

Reflections on Nigeria-Jamaica Diplomatic Relations, 1970-2020

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Abstract

The imperativeness of diplomacy has made research in international studies and diplomatic relations a recurring decimal, given that relations between nations are essential for the upkeep of international affairs. Consequently, interest in diplomatic ties involving independent sovereigns and international organizations has led to a growing body of academic literature, especially since the turn of the twentieth century. However, the conduct of diplomacy between and among Third World Countries has not received adequate attention in existing scholarly documentation, and Nigeria-Jamaica relations are inclusive of this gap. While formal diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Jamaica span over five decades, research endeavour in this regard has not been impressive. This forms the exigency for this study. This paper is set to interrogate relations between Nigeria and Jamaica with the aim of articulating its impact. The pertinent question is: to what extent has Nigeria-Jamaica relations benefited Nigeria? This and other variegated issues arising from the two countries' contact are examined in this analysis. Essentially, the paper adopts a multidisciplinary frame of analysis, employing both descriptive and analytical tools. The paper argues and demonstrates that while diplomatic relations between the two countries are not fortuitous, the prospects of such relations—with particular emphasis on the economy—have not been of much benefit to both countries. This is, however, not to say that the relationship has been without any mutual importance for the interacting nations.

Keywords: *Development, Diplomatic Relations, Jamaica, Mission, Nigeria*

Introduction

The importance of diplomatic relations between nation-states cannot be over-emphasized, which explains why relations involving state and non-state actors have caught the interest of scholars and analysts of international politics (Palmer and Perkins, 2007; Ukase and Atime, 2017). In Nigeria, literature is replete on the nature, practice, and impact of the country's diplomatic relations since independence, with a copious focus on relations with developed capitalist countries of the Northern Hemisphere. Recently, scholars of international studies have shown renewed zest for Nigeria's diplomatic ties with Third World Countries (TWC), especially in Asia and Latin America. As succinct as this may seem, relations between Nigeria and the Caribbean have not elicited considerable interest. For instance, while Nigeria has developed over fifty years of diplomatic relations with Jamaica, knowledge of the dimension and impact of such relations remains a terra incognita. A diplomatic relationship that has existed for more than half a century cannot be categorized as inconsequential and unworthy of intellectual interpretation. As such, the dearth of literature on Nigeria-Jamaica diplomatic relations creates a significant gap to be filled in the country's diplomatic historiography. This further informs the exigency for this study.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines relations between Nigeria and Jamaica with the aim of articulating their impact on Nigeria. The pertinent question is: To what extent has Nigeria-Jamaica relations benefited Nigeria? This and other variegated issues arising from the country's contact with Jamaica are examined.

The paper is divided into six sections: Section One (Introduction) presents the background; Section Two interrogates the concept of diplomacy to adopt an analytical model; Section Three analyses a brief background history of Nigeria and Jamaica; Section Four interrogates, in historical perspective, relations between Nigeria and Jamaica from 1970 to 2020; Section Five assesses the impact of the relations; and Section Six summarizes and concludes the discussion.

Conceptual Underpinning

There are varying perspectives on diplomacy such that no single definition is generally accepted. The concept has a wide range of definitional explanations, making the acceptance of any particular one a

matter of an individual's scholarly persuasion or deliberate choice to suit a line of argument. However, diplomacy is both 'a category of practice and a category of analysis' (Pouliot and Cornut 2015: 299), meaning that contemporary definitions are broad and differentiated along epistemological and methodological boundaries.

One charming, though heavily criticized, characterization is given by Satow (1966:1), who defines diplomacy as the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states. McDermott (1973:37), another leading scholar, sees diplomacy as 'a science which permits its practitioners to say nothing and [to] shelter behind mysterious nods of the head... a science whose most successful exponent is he who can swim with his head above [the] stream of events he pretends to conduct.' More elaborately, Plischke (1977:41) defines diplomacy as...

...the political process whereby states establish and nurture official inter-relations, direct and indirect, to pursue their respective goals, interest and substantive and procedural policies in the international environment.

For the purpose of our analysis, diplomacy is conceptualized to mean the political process by which political entities, generally states, conduct official relations with one another within an international environment. It is a mechanism designed to establish and maintain networks and relationships among traditional and new actors in the pursuit of shared, interdependent goals (Hart and Siniver 2020: 6). Thus, Nigeria-Jamaica relations are seen within the purview of this analysis as the official relations between the two countries in pursuit of shared and interdependent goals.

It is important to reiterate that the debate as to the appropriate theoretical construct for analysing diplomatic relations has generated heated arguments among scholars and analysts of international politics, leading to accusations and counter-accusations. Political scientists, for instance, often accuse their historian colleagues of simply "scratching around" and lacking rigorous methodology, being unconcerned with contemporary problems, and being "mere chroniclers" of an "embalmed past." Historians, on the other hand, frequently criticize theorists for erecting artificial models *ex nihilo*, creating "smoke screens of jargon,"

and becoming infatuated with computer paraphernalia instead of human beings, as Wiseman (2011: 710) succinctly observed.

Accordingly, we will not allow the issue of theoretical construct to detain us here. Instead, this study is analysed using a multidisciplinary perspective and methodology. This approach is justified by the fact that the study of diplomacy, like international relations, has become increasingly interdisciplinary, behavioural, comparative, and "scientific," as Palmer and Perkins (2007: xviii) put it.

Brief History of Nigeria and Jamaica

Nigeria is a country with a population of more than two hundred million people. Located in West Africa, Nigeria lies on the coast and her borders are contiguous with the Republic of Benin to the west, Niger and the Chad Republic to the north, and the Republic of Cameroon to the east. The country lies between longitudes 3⁰ and 15⁰ North and latitudes 4⁰ and 14⁰ East (Uwechue 1991:1441). Nigeria, as a modern state, is a British creation. Prior to British colonialism, what is today Nigeria was an agglomeration of different ethnic groups that existed and functioned independently. It was the British colonial masters who amalgamated the territory into one political fold in the early 1900s and named it Nigeria. Nigeria is a Third World Country with a population of over 200 million people. The country's economy is largely dependent on crude oil and agriculture. It is important to note that Nigeria and Jamaica share common history as both were colonised by Britain. The country became independent in 1960, the period which marks her diplomatic relations with other countries as an independent nation-state. The capital of Nigeria is Abuja; she is also a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and Non-Aligned Movement with Jamaica thus creating avenues for diplomatic engagements between the two countries.

Jamaica is an island country of the West Indies. It is the third largest island in the Caribbean Sea with a population of about 2.7 million inhabitants (Deuber and Hinrichs 2007:27). Jamaica is about 146 miles (235 km) long and varies from 22 to 51 miles (35 to 82 km) wide. It is situated some 100 miles (160 km) west of Haiti, 90 miles (150 km) south of Cuba, and 390 miles (630 km) northeast of the nearest point on the mainland, Cape Gracias a Dios, on the Caribbean coast of Central America. The national capital is Kingston. The great majority of its people are of African ancestry, the descendants of slaves brought by

European colonists. Jamaica became independent from the United Kingdom in 1962 but remains a member of the Commonwealth (<https://caricom.org/media-center/communications/press-releases/caricom-south>).

Jamaica is an upper-middle income country with an economy heavily dependent on tourism. Since its independence in 1962, the country has developed markedly but unevenly. Mining and manufacturing became more important aspect of her national economy. Agriculture continues to be one of the bases of the island's economy, accounting for about one-twentieth of the gross domestic product (GDP) and about one-sixth of the workforce. The major crop is sugarcane, with its by-products molasses and rum. Fruits, including oranges, coconuts, and bananas, are also important in the economy of Jamaica. It should be reemphasised that Jamaica's economy relies heavily on tourism which is one of the country's largest sources of foreign exchange. The reliance has made tourism sector a major facilitator of the country's diplomatic relations (Ishmael 2019:16).

Appraisal of Nigeria-Jamaica Relations

The history of Nigeria's diplomatic practice has been in the making shortly before the country's independence. As a nucleus of diplomatic practice, a Foreign Service division was created in the Nigerian Prime minister's office in 1957, to deal with matters concerning the commonwealth and foreign relations. During this period, selected Officers were at first attached to British embassies and consular posts to function as Third Secretaries Vice Consuls and so on (Kia *et al* 2017: 10-11). On 1st October, 1960, Nigeria gained independence and subsequently established a separate Ministry known as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations (Jibril 2004: 2) to deal with external affairs of the government. This marked the genesis of the country's diplomatic relations with other nations as an independent sovereign state.

Nigeria-Jamaica relation is rooted on a shared history and culture, and sense of a common identity. Much has been written about early ties which bound Africans in general and Nigeria in particular, and their Caribbean descendants to each other and the historical legacy embedded in the pursuit of common interests, most notably those related to the process of decolonisation and an end to apartheid. Solidarity

between the two groups was a hallmark of their relations. It should be stressed that common historical experience of slavery and the yoke of colonialism provided the rallying call for this early tie. Organised around an agenda of decolonisation and racial equality, spanning several decades, this early period marked the richest, vibrant and dynamic period in African-Caribbean relations, more putatively, Nigeria-Jamaica relations. Today, African-Caribbean relations are conducted via an array of different groupings and configurations operating within the structures of multilateral organisations as well as at the regional and national levels. At the multilateral level, cooperation takes place on an agenda of mutual but not exclusive interest to the two regions. Nigeria and Jamaica began to engage with each other through multiple points of contact as members of various multilateral organisations with overlapping membership. Such fora include the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries (ACP), and the English-speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM), as well as bilaterally, through diplomatic relations and associated memoranda (Ishmael 2019:6). Relations between Africa and the Caribbean are also expressed through bilateral ties and diplomatic relations at the national level.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was created and founded during the collapse of the colonial system and the independence struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and other regions of the world and at the height of the Cold War. We need to emphasise that the origin and programmes of the Non-Aligned Movement have been a subject of detail scholarly analysis (Carlse 2008; Mwalimu 2012). Therefore, we shall not allow it detain us here. What is of importance here is that during the early days of the movement, its actions were a key factor in the decolonisation process, which led later to the attainment of freedom and independence by many countries and peoples and to the founding of tens of new sovereign States. Throughout its history, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has played a fundamental role in the preservation of world peace and security. Historically, the non-aligned countries have shown their ability to overcome their differences and found a common ground for action that leads to mutual cooperation and the upholding of their shared values (Ugochukwu 2020:10). As members of the movement, Nigeria and Jamaica are able to engage in diplomatic talks and agreements concerning decolonisation and apartheid South Africa.

Few years following the Nigeria's independence, the country did not give any indication of the strong diplomatic relations that were about to unfold in Nigeria-Jamaica relations. It should be stressed that the Caribbean and West Africa have historical links through the slave trade, and Jamaica and Nigeria both have British colonial pasts, which ended in 1962 and 1960, respectively. As a result, they share important features of their present-day linguistic situations, while there are also very notable differences (Deuber and Hinrichs 2007:24). Although both sides continued to cherish historical and cultural links, there was initially no boisterous display of friendship. The first major diplomatic connections between the two countries came in April, 1970 during the administration of General Yakubu Gowon (as Head of State of Nigeria) and Hugh Shearer, the Prime Minister of Jamaica leading to the establishment of the Jamaican High Commission in Lagos, Nigeria and Nigeria's mission in Kingston, Jamaica (Bamgbose, 2007:85). Since then, Nigeria has maintained a continuous presence in Jamaica promoting her interest, protecting her citizens and strengthening strong historical and fraternal ties. Consequently, Nigeria established a diplomatic mission in Jamaica. The mission of the High Commission of Nigeria in Jamaica promotes and protects the national interest of the country within Jamaica in ways that contribute to the enhancement of Nigeria's security and socio-economic prosperity. To further strengthen this relation, a bilateral investment agreement was signed between the two countries on 5th August 1992 (<https://jis.gov.jm>). An important milestone in forging closer relations between Nigeria and Jamaica was the South African, African Union and Caribbean Diaspora Conference of March 16-17, 2005, which convened in Jamaica. At the core of the multi-pronged objectives of the conference was the need to revitalise the "historical and cultural bonds between Africa and the African Diaspora in the Caribbean, to establish mechanisms for building stronger political and economic relations... [and] identify opportunities for future collaboration" (Ishmael 2019:14).

Apart from this, Nigeria and Jamaica signed other agreements on cooperation following bilateral talks in Kingston. The agreements covered a range of issues, including energy, trade, culture, air services and education, along with technical and scientific cooperation. The two countries also look to resume the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) programme, which allowed Nigerian professionals to be deployed to

Jamaica to assist with training in areas like nursing, energy, sport and education. TAC programme, it should be noted, was one of the multilateral diplomatic instruments introduced by the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida, Nigeria's military president. Osayande (2020:145) captures it that the programme allowed young Nigerian professionals, particularly in such fields as medicine and education, to be sent to work in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific countries (ACP) for two years to assist the host countries in their development needs. Through the TAC programme, Nigeria was able to provide manpower to countries like Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Jamaica, etc. For example, available data has shown that in 2006, Nigeria deployed 10 medical professionals to Jamaica (Jinadu 2011:16). The programme boosted the bilateral relations between Nigeria and these countries, Jamaica inclusive (Boge 2017:28). In a nutshell, the TAC Scheme has fostered meaningful diplomatic contacts between Nigeria and recipient countries in a manner that has led not only to lasting official and interpersonal relationships but also promoted the principles and ideals of non-aligned South-South collaboration. Cultural and educational exchanges, the sharing of best practices in sports and the boosting of trade, business and investment were areas also agreed on by the two countries. In the oil and gas sector, there was agreement on Jamaica-Nigeria technical cooperation on oil. A communiqué was therefore signed to this effect on August 6, 2012. Moreover, both countries collaborate on multilateral levels being members of the Commonwealth of Nations (<https://venturesafrica.com>).

Recently, to mark fifty years of bilateral relations, Nigeria and the Republic of Jamaica deepened relationships between the two countries in the areas of tourism, education and economic activities with the launching of the inaugural flight from Lagos to Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay, Jamaica. After the historic flight, Jamaica is to become the next tourism hub for Nigerians. The establishment of a direct flight between the countries is expected to strengthen bilateral ties particularly in tourism sector (Reckord 2020: 3). To further strengthen the ties between both countries, Nigeria's Senate President, Ahmed Lawan, in 2020 called for better and more engagement between Nigeria's parliaments with that of Jamaica during the fifty years anniversary celebration in Abuja, Nigeria. Bilateral relations between Jamaica and the Federal Republic of Nigeria are further strengthened

with the staging of the fourth session of the Jamaica-Nigeria Joint Commission in Nigeria. The Joint Commission governs the framework for cooperation between the two countries (Reckord 2020: 1).

The Impact of Nigeria-Jamaica Relations

Nigeria and Jamaica, like much of Africa and the Caribbean, cooperate in various multilateral frameworks and fora based on natural affinities and shared interests. They have also built a network of regional and bilateral frameworks to facilitate engagement. While mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral relations have been developed, insufficient attention has been devoted to transforming their numbers into a political force, and the full scope of the political and socio-economic dimensions of the relationship is yet to be realized. The relationship, which was particularly vibrant during the early struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and the fight for racial equality, today seems fragmented and ad hoc. As such, diplomatic ties between both countries have had little impact, except in the area of exchange of personnel and travels.

Accordingly, through the Technical Aid Corps (TAC), Nigeria's trained manpower, particularly in the medical, scientific, and teaching fields, was deployed to assist the educational and medical sectors of Jamaica (Ewuchue 1991: 1488). Both countries benefit from such exchange: for Nigeria, the deployment provided job opportunities for its ever-growing population, some of whom would have been unemployed or under-employed at home. For Jamaica, the professionals helped strengthen their educational and health sectors for enhanced national growth and development.

This deployment of personnel has enabled some Nigerians working in critical sectors of the Jamaican economy to gain dual citizenship. Recently, the Nigerian High Commissioner to Jamaica revealed that Nigerians working in health and educational sectors have been appointed as heads of units and deans of faculties. For instance, Professor Wole Boko, deployed through TAC as a volunteer, was appointed as Dean of Humanities at the University of West Indies (Channels TV 29th April, 2020). However, despite the limited and seemingly low impact of overall diplomatic relations, this specific success tends to undermine the essence of the significant expenses Nigeria incurs maintaining its diplomatic corps in Jamaica, particularly given current economic challenges.

Conclusion

Nigeria and Jamaica diplomatic ties run deep, based on a shared history, culture, and common identity forged by the slave trade which forcibly relocated Africans to the New World, creating large centers of the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The common historical experiences of slavery and colonialism inspired the formation of the Pan-African Movement in the first half of the 1900s, led by the African Diaspora. Organized around an agenda of decolonization and racial equality, this early period spanning several decades marked the most rich, vibrant, and dynamic time in African-Caribbean relations, with both groups united around a common agenda. Today, while Africa and the Caribbean engage through multiple points of contact and in different fora, the relationship seems to have lost its luster and drive.

The paper argued that the future of Nigeria-Jamaica relations is ripe with potential and promise, but it requires concerted investments of time, attention, and political will to systematically transform the relationship into a political, social, and economic force suitable for modern times. This is owing to the opportunity for lucrative trade, investment, business, and tourism links between Nigeria and Jamaica. The paper posited that while diplomatic relations between the two countries are not fortuitous, the prospects of such relations, with particular emphasis on the economy, have not been of much benefit to them.

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