

# AFROCENTRISM AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP: AN APPROACH TO THE IDENTITY OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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## Introduction

Among the main legacies of the colonial period in sub-Saharan Africa, there's the establishment of modern nation states and political systems alien to African traditions and cultures. The emerging ruling elites of the independence struggles sought to establish strong state structures under nationalist banners, where the preeminence of executive power and the centralization of power were the most common mechanisms for maintaining national unity. Thus, within artificial borders, the new governments took on the task of converting the multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious mosaics that made up their populations into cohesive political units, the case of Nigeria being a clear reflection of this journey.

With more than 250 ethnic<sup>2</sup> groups speaking different languages<sup>3</sup> and a population divided between Muslims and Christians, the Republic of Nigeria is currently federally organized in 36 united states under a central government that faced the fragmentation of the country from the moment

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<sup>2</sup> The main ethnic groups are the Hausa, located in the north of the country, the Yoruba, located in the southwest and the Igbo, which is located in the southeast. Other important groups are the Fulani in the north and the Ijaw in the east.

<sup>3</sup> The official language is English, but the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages can also be used in the government.

of independence<sup>4</sup> and that it had long authoritarian interregnum until it reached the Fourth Republic<sup>5</sup>.

Considering the aforementioned ethnic and religious fragmentation that crosses the country, as well as the regime changes that took place since the sixties, it is worth asking if it is possible to highlight identity elements in Nigerian foreign policy that give continuity traits rather than rupture in their external relationship patterns and, if so, what these elements are.

Taking these questions as a starting point, the present work proposes that Afrocentrism has been a baseline circumstantial identity element in Nigerian foreign policy that has influenced the projection of the country's identity as a regional power of the 21st century.

In fact, a considerable proportion of the specialized literature agrees that Afrocentrism has remained an expression of Nigerian foreign policy, although with different intensities and contents depending on the different international and domestic contexts (Ajaebili, 2011; Kia et. al., 2016; Ubi & Akinkuotu, 2014; Jega & Farris, 2010; Lawala & Aluko, 2016; Nwankwo, 2013; Babatunde Amao, Olumuyiwa & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015).

*“It is clear that regardless of the phase or time periods in which Nigeria’s foreign policy could be classified, there are discernable continuities, especially with regard to a focus on African issues, especially relating to conflict resolution, peace-building, economic integration and more recently, democratization. The extent to which these core continuities have been pursued, however, has been essentially conditioned or affected by the dynamic happenings in the domestic and external environments” (Jega, 2010: 12).*

Based on the above, this paper aims to analyze Afrocentrism in Nigeria's foreign policy and its impact on the generation of a regional power

4 Throughout history there have been separatist uprisings and different rebel groups have been formed. The most outstanding fact was the civil war (known as the Biafra War), which broke out in July 1967 and lasted until January 1970 before the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria under the name of Republic of Biafra. The extensive and deep famine that resulted from the central government's siege and the sabotage of crops in these provinces, inhabited mainly by the Igbo ethnic group, caused a humanitarian disaster. Currently separatist groups of the Biafra region are still active, as well as others located in the oil zone of the Niger Delta.

5 In the independent history of Nigeria, democratic periods are called “republics”: I Republic 1963-1966; II Republic 1979-1983; and IV Republic, since 1999. The III Republic 1993-1995 began with the call for elections by the Transitional Council and the National Defense and Security Council and the victory of Moshood Abiola, of the Social Democratic Party, but the military regime annulled the results, imprisoned Abiola and handed over the presidency to General Abacha.

identity of the new century from an analytical-descriptive perspective based mainly on specialized bibliographic sources.

Considering the scarce bibliography produced in South America and in Spanish language on the foreign policy of sub-Saharan countries, this article is expected to be a contribution to broaden the knowledge about the problems of international insertion of African states and their foreign policies.

Regarding the order of the exhibition, it is signaled that the first section deals with conceptually addressing Afrocentrism and the category of regional power. The second, meanwhile, briefly presents the place of Afrocentrism in the external policies of democratic and military governments. Next, the third point reveals the Nigerian presence in the regional organisms, in the maintenance processes for peace and in horizontal cooperation since the 1960s. Finally, the fourth section delineates the link between Afrocentrism and the search for regional leadership during the governments of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

## Conceptual considerations

Interrogating on the identity basis of Nigerian foreign policy becomes relevant in the framework of current discussions in the discipline of International Relations that deal with the link between foreign policy and identity. In addition, this identity debate acquires an interesting connotation from the first years of the 21st century as it projects beyond its borders an image of emerging regional power.

With the aim of advancing the understanding of Nigerian foreign policy, the work starts from the distinction made by Busso and Pignatta (2008) between two types of structuring elements of identity in foreign policy. On the one hand, there are the "primal" elements, such as language, tradition, history and territory, and on the other, "circumstantial" elements, which can acquire an importance such as to configure identity traits which through time can become permanent, just like the primal elements. These circumstantial elements can be the result of decision-making processes and policies that are nourished by the ideas, norms and values that build the identity of a whole.

Although the different domestic fracture lines in certain primal elements may question the density of a Nigerian identity based on language and nationality, for example, there are primal elements, such as its territory and number of inhabitants, which, together with circumstantial elements present since the post-colonial period, have outlined the constitutive features

of foreign policy. Among the last elements in this work, “Afrocentrism” is especially considered. Its presence can be traced in key historical situations, in the self-perception of ruling elites, in the national interest and in the principles and traditions of foreign policy, which is to say, in those dimensions of the foreign policy that, according to Pereyra Doval (2015), are those that account for the continuities.

The presence of Afrocentrism in foreign policy from the moment of the birth of Nigeria as an independent State is a factor that has influenced the generation of the identity of the country as a “regional power”, but also as a “giant with feet of clay”, since a State can acquire multiple identities (Pereyra Doval, 2015).

In this sense, it is observed that Nigeria has in this century the characteristics of a regional power, because it has the following features: it possesses material resources (military, economic, demographic) and immaterial (institutional, political and ideological) to fulfill a leadership role ; it is closely linked to the region economically, politically and culturally; exerts influence on regional governance; and has the will to be a leader, as well as being perceived by its peers as such (Giaccaglia, 2016, Nolte, 2006, Ogunnubi, Olusola & Isike, 2015).

However despite gathering such attributes, the weaknesses linked to the level of development, corruption<sup>6</sup> and internal security problems undermine the identity of regional power – from which the leadership is presented among its neighbors – and raise criticism to Nigerian Afrocentrism. Thus, the weaknesses in the domestic development have given rise to the sign of “giant with feet of clay”, as Kabunda Badi (2011) points out when referring to Nigeria as one of the main African powers that despite having important natural resources, since its independence, has faced serious internal contradictions. In this way, and as in the Brazilian case studied by Lafer (2002), the “development challenge” becomes an element that crosses the identity of Nigerian foreign policy. In turn, the pursuit of development accounts for foreign policy as a public policy that seeks to “translate internal needs into external possibilities to expand the control power of a society over its destiny” (Lafer, 2002: 20).

Consequently, and appreciating that Afrocentrism has been linked to the objectives of regional leadership and national development as elements

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6 On the problems of development in Nigeria see: Ekundayo (2015); Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2012); Omede and Ngwube (2017); Nwagboso and Duke (2012).

of continuity<sup>7</sup> in foreign policy throughout the different Nigerian regimes, as will be seen in the following sections, it is considered important to address particularly the actions of governments as modelers of the identity of foreign policy. This is because state action can emphasize “certain constitutive features based on the identity that is intended to be defined, accentuating the identity traits that are functional to their objectives” (Busso and Pignatta, 2008: 15).

## The place of Afrocentrism in foreign policy designs

Afrocentrism has remained a goal of Nigerian foreign policy since independence to the point that already in his inauguration speech in 1960, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966) pronounced the principles that would guide Nigerian foreign policy in the years to come: Non-alignment, respect for equality, independence, sovereignty and integrity of the states; no interference in the internal affairs of third countries; participation in international organizations; and Africa as a centerpiece of the country’s foreign relations.

These principles were adopted constitutionally in 1960<sup>8</sup> and were maintained over time to be reaffirmed in the current Constitution of 1999, which in its article 19 declares as the second objective of foreign policy “(the) promotion of African integration and support for African unity.”

The constitutional texts reflect the values of the republican governments, which have always been in line with Afrocentrism during the democratic periods. Thus, during the Second Republic, the government of Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) continued with a policy focused on Africa, committed to non-alignment, the search for a new, more equitable international order and the peaceful resolution of the conflicts.

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7 Based on Russel (1990), we indicate that we understand by “continuity” the maintenance over time of certain orientations and policy content in one or several foreign policy issues, while the “change” implies the abandonment or replacement of one or more of the orientations foreign policy and variations of the contents and/or ways of doing that policy.

8 The first text was drafted in the context of the independence of Great Britain in 1960 and recognized Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. The second Constitution was given during the conformation of the First Republic, in 1963. The third was approved during the Second Republic, in 1979 and adopted the American presidential system. The text of the fourth Constitution was drafted in 1993 during the Third Republic and was not fully implemented. The last Constitution was approved in 1999 during the IV Republic.

During the 4th Republic, the governments of the PDP – Olosegum Obasanjo (1999-2007) Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010) and Goodluck Jonathan (2011-2015) – also placed Africa at the center of their policies. With the beginning of the new democratic stage, efforts were made to change the image of Nigeria in the world and demonstrate the commitment to democracy and human rights. In this line, Obasanjo launched a “shuttle diplomacy” in order to demonstrate to the international community the change that was taking place.

During the PDP governments, it was argued that external relations should be made available to domestic demand and needs for development and economic growth<sup>9</sup> and that the country should maintain its key position in the region to promote democratic and humanitarian values and sustainable development in a context of globalization. In this way, Africa retained its special place, but with a strong look at the benefits that could derive from the Nigerian commitment to the region's issues:

*“For the first time, there were conscious efforts by Nigeria to ensure that her sacrifices of lives and resources towards restoring peace to many countries in Africa no longer go without commensurate national benefit. It marked a paradigm shift in Nigeria's foreign policy. However, focusing on Nigeria's domestic priorities did not mean abandonment of African issues” (Boma Lysa et. al., 2015:5).*

But not only in democratic periods Afrocentrism was encouraged. During the military interregnum it was an essential factor to promote regional leadership. According to Kia et. al. (2016), it was during the government of General Gowon (1966-1975) that Africa became the “basal stone” of foreign policy<sup>10</sup>, a policy that was consolidated in the 1970s with Generals Murtala (1975-1976) and Obasanjo (1976-1979). In this way, based on the geographical and economic importance of Nigeria – strengthened by the profits from the oil discovered – the objectives of territorial integrity and economic development were subsumed to Afrocentrism as the guiding force of the national interest

<sup>9</sup> Obasanjo presented “Nigeria 20: 2020”, a document according to which the country should become one of the twenty largest economies in the world in 2020. This idea was complemented by Jonathan with the “Transformation Agenda”, a series of industrialization and modernization plans tending to diversify the economy and boost development.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Gowon took a turn towards the Soviet Union in the face of the refusal of the United States and Great Britain to provide military support during the civil war.

(Jega, 2010: 4). In fact, the idea of Africa as the centerpiece was articulated in 1976 to define the country's foreign policy.<sup>11</sup>

In the eighties a “realistic phase” was opened that relegated Africa to discourse and economic relations, although the central lines of Afrocentrism remained. In fact, there are analyzes that point out that General Buhari's (1983-1985) diplomacy was confrontational, inconsistent and even “hostile” to his neighbors (Kia et al., 2016). The government of Babangida (1985-1993), meanwhile, carried out an “economic diplomacy” that, in a context of economic recession and application of structural adjustment policies, was aimed at channeling all relations from the economy and deepening ties with the Western powers, fixing attention in Africa on those issues related to the maintenance of regional security.

However, it was during the government of Babangida that horizontal technical cooperation activities were formalized and that the strategy of “concentric circles”<sup>12</sup> was defined, which proposes in geographical terms four priority levels of the country's relationship. In the first circle are the neighbors adjoining the country – Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger –, in the second the States and organizations of West Africa, in the third the African continent and its actors and in fourth level the rest of the global institutions and States of the world.

In the nineties, the axes of foreign policy remained with the government of Sani Abacha (1993-1998), but the weak legitimacy of its totalitarian government – both in the country and abroad – influenced the Nigerian international insertion and, agreement with Babatunde Amao & Okeke-Uzodike (2015), led to the implementation of an “isolationist foreign policy”, with features of ambivalence and inconsistency. The regime received international condemnation of the massive violations of human rights in a historical context of changing times marked by the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa and the beginning of formal democratic processes in sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>11</sup> This conception was elaborated by a specialized committee headed by academic Adebayo Adedeji.

<sup>12</sup> It was conceived in the eighties by Professor Ibrahim Gambari to make the international strategy of the country more effective (Ziebell de Oliveira, 2013).

## The Nigerian regional action

It is possible to verify the active Nigerian regional presence mainly in three areas of action. On the one hand, in its contribution to regional organizations. On the other hand, in its support to the national liberation movements, during the first decades after independence, and to the mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts and maintenance of peace since the nineties. A third space that accounts for Nigeria's connection with its neighbors is horizontal financial and technical cooperation, although they have less visibility. Based on examples for each of the three lines of action, the following section seeks to account for Nigerian regional commitment throughout the period studied.

### *Nigerian participation in the regional integration schemes*

In relation to integration and cooperation agencies, it is observed that since the beginning of the sixties, Nigeria was engaged at the continental level with the Organization of the African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Already in the XXI century, the government of Obasanjo played a central role in the implementation of the African Union (AU) and in its framework with the proposal of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an initiative supported by the West and implemented since 2001 with the purpose of eradicating poverty, promoting sustainable development and integrating Africa to the world economy from the perspective of the "African Renaissance".

Within the framework of the AU it should also be noted that the Obasanjo administration played an essential role together with Brazil in the organization of the Latin Africa-South America Summit (ASA), where it carried out the voice of the African countries. The idea of holding this summit as a platform for regional ties was expressed for the first time by President Obasanjo as part of a visit to his Brazilian counterpart Lula Da Silva. The First ASA Summit took place in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, on November 30, 2006, and 53 foreign ministers from the AU member countries and from the 12 countries that made up the then South American Community of Nations attended Abuja.

As far as regional integration schemes are concerned, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been the emblem of Nigerian commitment to its region. The creation of ECOWAS<sup>13</sup> in 1975, promoted

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13 Formed by Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.



by Togo and Nigeria, was a clear expression of the will to occupy a special role before the Francophone states and the South African racist regime.

Although ECOWAS was founded with the purpose of promoting the economic and commercial cooperation of its members, it has advanced in other dimensions, giving an account of its political relevance. In 1979, Nigeria promoted the protocol for the free movement of persons and the right of residence, which was one of the greatest achievements of the integration scheme. Later, in 1990, in the context of the war in Liberia, the Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was created as the militarized arm of the integration scheme to act in situations of conflict. In 2001 Nigeria urged the democratic protocol on good governance, realizing the change of orientation of its domestic regime. In addition, based on the economic orientation of the PDP's foreign policy, the deepening of the commercial dimension was promoted through a fast track to reach a common external tariff and then reach the customs union (Ubi & Akinkuotu, 2014).

ECOWAS has been a central action tool for Nigeria and the country has been key in maintaining its structure. For this, it is enough to consider that annually it has contributed approximately 50% of its budget (Bobbyi, 2010). Although in terms of the economic role of the scheme, deficiencies and weaknesses are pointed out in terms of tariff barriers, common monetary policy and creation and promotion of interregional trade, the political role of ECOWAS has been central in the region and for Nigeria was the privileged space where to shape their interests.

### *The Nigerian contribution to regional peace and security*

Nigeria has become involved in regional security issues based on the idea that without regional peace Nigeria itself would not be safe. Nigeria's active participation in various peacekeeping and peacemaking operations has been extensively analyzed, taking into account various readings both favorable and critical of the role of the Nigerian armed forces, both for their actions and foundations<sup>14</sup>.

Going back in history, we can observe that in the framework of the independence struggles, Nigeria supported the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 and Angola in 1975 – with the recognition by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) as the legitimate government – and

<sup>14</sup> The detailed analysis of Nigeria's participation in peace missions in the region exceeds the purpose of this work but its relevance is not unknown, which can be appreciated in numerous contributions, such as those of Azgaku (2015), Ojekwe (2010) and Daduda et. al. (2017), among others.

they sent peacekeeping troops under the UN mandate to the Congo in 1963. Subsequently, Babangida maintained its support for the independence and liberation movements and, given that the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire were considered a destabilizing threat, continued to finance peacekeeping missions, despite the high costs of the Nigerian presence.

From the 4th Republic onwards, Nigeria continued to participate in peace missions in the region and sent troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan for UN and AU missions, in addition to contributing to the dialogue between the rebels and Abuja to reach a peace agreement in Darfur. It was also a valuable interlocutor for the resolution of the conflict, that led to the division of the country between Sudan and South Sudan through its support to the Intergovernmental Authority on East African Development (IGAD).

On the other hand, presiding over the AU, Nigeria supported the peace process in Liberia, where former President Abubakar headed the commission that negotiated that Charles Taylor should leave office. It was also an important player in Togo to avoid international recognition of the 2005 elections, it acted in Sierra Leone for the peace and reconciliation process to take place, promoted dialogue forums in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal in the face of strong political instabilities with outbreaks of violence.

Along the same lines, the government of Jonathan continued taking measures to extend peace and democracy in Africa, with special attention to a phenomenon that took a renewed momentum in those years: terrorism. The resurgence and extension of the actions of Boko Haram in the north of the country imposed on the Nigerian agenda the commitment to fight both internally and externally against terrorism.

Hence, the maintenance of regional peace and the fight against terrorism were among the main arguments of the government of Jonathan to send troops to Mali in the framework of the mission of the AU and at the request of ECOWAS, as it was in danger that northern Mali became a refuge for different terrorist groups. It also supported democratic efforts in Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ghana and Sierra Leone, and maintained its participation in the UN peace missions in Sudan, South Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

### ***South-South development cooperation***

In relation to financial cooperation, as representative examples we can mention that Nigeria was the third contributor of capital and resources

for the start-up of the African Development Bank (ADB) in 1964. Later, in 1976, the ADB and the Nigerian government agreed to the creation of the Nigeria Trust Fund (NTF) with the purpose of contributing to the financing of development policies of the least developed members of the bank. The NTF agreement ended in 2006, but given its good results in 2008, its duration was extended for another decade. In addition, the Nigerian Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF), launched in 2004 to complement the NTF through technical assistance for the preparation of financing projects in those countries requiring reconstruction after armed conflicts (Mailafia, 2010), continued to operate.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the development of technical cooperation. In 1987, the Technical Aid Corps (TACS) was created. As a South-South cooperation program, it was aimed at providing technical assistance to countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, financing Nigerian professionals to contribute to the countries of destination (CIDOB, 2008).

Over the years, TAC<sup>15</sup> has remained active and is considered to have been successful in exporting Nigerian values and knowledge to its peers in the region. However, it is complex to make a comprehensive evaluation of its development. This is due, in part, to the fact that there are few studies dealing with the TACS given the lack of documentary information, given that in most cases, particularly in periods of military rule, disbursements were made outside the official budgets (Mailafia, 2010).

## Regional leadership in the 21st century

In the new century, the democratic return was accompanied by an important economic strengthening. The national economy grew at an accelerated pace, driven mainly – but not only<sup>16</sup> – by the high price of oil and the increase in demand at the international level<sup>17</sup>. With growth rates above

<sup>15</sup> For more information see the official website of the program: <http://www.dtac.gov.ng/DTAC/dtac/aboutDTAC#third>

<sup>16</sup> The UNECA (2014) indicates that natural resources contributed a quarter to sub-Saharan growth at the beginning of the century and that the rest was due to better macroeconomic management, the increase of FDI, trade with new partner countries and the increase in internal demand, linked to rapid urbanization, the expansion of services and an incipient middle class.

<sup>17</sup> Nigeria is the 12th largest oil producer. It produces 2.5 million barrels per day and has proven reserves of 37 billion. The oil sector accounts for almost half of the Nigerian GDP and 90% of its exports (CIA World Fact Book, 2017).

5%, Nigeria positioned itself as the largest African economy, with a GDP of 481,000 million dollars in 2015 (World Bank, 2017)<sup>18</sup> and with amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI), which averaged 5 billion annual dollars for the period 2010-2014 (African Economic Outlook, 2016).

The image of leadership with axis in Afrocentrism was then impelled by the governments of the PDP, which, together with this economic growth and democratic values, highlighted the material capacities linked to the primal elements of identity – quantity of population (180 million inhabitants) and extension of the territory – and its military presence – has the largest armed forces in the region and assiduously participates in the UN peace missions and the ECOWAS<sup>19</sup>.

Nevertheless, this role of *primus inter pares* in West Africa with Afrocentric bases has not been without criticism based on the important domestic weaknesses. First, we find the gap between being the largest African economy and the highest level of poverty (50% rate) with low human development. Hence, the demands for better and inclusive public goods and services, especially in matters of education and health, are very strong and that the expense in military actions abroad is reproached as much as the offer of cooperation.

Such positions make a negative evaluation of the results of Afrocentrism in terms of benefits for the country and underline that Nigeria has sacrificed much for the region without obtaining anything in return. They also point out that this policy has not been able to obtain the recognition of its peers as a regional leader, as its image is marred by poverty and corruption (Ajaebili, 2011), to which the risks derived from terrorism are currently added.

*“Afrocentric foreign policy commitment overwhelmingly overshadows domestic reality. The little gain from Nigeria external relations cum African diplomacy fall squarely within the domain of regional prestige that bears no relationship to the nation’s human and economic security”* (Kia, 2016: 35).

Based on this, we can see that Nigeria can be described as a “giant with feet of clay” that has current capacities and potentialities to occupy the

<sup>18</sup> Nigeria exceeded the South African GDP, which in 2015 was 314,000 billion dollars (World Bank, 2017). Nonetheless, South Africa continues to be the most diversified and industrialized economy in the region. It should also be noted that in 2014 the Nigerian government announced the updating of the basis for calculating GDP according to the United Nations Accounting System, which had not been updated since 1990.

<sup>19</sup> For the year 2017 it was the 14th contributor of contingents to the United Nations with 2,174 troops (UN, 2017).

role of regional power in terms of its Afrocentrism, but that presents deep constraints in its development that limit its leadership projection and its actions in the international arena.

## Final Thoughts

Afrocentrism as a circumstantial identity element of Nigerian foreign policy has been present in every key historical period, in the principles of foreign policy, in the self-perception of ruling elites and in the principles and traditions of foreign policy. This presence has not been immutable, but Afrocentrism has had different intensities and contents depending on the national interests that each government determined, point at which the ideas and values of the governments have been relevant to shape this identity element.

In this way we find that in the 1960s, Afrocentrism was mainly oriented towards supporting pro-independence processes and the fight against racist governments in a context of non-alignment, but in the 1970s military governments sought to extend their influence among neighbors to consolidate Nigeria's regional power role. Later, despite the critical moments of structural adjustment that recalibrated foreign policy, focusing on the economic dimension in the 1980s and the change of regime at the beginning of the 21st century, the PDP governments maintained and strengthened Nigeria's identity as a regional power. This is reflected in the continuity of the Afrocentric lines of action in terms of integration, peacekeeping and development cooperation.

But unlike previous periods, in the new century governments in their discourses and policies explicitly linked the idea of regional leadership with the goal of Nigerian development. The PDP governments raised relations with the region based on what they considered Nigerian national interests. Nigeria's close relations with the region, from an economic, political and security point of view, were identified as basal stones for the conversion of the country into a regional power. In this way, two identity elements, such as "Afrocentrism" and the "development challenge", were intertwined to project the identity of Nigeria as a "regional power" in West Africa.

However, in front of the readings that emphasize that the interest of the region is part of the Nigerian national interest, other views are raised that criticize the commitment with West Africa as domestic needs dominated by socioeconomic weaknesses deepen after the fall of the prices of raw materials, and political-institutional, in particular corruption.

As a result, as in previous decades, the constraints resulting both from a monoproduktive structure and a peripheral international insertion destined to the exportation of raw materials, as well as from the conditions of underdevelopment that have not been able to be reversed in spite of economic growth, are consolidated as part of the “development challenges” that undermine the foundations of the image of “Afrocentric regional power”.

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### **Abstract**

In the 21st century, economic growth and democratic consolidation promoted the international projection of Nigeria as a regional leader. In this context, this article explores the identity elements of Nigerian foreign policy, focusing on Afrocentrism and its impact on the country's identity as a regional power. For this, from a descriptive-analytical methodology, the role that Afrocentrism has had in foreign policy designs since independence is described, the main lines of action in matters of cooperation and regional integration are exposed and the potentialities and constraints facing the Nigerian leadership in West Africa are presented.

### **Keywords**

Nigeria; Foreign Policy; Identity; Afrocentrism; Regional Power.

*Received on January 28, 2019*

*Approved on March 24, 2019*

*Translated by Camila Ayala*