

From Pan-Africanism to Continentalism: Nigeria's Role in Shaping Africa's Integration Vision

*Pan-Afrikanizmden Kıtacılığa:
Afrika'nın Entegrasyon Vizyonunun Şekillenmesinde Nijerya'nın Rolü*

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Abstract: This study employs the concepts of Pan-Africanism and Continentalism to compare Nigeria's persistent foreign policy approach in Africa with its continentalist vision. The concept of Pan-Africanism emerged as a liberation ideal in the early twentieth century, serving as an anti-colonial movement that championed the identity and unity of African nations. Over time, however, this ideal has evolved into Continentalism, an integration strategy rooted in institutional, economic, political and security considerations in the twenty-first century. The paper scrutinises Nigeria's participation within the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), demonstrating how Pan-African ideals have been translated into policy and institutional practices. It posits that Nigeria's foreign policy reflects a transition from ideological solidarity to pragmatic institutionalism, where cooperation and shared governance supplant emotional unity as the principal drivers of African integration. Through analysis of Nigeria's roles in regional peacekeeping, economic cooperation, diplomatic mediation, and institutional leadership, the study illustrates how Nigeria has evolved from a moral leader of Pan-Africanism to a strategic architect of Continentalism. The findings underscore Nigeria's pivotal role in shaping Africa's continental agenda and affirm that the legacy of Pan-Africanism endures within the institutional framework of Continentalism.

Structured Abstract: Africa's modern political and economic development has been influenced by external interventions and internal divisions. In the early 20th century, Pan-Africanism emerged as an ideological movement departing from colonialism (Akay, 2021), seeking to revive African studies, culture, and unity. By the 21st century, however, the continent's challenges—such as economic relations, border disputes, debt issues, and security crises—shifted focus from this idealism to a more practical and institutional approach. This new perspective, called Continentalism, advocates for continental integration through economic and institutional cooperation, while maintaining cultural unity.

The primary objective of this study is to analyse Nigeria's foreign policy record in Africa, the transition from Pan-Africanism to Continentalism, and to answer the following fundamental research question:

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“How has Nigeria's foreign policy evolved into an institutionalised continentalism through Pan-Africanist ideals?”

This collaborative study aims to understand the transformation of African integration by examining Nigeria's role in institutions such as the African Union (AU), the Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). By distinguishing between its ideological (Pan-Africanism) and institutional (Continentalism) dimensions, the study aims to present a practical framework that contributes to African integration.

Pan-Africanism emerged as an ideology advocating political, economic, and cultural solidarity among African peoples. This movement, shaped by thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, and Marcus Garvey, emphasised the self-determination of Africans and established the principle that "Africa must be resolved by Africans". Nkrumah's statement, "As long as African unity persists, colonialism will revert to a different form", best summarises the movement's political and economic recovery (Biney, 2008).

However, by the late 20th century, Pan-Africanist sympathy had given way to a continental approach based on institutional cooperation. This shift can be explained through the framework of Neofunctionalism and New Regionalism. According to Ernst Haas's (1958) functionalist approach, economic cooperation leads to political integration; this "spillover effect" (diffusion) is also evident on the African continent. Similarly, Hettne and Söderbaum's (2000) new regionalism approach emphasises the organisation of globalisation based on Africa's own dynamics.

Continentalism, built on these theoretical foundations, embraces the principles of mutual benefit and institutional resilience, based on functional cooperation rather than emotional solidarity. Thus, the ideal of African unity moved from an abstract goal to a step-by-step institutional process. The study also resonates with Thabo Mbeki, who developed the African Renaissance. Mbeki emphasised that Africa was no longer an actor waiting for help, but rather an actor capable of resolving issues on its own terms. In this view, Continentalism is not merely a political project but also a form of "African realism." Thus, the moral solidarity spirit of Pan-Africanism is combined with the institutional wisdom of Continentalism.

This study is based on a centralised and comparative analysis method. The research examines three periods of Nigeria's foreign policy (the period of independence, the period of military rule, and the period of democratisation), assessing its contributions to African continental integration during these periods. The data collection process is based on aggregate sources and document analysis. The extensive resources used include African Union declarations, Nigerian foreign policy declarations, ECOWAS and AfCFTA documents, as well as contemporary academic literature. A qualitative approach was adopted as the methodology, analysing the ideological transition between Pan-Africanism and Continentalism using institutional comparative technology. Furthermore, the case study method provides a concrete example of Nigeria's involvement in the African Union, ECOWAS, and AfCFTA. This method allows us to demonstrate how Nigeria's ideological perspective has been institutionalised in practice.

The overall assessment of the findings reveals that Nigeria has accelerated Africa's political, economic, and security integration by redefining Pan-Africanist ideals with a Continentalist strategy. In conclusion, Pan-Africanism and Continentalism are not opposites, but complementary. While the former offered a vision of ideological and emotional solidarity, the latter transformed this vision into an institutional reality. Nigeria's experience is the most concrete example of this transition.

Nigeria has preserved the Pan-African principles of identity, freedom, and solidarity and transformed them into policies of integration, development, and security. This process is evident in a wide spectrum, from the institutionalisation of the African Union to the implementation of the AfCFTA. Nigeria's leadership has shifted the continent's discourse on "shared destiny" to "shared responsibility." However, this leadership is dependent on domestic political stability, economic diversification, and democratic deepening. This study demonstrates that African integration is based not only on economic but also ideological and cultural foundations. The Nigerian example demonstrates that by combining the historical spirit of Pan-Africanism with the institutional intelligence of Continentalism, a unique model of development and integration is possible in 21st-century Africa.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Continentalism, Nigerian Foreign Policy, African Union, ECOWAS, African Integration, International Relations, Politics

Öz: Bu çalışma, Pan-Afrikanizm ve Kıtacılık kavramlarını kullanarak Nijerya'nın Afrika'daki kalıcı ve kapsamlı dış politika yaklaşımını kıtacılık vizyonu ile karşılaştırmaktadır. Pan-Afrikacılık kavramı, yirminci yüzyılın başlarında bir kurtuluş ideali olarak ortaya çıkmış ve Afrika uluslarının kimliğini ve birliğini savunan bir sömürgecilik karşıtı hareket olarak hizmet etmiş ve etmektedir. Ancak zaman içerisinde bu ideal, 21. yüzyılda kurumsal, ekonomik, siyasi ve güvenlikle ilgili hususlar üzerine temellenen bir entegrasyon stratejisi olan Kıtacılık ideolojisine dönüşerek varlığını devam ettirmeyi başarabilmiştir. Bu makale, Nijerya'nın Afrika Birliği (AU), Batı Afrika Devletleri Ekonomik Topluluğu (ECOWAS) ve Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi (AfCFTA) içindeki katılımını inceleyerek, Pan-Afrikanizm ideallerinin politika ve kurumsal uygulamalara nasıl dönüştürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda bu makale, Nijerya'nın dış politika yapım süreçlerinin, ideolojik dayanışmadan pragmatik kurumsallığa bir geçişi yansıttığını ve bu geçişte, Afrika entegrasyonunun temel itici gücü olarak duygusal birliğin yerini işbirliği ve ortak yönetişimin aldığını öne sürmektedir. Çalışma, Nijerya'nın bölgesel barışın korunması, ekonomik işbirliği, diplomatik arabuluculuk ve kurumsal liderlik alanlarındaki rollerini analiz ederek, Nijerya'nın Pan-Afrikanizmin manevi liderliğinden Kıtacılık ideolojisinin stratejik mimarlığına nasıl dönüştüğünü göstermektedir. Bu bulgular, Nijerya'nın geliştirdiği ve uyguladığı dış politikası ile Afrika kıtasının gündemini şekillendirmedeki önemli rolünü vurgulamakta ve Pan-Afrikanizmin mirasının Kıtacılık ideolojisinin kurumsal çerçevesi içinde devam ettiğini teyit etmekte ve bölgesel güç dengeleri açısından yeniden yorumlandığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pan-Afrikanizm, Kıtacılık, Nijerya Dış Politikası, Afrika Birliği, ECOWAS, Afrika Entegrasyonu, Afrika Siyaseti, Bölgeselcilik

Introduction

In the history of modern times, the African continent went through a complicated political evolution process, which was subjected to outside influences as well as internal conflicts. Colonialism started in the late 19th century, which had a great impact on the African economy, culture and social organisation. Pan-Africanism became the ideological power of this time, and it significantly contributed to the activities of Africa to reestablish its identity, cultural identity, and achieve political independence (Adi, 2018).

African states have experienced serious structural problems in the post-independence period, including economic dependency, boundary problems, ethnic problems and foreign debt, which have constrained the ideals of Pan-Africanism. The 21st century has given emphasis on integration, development, and cooperation in security within the continent. This vision is based on the concept of Continentalism that maintains the cultural and historical nature of Pan-Africanism but at an elevated institutional level (Bach, 2007).

Continentalism is a policy aimed at enhancing internal unity in the continent using functional organisations and win-win principles, and makes a point of staying uninvolved in the emotional component of Pan-Africanism. Nigeria has led in this change. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has realised that Africa is central to its foreign policy and has actively participated in the political, economic, and security activities on the continent (Adebajo, 2010). The differences and similarities between Pan-Africanism and Continentalism have been discussed by examining the influence of the continentalist strategy of Nigeria on the African integration regarding their interaction modes. The research question is as follows: How has Nigeria's foreign policy evolved into an institutionalised continentalism through Pan-Africanist ideals?

This paper attempts to examine the historical and intellectual roots of Pan-Africanism specifically, explain the theoretical base of Continentalism and institutionalisation, and criticise the African policy of Nigeria through the three important times, namely, the independence period, the military period, and the democratisation period. It also examines the interaction of the policy of Nigeria with the wider continental integration initiatives. The paper evaluates domestic and foreign policy decisions made by Nigeria and its participation in organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Continental

Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In this broad manner, this paper follows the development of the foreign policy of Nigeria based on the Pan-African values to a finer continentalist policy. The study is based on a comprehensive literature review and policy comparisons, where documents like the Nigerian foreign policy statements, the African Union declarations and other scholarly sources are analysed. This eventually assists in explaining the connection between ideological visions and institutional realities in the process of integration in Africa.

Fundamental Principles of Pan-Africanism and the Conceptual Foundations of Continentalism

Ideology and institutionalisation are also attributes that are shared in Pan-Africanism and Continentalism. Although Pan-Africanism is an ideology that fosters social identification and cohesiveness against colonialism, Continentalism has made this ideal the strategic foundation of political integration.

A pan-African movement, which is broadly described, is a political, economic, and cultural unity movement by African peoples and people of African descent in the diaspora, based on common destiny (Legum, 1965). It was created as a reaction to centuries of colonialism and offered an intellectual basis for Africans to redefine themselves and to reclaim their independence. The key element of Pan-Africanism is African identity rebuilding. The idea behind this movement is to liberate the history and culture of Africa from Eurocentric histories and to develop a discourse of liberation rooted in the historical experience of the continent itself.

Pan-Africanism aimed at restoring the African belief in their history and culture with the focus on unity. It was a crusade that advocated self-respect and self-confidence as a reaction to the inferiority complex of colonialism. The concept of a political unity and the cultural awakening were triggered by this identity formation. According to pan-Africanist intellectuals, sovereign African states needed to step out of the artificial boundaries that had been created during the colonial era and come up with a collective vision and integrated unity. To them, liberation could not be attained completely through the independence of each state, but rather, they felt political unity in the continent was the key to real liberation.

Development and economic independence are also fundamental tenets of Pan-Africanism. The movement emphasises the fact that political independence will only be significant if it is accompanied by economic self-sufficiency. Accordingly, one of the main goals is to transform Africa into a non-dependent state in the world economy, with equitable and effective use of the resources, and the cooperation of the regions. It is worth noting that W.E.B. Du Bois concluded this position by the statement: Africans need to solve the problems of Africa, which contains the moral and intellectual soul of the movement. Kwame Nkrumah held on to the vision of Du Bois by saying that unless there was a political foundation of unity in Africa, colonialism would re-emerge in a different form (Nkrumah, 1963).

Nkrumah considered Pan-Africanism as a cultural renaissance and also a political project that was meant to change the continent. Therefore, it transformed into a full-fledged ideological movement which, on the one hand, re-established African identity by revitalising the culture, and on the other, led to political cohesion and economic autonomy. This ideological backdrop also facilitated the growth of Continentalism; the emotional and historical aspects of Pan-Africanism established the grounds of the institution and strategy structures of Continentalism.

Continentalism is more institutional, pragmatic and strategic, although it is based on the legacy of Pan-Africanism. Whereas pan-Africanism stressed unity as a result of emotional solidarity and collective identity, at the end of the 20th century, it began to focus more on a functional approach. This new vision is to transform Africa into a successful and independent actor in the global arena,

and the continent is not only a solidarity zone but a whole system which can create its own institutions, markets and security systems.

Continentalism is based on integration theories and approaches of new regionalism. According to the neo-functionalist approach, economic cooperation ultimately results in political integration, since when one part is cooperating, it causes a spillover effect on the other, leading to stronger integration (Haas, 1958). This concept is what has formed continentalism in Africa: regional cooperation in trade, transport, energy and security is likely to someday provide political unity within the continent. The new regionalism theory, on the other hand, has argued that Africa should restructure itself based on its dynamics in the modern context in order to embrace globalisation since the 1990s (Hettne & Soderbaum, 2000).

According to this theory, regional and continental organisations are not only the products of economic cooperation but also they are structures of so-called intermediate sovereignty. This has the potential to promote the ability of states to act in a unified manner in the global system. Continentalism seeks to enhance better governance by factoring in joint sovereignty over the territories without compromising national sovereignty at the national level. It contrasts with Pan-Africanism, which concentrates on ideological unity, and Continentalism, which concentrates on institutional collaboration. Whereas Pan-Africanism is all about emotional and cultural unity, Continentalism is guided by shared inter-group interests and practical collaboration. Consequently, Continentalism reposes the objective of African unity into a long-term process, which is slowly attained through institutions, agreements, and common policies.

One of the most important elements of continentalism is that it aims at re-establishing the influence of Africa in the global system. Along with the breakdown of the bipolar world order after the Cold War, Africa was at a crossroads in defining its foreign policy; at this stage, the continent sought to move out of its passive role to an active international player (Murithi, 2005). This initiative is based on the notion of continentalism. It became a reality in the formation of the African Union (AU) in the 2000s. Based on the OAU (the Organisation of African Unity) experience, the AU has contributed to the tradition of Pan-Africanist principles but has improved the practical decision-making, regional economic communities (RECs), and development initiatives at the collective level. The institutional mind of continentalism is represented by the structure of the AU, which consists of the African Parliament, the African Court of Justice and the Peace and Security Council.

Continentalism acknowledges the right of Africa to decide its own fate not only at the political level but also on the economic front, as well as security matters. It has been influenced intellectually by the appeal of an African Renaissance given by Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki also highlighted the point that Africa was no longer a continent that requires aid, but an agent that can make its own decisions, manage itself and defend itself in the international sphere (Mbeki, 1999). This observation turns Continentalism into a political agenda as well as a mere manifestation of African realism. It fits into the historical tradition of solidarity within the continent, which made it a viable approach to the modern conditions. Through the ideological power of Pan-Africanism and the technical capacity of Continentalism, it has the ability to institutionalise higher internalisation and generate more independence of Africa in the international system. To sum up, it is important to note that Continentalism is a concept that will give Africa a strategic outlook in the 21st century by shedding off the emotional and cultural underpinnings of the practice of Pan-Africanism. The idea behind this strategy is to internalise Africa, and it will be a better-balanced, stronger, and more representative member of the global system.

Nigeria and the Significance of the Country in Africa

Nigeria is an important country in the political, economic and strategic arena in Africa. Its importance has not only been fuelled by the size of its population but also by its historical mission and diplomatic vision. Nigeria boasts of an economy that is the biggest in Africa, very big natural

resources, a large population of more than 230 million, and a big cultural diversity, making it a hub of power on the continent. This significance goes beyond mere quantitative considerations; Nigeria is also the leader, ideologically speaking and plays a rather prominent role in the post-colonial union of the African continent as an institutional agent.

The foreign policy of Nigeria has been historically based on the concept of an Africa-centred foreign policy that has been shaping the way of Nigerians since gaining independence in 1960. Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa outlined this policy at the United Nations General Assembly, saying: “Our foreign policy stems from the unity and prosperity of Africa, since Nigeria can not be conceived without considering Africa” (Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations, n.d.).

This statement demonstrates that the foreign policy of Nigeria is not only orientation-based but identity-oriented as well. Nigeria is more attached to the fate of the African continent, where unity, development and image of the continent to the world are highlighted (Adebajo, 2010). The Africa-centred foreign policy of Nigeria is grounded on three principles. To begin with, fostering unity among African countries, particularly the ones that have just been decolonised, in aid of Pan-African notions. Second, to ensure the independence and sovereignty of Africa, Nigeria was at the forefront in matters of diplomacy and economic endeavour, especially against apartheid South Africa. It has also been helpful in the independence struggle in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Angola. Third, maintaining the representation of Africa in the world order, lobbying against marginalisation of the African continent and bringing it to have a collective voice in such forums as the UN. These principles, though formerly based on Pan-Africanist rhetoric, have taken the institutional and interest-based Continentalist approach. The international relations after the Cold War led to a shift in the policy of Nigeria to be pragmatic and not strictly ideological.

The geographical significance of Nigeria goes beyond its geographical borders into economic and demographic dominance. It is the most populous nation in Africa and contributes about 20 per cent of the GDP on the continent. Its various industries, some of which include oil and natural gas, to agriculture and manufacturing, have given it a strong regional economic impact. Nigeria is not, however, an economic power that is only resource-endowed but also forms a crucial part in determining intra-African trade patterns. West Africa has economically dominant financial and logistical centres such as Lagos and Abuja. Nigeria is both a producer and an agent of regional economic integration, being a country that exports about 20 per cent of its products to other African countries (UNECA, 2020). Also, the soft power of Nigeria, especially Nollywood, contributes to the power. Nollywood has become the role model of African culture, and Nigeria has also become a leader in terms of cultural renaissance of the continent in the aspects of music, media and academia. Overall, Nigeria is a country of economic power and cultural continentalism.

The effectiveness of peace and security policies in Nigeria is yet to be seen, but it increases the influence of the country in Africa. The failure of the African collective security system was demonstrated during the 1990s civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. ECOMOG (West African Peacekeeping Force), which was commanded by ECOWAS, was crucial during the time, and thousands of soldiers were engaged (Adebajo, 2002). The experience provided a turning point since it proved to be a viable way of continent-based peacekeeping. As a result, the African Union has come up with the Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which it uses to advance this model on a continental basis. Nigeria thereby emerged as a stabilising factor and a pace setter in the institutionalisation of peace and security measures in Africa. The Pan-Africanist concept of African solutions to African problems can be seen in the Nigerian security policies. This strategy will minimise dependence on outside intervention and develop in-African security frameworks (Hashiru & Tufekci, 2018).

Nigeria is a historic and institutional leader in Africa as far as diplomacy is concerned. It constantly presents itself as the representative of the continent, collaborating with such organisations

as the African Union, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the G77. Nigeria is regarded as a powerful competitor, especially in becoming a permanent African member of the UN Security Council. The ability to create legitimacy is also linked to diplomatic leadership in a nation. The tradition of diplomacy in Nigeria is long-lived and allows the country to bring together different ideological groups on the continent and arbitrate conflicts. The practice has seen Nigeria gain more power in major bodies like the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The continental approach to Nigeria tries to transcend this romance and symbolism of Pan-African ideals and to make them policies that are practical and enduring. This strategy is premised on three key pillars.

- *Institutional resilience*: Making the African Union and regional organisations more effective, enhancing decision-making, and making continental integration faster.
- *Economic cooperation*: Expanding intra-African trade, diversification of regional production chains and securing economic integrity of the continent with the help of AfCFTA.
- *Collective security*: This is the projection of the security infrastructure that will assist Africa in resolving its crises without necessarily appealing to outside forces.

This vision has not only made Nigeria one of the state actors but the driver of a continental initiative. The future of Africa has taken the form of a hybrid model, which is the fusion of the moral heritage of Pan-Africanism with the practicality of Continentalism, which the country has formulated.

African Union and the Nigerian Role

The establishment of the African Union (AU), the successor of the OAU in 2002, marked the beginning of a new era in the institutional history of Africa. This did not merely mark the change of name, but also the change of attitude of Africa in regard to integration towards a concept of solidarity, to a working system of continental leadership. It is through the efforts of Nigeria that this change has been effected both intellectually and institutionally.

In 1963, 32 of the recently independent African states formed the OAU. It was mainly aimed at facilitating decolonisation and fostering unity among Africans. However, in the 1980s, there was an increase in the question of the effectiveness of the OAU. The situation in Africa disclosed that its structure, which concentrated principally on sovereignty, was not sufficient since it was associated with civil wars, coups, abuses of human rights, and poverty (Ake, 1981). After the completion of the Cold War, African countries realised that they should re-establish their place in international relations. It caused the need to have a unified foreign policy and economic approach instead of being bystanders in global affairs. The African Union is a product of this movement, which came up with the Sirte summit in 1999, and its founding document was adopted in 2000 and came into force in 2002. The creation of the African Union brought Pan-Africanism ideals to the form of continentalism. Its Constitution seeks to enhance continental integration, peace and security, and democratic governance. Africa was therefore able to transform from a loose group of independent states into a single continent with one vision (Murithi, 2005).

The active participation in the African Union makes Nigeria be considered the engine of Africa. In the establishment of the African Union, which took place between 1999 and 2001, Olusegun Obasanjo, then the President of Nigeria, played a central role in forming the vision of the African Union. He suggested the shift of respect to the sovereignty of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the responsibility to intervene in order to allow Africa to react to human rights violations and genocide (Murithi, 2005, p. 78). Nigeria has contributed significantly to the financial, military and diplomatic arm of the AU, and has been one of the largest contributors on the continent,

along with Egypt and South Africa (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2025). It has also financed other projects such as the African Peace Fund. Nigeria, as a permanent member of the AU Peace and Security Council, has been at the forefront of mediating crises in Africa on a diplomatic front. It has contributed immensely to the Sudan-Darfur war, the Somali civil war and the instability in Mali by providing the military and logistical support in the work of the peacekeeping organisation of the African Union. The activities of Nigeria are indicative of a true desire towards the Pan-African mission of Africans addressing their problems.

The inputs of Nigeria have shaped the majority of the African Union institutional architecture structures.

- *African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)*: Nigeria had contributed immensely to the development of this architecture, both in military and financial terms. The country has been one of the largest contributors to peacekeeping operations in Africa.
- *African Economic Community (AEC)*: Nigeria contributed greatly to the economic platform that brought about the idea of free trade and integration of Africa.
- *African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights*: Nigeria provided massive diplomatic support in the establishment of regional institutions for human rights protection. Besides, Abuja has become a large African diplomatic centre.
- The creation of the African Economic Community was based on the Abuja Agreement in 1991; the agreement was considered the forerunner of the current *African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*.

In that respect, not only did Nigeria aid the existing structures, but it also set the foundation of continental integration.

Despite being among the most powerful African Union members, Nigeria has at times been challenged by the rest of the world over its leadership. The development of South African diplomacy on the continent, the Egyptian domination in North Africa and the place of Ethiopia as the institutional centre have undermined the Nigerian hegemony. This has occasionally caused a problem of coordination in the decision-making processes of the AU. The same has been compromised due to disagreements between South Africa and Nigeria, especially in the Libyan intervention (2011) and the political crisis in Zimbabwe (2008). These obstacles notwithstanding, the Nigerian diplomatic experience and legitimacy remain to put the country in the position of a moral authority and one of the most influential voices in Africa.

The African Union has been undergoing far-reaching reforms in recent years in order to increase its effectiveness. These reforms encompass simplification of its bureaucracy, financial autonomy and better interactions with regional organisations. Nigeria helped them in this endeavour financially and politically. It is important to note that Nigeria had adopted the Institutional Reform Package, spearheaded by Rwandan President Paul Kagame in 2017. In this reform, Nigeria suggested the enlargement of the powers of the African Union Commission, the authority of the African Parliament and the building up of the financing system within the continent with the help of the member dues. These are strategic in ensuring that Africa is in a position to maintain its institutions without having a reliance on external assistance.

The African Union is today an amalgamation of the historicalism of Pan-Africanism and the institutionalism of Continentalism. Nigeria is planning to have Africa as an independent, economically sound and safe continent. The nation suggests transforming the African Union into a grassroots organisation, but not an intergovernmental forum. Based on this, Nigeria intends to establish grassroots continentalism by using youth activities, cultural exchange platforms, and civil

societies. Nonetheless, the stability of Nigeria's leadership in the African Union will depend eventually on its internal stability. The achievement in economic stability, democracy, and anti-corruption will also enhance the credibility of Nigeria on the continent.

ECOWAS and Continentalism-Regionalism Shift

Regional cooperation experiences influenced the integration process in Africa prior to the time when Africa became official at the continental level. West Africa served as an experiment on continental integration, both geographically, historically and economically. The most obvious manifestation of regional integration at an institutional level was to join the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which Nigeria did in 1975.

ECOWAS was formed through the treaty of Lagos, which was signed on May 28, 1975. The main purpose it was meant to achieve was to strengthen the economic collaboration of the 15 member states, establish a free trade zone and implement collective development policies. One of the reasons that led to the process was the need to overcome the economic division and reliance on other states that the nations in the region went through after the colonial regime (Bach, 2007).

Nigeria has been instrumental in the formation of ECOWAS, providing financial support as well as having a say in its political agenda. At this time, Nigeria had a military leader, General Yakubu Gowon. He viewed ECOWAS as a vehicle for realising Pan-Africanist ideologies in the region. According to Gowon, regional integration would facilitate greater unity in West Africa and, eventually, in the entire continent of Africa (Okolo, 1985).

The main objective of ECOWAS has always been the integration of the economies of its member countries. The group, however, realised that economic cooperation that was sustainable needed to deal with political and security threats. In the 1980s, regional instability changed the orientation of the organisation to an active participation in the peace and security issues rather than an economic orientation. Nigeria has been at the centre of the transformation. Nigeria is the powerhouse of ECOWAS, as the largest contributor by spending approximately 60 per cent on the yearly budget, as well as in diplomacy and institutions. To add to that, its secretariat in Abuja also gives the organisation more power within Nigeria.

Nigeria could be seen in three ways in ECOWAS:

- *Financial leadership:* The projects and peacekeeping operations of the organisation are mostly executed using Nigerian resources.
- *Diplomatic leadership:* Nigeria has a mediation role in the settlement of internal conflict.
- *Normative guidance:* Nigeria has shaped the ECOWAS policies regarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Indicatively, Nigeria was key in the move by ECOWAS to intervene after the 1999 coup disposed the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone. On the same note, ECOWAS was involved in diplomacy at the time of the crisis in the 2000s in Guinea and the Ivory Coast with the assistance of Nigeria. ECOWAS has since been more concerned with economic integration and institutional cooperation. In the African Union and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was initiated in 2019, Nigeria has been a prominent contributor and is largely based on the efforts of the ECOWAS. In Lagos and Abuja, improvements in trade reform, regional tariff policies and customs union practices were the groundwork leading to further integration on the continent (UNECA, 2020). In this regard, ECOWAS may be considered the laboratory of integration of Africa.

In the 2000s, ECOWAS established regional economic provision mechanisms, as the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and the Common External Tariff (CET). Although not all projects

gave rise to challenges, they were great milestones in the harmonisation of economic standards in Africa. ECOWAS has also proved that integration in the region is not only an economic issue but also a political duty and a security issue. The leadership in Nigeria has been significant in enabling the organisation to redefine Pan-African ideals.

This experience has contributed to the growth of continentalism in three ways:

- *Institutional learning*: ECOWAS has provided an example of how to make decisions by the African Union in its organisational experience.
- *Collective security culture*: Regional peace operations have laid the groundwork for the African peace architecture at the continental level.
- *Economic integration model*: The AfCFTA has been based on the practical example of the initiatives of free trade and customs unions.

Hence, it is shown that historically continentalism has been a bottom-up process through ECOWAS. The African integration was at the regional level before it started developing to the continental level.

In the case of Nigeria, ECOWAS is the best avenue to take the concepts of Pan-Africanism to the vision of Continentalism. The culture of regional integration has been promoted in the country by strengthening both the political and economic integration using different regional organisations. In this regard, the experience of ECOWAS in Nigeria provides two important lessons as to how Africa should integrate in the future: to begin with, African integration must not be based on ideological consensus, but on governance capacity; and, secondly, to integrate Africa, the region must take regional solidarity to another level: to a continental level of continental integration. We can see these principles in the practical experience of ECOWAS. ECOWAS is more than just a regional bloc; perhaps it is an essential precursor to African Continentalism. The participation of Nigeria is a clear indication of the capacity of this country to integrate its Pan-African identity with the Continental vision at large.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Emerging Economic Continentalism

The most reflective Continentalism initiative in terms of economy is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It also represents the utmost integration, which is reached in the African continent. This agreement was created out of a re-interpretation of Pan-African principles through the economic perspective; in this way, it aims to enhance the inner market, diversify production supply, and reduce the reliance on foreign states.

The AfCFTA was established as the basis of the 2012 African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, and in 2018, 44 countries signed the accord at Kigali, Rwanda. It was activated on May 30, 2019, and has been ratified by 54 countries ever since, thus being the largest free trade area in the world. The main objective of the AfCFTA is to expand intra-African trade by half in five years by removing customs duty and allowing free movement of services and goods (UNECA, 2020). This project gives a solution to the problem of the fragmented markets in Africa, which has long existed. The essence of Pan-Africanism, namely, the self-sufficiency of Africa, is being attained currently by employing economic policies. Thus, the AfCFTA may be considered to be not merely a trade agreement but a step on the path of autonomy instead of dependence in the development process of Africa.

First, the AfCFTA process was reluctant to include Nigeria, the biggest economy in Africa, because local labour and industrial unions feared that cheap imports would disrupt the local production. Small and medium enterprises also did not relax, as they feared that they would be

affected negatively by the greater competition. However, following the evaluation in 2019, then President Muhammadu Buhari decided Nigeria had to be part of AfCFTA on strategic and long-term grounds. On July 7, 2019, at the Niamey Summit, the Abuja government reiterated its economic integration leadership on the continent by signing the accord. This move was a big step forward for both the economy and diplomacy of Nigeria, as the country was able to access the huge market in Africa and diversify its exports, hence making the economy grow. In the modern sense, Pan-African solidarity is represented by Nigeria, which has become a full-fledged economic continentalist in its foreign policy.

The strategic position of Nigeria in the AfCFTA can be seen at three levels:

- *Economic Leadership:* Nigeria is a hub of manufacturing and energy infrastructure in Africa. It is in charge of approximately 20 per cent of exports on the continent. The AfCFTA will be sustained as long as the non-crude oil industries in the country (agriculture, textiles, telecommunications, and services) experience growth.
- *Policy Coordination:* Nigeria is engaging with the Economic Affairs Commission of the African Union and the West African Economic and Monetary Union to assist in ensuring that trade policies are more uniform regionally and continentally.
- *Political Representation:* In addition to being a place to conduct business, the AfCFTA assists Africa in playing a greater role in the global economy in terms of bargaining. Nigeria, in this instance, is one of the principal nations, which can be said to represent the collective bargaining power of Africa.

African Security Architecture and the Nigerian Approach to Continental Security

One of the main areas where Pan-Africanism ideas of the past and Continentalism institutional approaches meet is the issue of peace and security in Africa. The African countries gained independence and had to struggle with complicated security matters such as civil wars, border conflicts, ethnic conflicts, and foreign interventions. Consequently, Africa was to have its own security structure, which was called the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), formed in 2002 with the African Union (AU). Nigeria serves as the key to forming APSA and contributes to almost all the security endeavours in Africa. The sheer participation has provided Nigeria with profound knowledge of what security means to Africa, and it has been labelled as the guarantor of peace on the continent. A case in point is the ECOWAS Peacekeeping Force (ECOMOG), whose example since the 1990s has been to offer experience invaluable to Nigeria when it comes to spearheading military diplomacy in Africa (Adebajo, 2002).

The Pan-Africanist understanding of security began with the feeling of unity and fight against independence. Nkrumah not only threatened that a divided Africa would enable the colonialists to come back, but he also focused on security, rather than politics (Nkrumah, 1963). The focus was more organised and strategic with the advent of Continentalism. Security had taken a new form, and this time it focused on action that the African Union could take. With APSA, Africa developed a tangible conflict prevention model, responsiveness to crises in a short amount of time, and incorporation of peacebuilding in the continental governance. The initial concept of the Pan-Africanism of (moral) unity has been turned into the Continentalism of institutional responsibility, and it has become the shift of idealism to active, practical involvement.

The Continental Leadership: Its Strengths and Weaknesses

The significance of the country has made Nigeria the natural leader of Africa because it is very large, economically powerful, influential diplomatically, and capable of providing security.

Nevertheless, these aspects are not all that leadership is all about; it is based on the legitimacy, stable institutions and clearly defined foreign policy.

Strengths: Strategic Capacity and Normative Influence.

a. Demographic and Economic Strength: The population of Nigeria exceeds 230 million. That is why it is the most populous country on the continent, and its economy is the leader. Nigeria provides a fifth of the GDP in Africa. This is a big country with a huge domestic market, which has significant weight in trade, diplomacy, and regional markets, particularly in energy, agriculture and services.

b. Diplomatic Experience and Mediation Tradition: Nigeria is an ancient country. It has been involved in the crisis in Africa since the 1960s, whether individually or in larger groups. It was not standing on the margin in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan or Mali. The Nigerian attempts at the negotiation table and at the peacekeeping have established the reputation of Nigeria as a peacemaker.

c. Normative Leadership and Value Representation: Leadership is not just about power or mediation. Pan-Africanism has acquired a modern stamp through the foreign policy of Nigeria. African solutions to the African problems do not merely exist in slogans, but they define the approach to the country and the African identity. Adherence to these values has made Nigeria a real soft power in the region.

d. Institutional Network and Regional Influence: Nigeria's capacity to influence Africa is obvious within the networks such as ECOWAS, the African Union, the African Development Bank, and the African Continental Free Trade Area. It is usually central and it uses these networks to promote its vision in Africa. The leadership of the country is not flawless; however, it is very powerful and permeates all layers of the continental politics.

Weaknesses: Structural and Political Constraints

a. Economic Fragility and Resource Dependence: Nigeria may be leading the economic charts in Africa, but it is still over-dependent on oil. As the world oil prices fluctuate, the government revenue also fluctuates in the same direction. It becomes difficult to finance large-scale projects in Nigeria to serve the continent. High poverty levels and wide income disparities add to this, and you have a nation which is barely able to keep itself together, not to say that it can act as a guide (Abdullahi, Jakada & Kabir, 2016).

b. Internal Political Turmoil and Governance Issues: Nigeria is a country that is full of ethnicities and religions, and thus struggles with internal political turmoil. Boko Haram continues to put security on high alert in the north. Meanwhile, the democratisation of Nigeria is brought down by corruption, disorganised elections, and slow bureaucracy. These evils erode the concept of Nigeria as a model democracy in Africa.

c. Continental Competition: Nigeria does not push towards continental leadership without a fight. South Africa is an attractive alternative centre of gravity in the African Union with its well-developed institutions, modern industries, and economic connections with the rest of the world. Egypt is also raising the game, establishing power in North Africa and attempting to influence the workings of the continent. The competition of these giant players also paralyses, at times, decision-making at the African Union (Hashiru & Tufekci, 2018).

d. National Sovereignty Sensitivities: What annoys a lot of African countries is one country appearing to be overly powerful. Nigeria is the most active member of the ECOWAS and the AU, which may be interpreted as a regional coercion by some, as a power grab instead of cooperation. Such caution is a limit to soft power in Nigeria.

The presence of Nigeria in Africa is not restricted to politics and economics, but also to the cultural influence it has. Nollywood movies not only target millions of people in the country but also

across the entire African continent and other parts of the world. Likewise, Afrobeats is not just popular, but it shapes the attitude of other countries about African culture and has an effect on fashion and literature, as well as digital trends. These cultural expressions are not mere trends; they make Nigeria the cultural centre of the continent. Nevertheless, regardless of this rich artistic power, there are such negative factors as social inequality and poor educational systems which restrain the full possibilities of the cultural impact of Nigeria. The possibilities are immense, but unless they have a solid base, the opportunities cannot be realised fully.

The impact of Nigeria in Africa is a common discussion among scholars. Is it a hegemonic power or a nation that works under shared responsibility? The Hegemonic Leadership Thesis holds that Nigeria uses its economic and military power to shape the African norms and institutions. On the contrary, the Shared Responsibility Thesis indicates that the leadership of Nigeria is based on the solidarity and reciprocal benefits (Adebajo & Landsberg, 2003). As a matter of fact, Nigeria is prone to being in the middle of the road. It seeks to bring stability and cohesion throughout Africa as well as safeguard its own interests. The key to success in this balancing game is political stability at home and a foreign policy that is regular and steady.

It is the development within the country and abroad that would enable Nigeria to have continental leadership. The country needs to internally enhance economic diversification, institutionalise democracy, and fight corruption. Nigeria can advance its control on the outside by participating actively in the reforms of the African Union, mediating conflicts in the region, and investing in initiatives such as the AfCFTA. In the future, the leadership approach in Nigeria will be more inclusive by incorporating various stakeholders who are not necessarily the government, but scholars, civil society, leaders in businesses and media. This is a non-discriminatory strategy that enhances the influence of Nigeria and initiates sustainable leadership.

The position that Nigeria has in Africa is midway. The country reflects the Pan-Africanism of its long-term tradition and the Continentalism of its utilitarianism. Nigeria is a country with a great population, a rising economy, global power, and a vibrant culture, contributing to a visionary hope that it is bringing forth on the continent. Internal problems such as political instability, economic weakness, and regional competition also pose a challenge to development, however. Then, what does Africa mean by and to Nigeria? It is not an archetypal hegemon or a simple idealist who lives by dreams. Rather, Nigeria is a hybrid power that shapes and reflects the current development of Africa. Simply, Nigeria is not only at the forefront of the continental shift towards Continentalism; it is also trying to push the boundaries of the notion.

Conclusion: Pan-Africanism to Continentalism Inferences Based on the Nigerian Experience

The concept of pan-Africanism appeared in the early 20th century as a powerful notion, a notion created by Africans to fight against colonialism, racism, and foreign domination. It is all about creating a shared identity, solidarizing and creating political cohesion. Later on, Continentalism pushed the idea a step further and wanted not only unity but also to ensure that this was put into practice by forming institutions, economic integration, security and even common policies. This development is represented in Nigeria. Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has focused its foreign policy on Africa, transforming the principles of peace and solidarity into practice. It combined the sentimentality of Pan-Africanism with the practical Continentalism tactic. Therefore, Nigeria has a strong power in the African Union, ECOWAS, and the AfCFTA. It is not just a tale of tradition-breaking Pan-Africanism and Continentalism are not separate, one entity offering the vision, the other putting it into practical action. The idea of shared destiny has changed to shared responsibility.

This is the thread connecting Africa with its history and with its structure in its struggle to create its future in the world. The contribution of Nigeria is very high in this regard. The nation has

gone to the point of promoting Pan-African ideals, beyond the speeches, and this has resulted in the changes of OAU to the African Union. In the regional security, as well as economic policy, Nigeria has played a significant role in transforming high-level objectives into working institutions. This paper discusses the methods the leadership of Nigeria uses to encourage African integration by taking into account three key dimensions: the first cultural and ideological dimension. Nigeria has preserved the fundamental Pan-African ideals, including unity, identity, and solidarity, and incorporated them into contemporary identity politics. Today, the African identity is not simply based on the past but on the future, which is shared. Second, the aspect of institutional and governance. Organisations such as ECOWAS, the AU, APSA, and AfCFTA are at the forefront of integration. Nigeria has proved to be a necessity not only in the creation of these organisations but in the financing and running of these organisations, which goes to show that continentalism is a form of governance that is strong. Third, the economic and security factor. The stability and economic cooperation go hand in hand. Nigeria has promoted economic integration through ECOWAS and the AfCFTA, as well as in the area of continental security through APSA and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This combined strategy is critical towards the autonomous growth of Africa.

The style of leadership adopted in Nigeria is characterised by strata of leadership. It promotes peace and trade in West Africa through the ECOWAS. In Africa, it facilitates institutional cooperation by the AfCFTA and the AU. Nigeria represents Africa in the realm of international politics throughout the world. This multi-level approach makes the Pan-Africanism vision of Africa-to-Africa real into Africa to rule with others. Nevertheless, obstacles still lie on the way to complete integration. Poor infrastructure (Akay, 2020), economic inequalities, democratic failures, coups and foreign intervention are threats to unity. Also, continental institutions have problems of funding and coordination, thus hindering progress. Nigeria suggests three important solutions: first, to make the AU financially independent and decrease the dependence on foreign donors; second, to make institutions harmonious by matching the decisions of regional organisations, namely ECOWAS, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC), with the decisions of the AU; and thirdly, to pursue a human security approach, which means to correlate the development, education, climate and health in the process of peacebuilding. These actions turn the Moral vision of Pan-Africanism into policy by Continentalism. Previously, it represented freedom and identity; nowadays, it is being transformed with development, digitalisation, green transformation, and security on the priority list. This new vision of Pan-Africanism is represented by Continentalism.

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