

THE DIASPORA QUESTION AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Nwogbaga, D.M.E.

Department of Political Science,
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
E-mail: nevarelent4sure@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The Diaspora question which focuses on matters relating to citizens abroad has raised a lot of contentious issues that demand greater attention in Nigeria's foreign policy. The contentious issues border on: first, the roles of the Nigerian Diaspora in advancing the country's foreign policy, and; second, how Nigeria's foreign policy affects the lives and interests of the citizens abroad. So far, the arguments which dominated existing literatures favour more or less the legal migrants who also engage in legitimate activities; while little or inadequate attention is given to the illegal migrants and those who allegedly engage in illegitimate activities in their countries of abode. As a consequence, many Nigerians abroad suffer a lot of incarcerations which ordinarily they wouldn't have suffered if they were given adequate diplomatic attention. In contribution to existing views, this paper is poised to (i) identify the contentious issues in the Diaspora question which demand more serious attention in Nigeria's foreign policy (ii) examine the roles of the Nigerian Diaspora in advancing the country's foreign policy, and (iii) explain why Nigeria's foreign policy should serve the legitimate interests and diplomatic needs of all Nigerians abroad even if they are illegal migrants or allegedly engage in illegitimate activities.*

Keyword: Diaspora, and Foreign Policy,

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Biographic Note: Nwogbaga, David M.E., is a lecturer with the Department of Political Science Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki; holds B.Sc. and M.Sc. in Political Science at Ebonyi State University; presently undergoing his PhD programme and also a member of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA). He specialized in international relations with more focal interests on International Law and Diplomacy as well as Conflict and Strategic Studies.

Introduction

The paper examines the Diaspora question in the context of Nigeria's foreign policy. The concept of *Diaspora* originated from the Greek preposition *diá* (between, through, over, or across) and the word *speiro* (scatter, spread, sow, or disperse) (Adamson, 2008). Hence, *Diaspora* could be interpreted to mean *spread over* or *disperse across*. The word has

been historically used to describe mass-dispersion of people with common roots who have been involuntarily forced to relocate from their homelands to foreign lands (Bakewell, 2008; Adebayo, 2010). Accordingly, the term was strictly used to describe the Jews expelled from the Middle-East, the Africans exported through slave trade, The Tibetans who fled their homeland with the Dalai Lama in 1959 to escape the brutal invasion and occupation by China (Cohen, 1997). However, contemporary use of the concept is more expansive to include those that voluntarily left their homelands to live in other countries.

The term *Diaspora* was first associated with Africans in 1965 by George Shepperson at the international Congress of African History at the University of Dar es Salaam where he linked the dispersal of Africans as a result of slavery and imperialism to the experience of the Jews (Adamson, 2008). Undoubtedly, Nigerians were largely among these enslaved Africans that essentially constitute today's Diaspora across the world. Hence, the history of Nigerian Diaspora is inextricably routed with the evolution of the African Diaspora. The Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) of Nigeria on international relations associated the origin and development of the Nigerian Diaspora with the rest of Africa in four phases: (i) the *Diaspora of enslavement* marked by forced exportation through the trans-Atlantic slavery (ii) the *Diaspora of colonisation* who are the survivors of Africa's partition in exile or their descendants; (iii) the *Diaspora of greener pasture* whose emigration resulted from the search for better social security and economic conditions lacking in their homeland due to bad governance; and (iv) the *Diaspora of globalisation* characterised by the ascendance of Africans to high and viable positions of leadership in relevant world organisations like the United Nations, the World Bank, and Commonwealth of Nations (PAC, 2005). As a result of these processes, there are about 17 million Nigerians in different parts of the world who still share common links with the country (Akunyili, cited in Eso, 2009). The Nigerian Diaspora therefore refers to the nationals or citizens and persons of Nigerian origin or descent, Nigerian emigrants, and Nigerian expatriates, residing abroad (Adebayo, 2010).

The relevance of the millions of Nigerians abroad to the country have been severally emphasised especially in the foreign policy process. While Dora Akunyili describes every Nigerian in Diaspora as an ambassador (Eso, 2009), the reports and writings of the world Bank (2005), Ojo (2007), Adamson (2008), Bakewell (2008), Adebayo (2010), and Aganga (2011) perceive them as invaluable external assets for national development. In a sense, the Diaspora holds critical stakes in Nigeria's foreign policy process thereby necessitating the need for full diplomatic protection for all. But some opinions hold that only the legal Nigerian Diaspora who also engages in legitimate transactions abroad should fully enjoy diplomatic recognition in Nigeria's foreign policy process. Hence, one of the major challenges facing the Nigerian government today is how to protect the Diasporas citizens and explore their potentials for national development. This is the basis upon which this paper seeks to address the following questions: what are the contentious issues about the Diaspora which demand more serious attention in Nigeria's foreign

policy? What are the roles of the Nigerian Diaspora in advancing the country's foreign policy? Why should Nigeria's foreign policy serve the legitimate interests and diplomatic needs of all Nigerians abroad whether they are legal or illegal migrants?

The documentary research design was adopted in addressing these questions; hence, the researcher used textbooks, periodicals, research reports and seminars, as well as internet and journal publications in gathering relevant information and data. These literatures were sourced from libraries and internet websites. In order to elicit the information and data relevant to the study, the contents of the literatures gathered were thoroughly read, simplified, summarised, classified and assessed with focus on the questions raised. Consequently, the conclusions made were based on the interpretations and logical inferences drawn from the information and data generated from existing literatures.

The Contending Issues about the Diaspora in Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Nigeria's foreign policy which refer to all governmental decisions that guide the nation's relations with other countries (Akindele, 1986), is mainly faced with the challenge of how to guarantee the welfare and security of the Diaspora citizens (PAC, 2005). The resurgence of interests on the Diaspora citizens by different countries of Africa is as a result of various factors which Akukwe and Jammah (2004) identified mainly as (i) the decision of the African leaders in Addis Ababa in February 2003 to recognise *the Diaspora as the sixth region of the African Union (AU)*; (ii) the need to exploit the investment potentials of the Diaspora communities who have increasingly recognised Africa as a fertile field to invest their talent, capital, expertise, leisure and the production of intermediate technology. In addition, Nigeria's foreign policy attention to the Diaspora derive from the considerations that (a) the Diaspora could drive its vision of becoming one of the 20 leading economies in the world by 2020 (PAC, 2005); (b) in a globalised world where borders are increasingly porous and skills migrate to most attractive economic environment, successful developing countries will be those who can easily leverage their Diaspora human and financial capitals by mobilizing their resources for foreign direct investment (Ojo, 2008); (c) more citizens need to be involved in diplomacy at reduced cost with less bureaucratic hurdles in order to reach out and recreate the image of Nigeria in the international community instead of restricting the art to the limited number of diplomats posted abroad (Ogunsanwo, 2009). Essentially, it means that Diaspora communities are not only relevant political units but also hold a lot of economic opportunities and potentials for African states like Nigeria. This explains why Young (1999) asserted that Africa continues to wallow in bad governance and poverty because it has not opened its arms to receive and explore the potentials of its citizens in the Diaspora.

In order to protect the Diaspora and explore their development potentials, the Nigerian government began to refocus the nation's foreign policy to reflect the interests and needs of the citizens abroad (Eke, 2009). This manifested in its declaration of Citizen Diplomacy on 30 July, 2007. Citizen diplomacy conceptualises citizen-centric model of governance that considers the nationals as both the *end* (essence) and the *means* (agents

or instruments) of government (Eke, 2009). Thus, citizen diplomacy as a foreign policy response to the Diaspora question requires the government of Nigeria to more consciously resort to the calculi of the basic needs, human rights, security and socio-economic welfare of the citizens in conducting bilateral and multilateral engagements with other nations (Opara, 2009). Some of the contents of Nigeria's foreign policy as expressed in citizen diplomacy include the desire to ensure that (a) Nigerians travelling or resident abroad are treated with respect by other nations; (b) the growing number of Nigerians in the Diaspora invest their resources in the development of the Nigerian economy; (c) the images of Nigeria and Nigerians are improved abroad; (d) Nigerian Diaspora who seek consular assistance receive sufficient and timely diplomatic attention (Eke, 2009).

However, it is difficult to realise these foreign policy goals for various reasons that border on inadequate patriotism on the part of the Diaspora citizens as a result of insufficient diplomatic protections by the Nigerian government (Olaniyanu, 2009; Opara, 2009). For instance, many Nigerians in Diaspora suffer incarcerations as reflected in the data presented below:

Table 1: Nigerian Diaspora in the Foreign Jails of some selected Countries, 2002-2012

Country	Estimated Number of Persons
Equatorial Guinea	128
Brazil	469
India	500
China	1000
Britain	1000
Togo	300
South Africa	56
Total	3,453

Sources: Iloka (2011), Falana (2011), Kuku (2012); Daily Champion (28 September, 2002)

Some of these Nigerian citizens languish in the foreign jails without trials for various offences such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, fake travel documents, internet scam, identity fraud, cyber crimes (Iloka, 2011; Falana, 2011; Kuku, 2012). Some of them are not only jailed without trial but also denied legal counsel and communication rights with relatives (Daily Sun, December 25, 2011). For example, Ogochukwu Malu was jailed without trial in China for entering the country with Guinea Passport instead of Nigerian Passport (Iloka, 2011). More so, the congestion of foreign jails by the Nigerian Diaspora and the associated financial costs of the prisoners' welfare even compel a country like Britain to negotiate the contested "Prisoners Exchange Agreement" with the Nigerian government for the transfer of some Nigerian prisoners (Falana, 2011). It would rather be preferable that the Nigerian government negotiates the release (and deportation where

necessary) of such citizens in foreign Jails because Nigeria's 148 prisons capacity estimated at 46,700 inmates as at 2011 was over-populated with 80,000 inmates (Falana, 2011). Worse than the issues raised above is that some of the Nigerian Diaspora have become victims of extra-judicial killing as reflected in table 2 below:

Table 2: Extra-Judicial Killing of Nigerian Diaspora

Date	Country	No. of Persons
1994	Gabon	23 Nigerians
2002	Indonesia	55 Nigerians
Jan. 2007-April 2008	South Africa	84 Nigerians
May 2007	Czech Republic	1 Nigerian diplomat
March 2, 2009	Belgium	1 Nigerian woman
March 2009	Equatorial Guinea	16 Nigerians
Total		180 Nigerians

Sources: Jimoh, A.M. (2008); *The Nation*, March 16, 2009 (Lagos); *Daily Sun*, March 19, 2009 (Lagos); Eke, A.O. (2009); Ujumađu (2008).

The 23 Nigerians killed in 1994 were among the 270 African immigrants who were maltreated to death in Gabon at the Cross-Bouquet detention camp in Libreville (Eke, 2009). While other countries like Ghana, Togo, and Benin, whose citizens were also involved, made attempts to seek explanations, Nigeria was not seen to have made any serious efforts to show concern over the death of those individuals (Eke, 2009). With respect to South Africa, the 84 Nigerians were killed in different circumstances: for instance, whereas Ikechukwu Obiakor was subjected to death in Lindela detention camp in Johannesburg while waiting for deportation; Ekene Mbakwe was shot in his shop by the South Africa Police Patrol Team in Johannesburg (Eke, 2009). Furthermore, the Nigerian diplomat, Wayi L.M. was killed at Nigeria's Embassy in Czech Republic by Jiri Pososky, an irate victim of '419' (Advance Fee Fraud). The Nigerian woman, Mrs. Evelyne Uche Amarin was killed by her Belgian husband, Mr. Wim Vanacker.

Observably, apart from the death of Nigerians in Gabon and Indonesia in 1994 and 2002 respectively, the other extra-judicial killing of 102 Nigerians from 2007 to 2009 occurred when Nigeria vehemently began to profess the *citizens* as the centre-piece of its foreign policy; yet, no action was taken by the government in response to the mistreatments. It was noted that the mistreatment of the Nigeria Diaspora could not have been different because it is the way Nigerians are treated at home with levity that they are treated abroad (Chukwumerije and Obiora, cited in Jimoh, 2008). Consequently, many Nigerians who have suffered incarcerations or witnessed the mistreatment of Nigerians abroad tend to question why they should be patriotic to the country that scarcely shows concern for their welfare and security.

It would however be unpatriotic not to highlight some of the areas where the roles played by the Nigerian government in the interest of the Diaspora deserve commendations. In

June 2009, the government facilitated the rescue of ten (10) Nigerian sailors who were intercepted by Somali pirates off the coast of Somali while on their way back to Nigeria from Yemen where they had gone to bring a ship belonging to their Nigerian employer (Opara, 2009). Also, during the crisis that rocked Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and that of Syria, the government made significant efforts and safely evacuated over five thousand (5000) Nigerians who were trapped (Danda, 2011; Dabiri, 2011; Business Day, 2011). There is also need to appreciate the quick diplomatic response of the government in deporting about one hundred and thirty-one (131) South-Africans to reciprocate South-Africa's deportation of one hundred and twenty-five (125) Nigerians on March 3, 2012 over alleged possession of fake "Yellow Fever Vaccination Cards" (Abioye, Olorok, and Alechenu, 2012). The action forced South-Africa to apologise officially for engaging in such act coupled with the attack on Nigeria's High Commission in the country some months back (The Punch, March 5, 2012). These actions were taken in favour of the Diaspora as recognition of Nigeria's obligation to protect its nationals abroad in view of the values attached to them and the roles they could play for the country.

The Roles of the Nigerian Diaspora in the Foreign Policy Process

The Nigeria Diaspora plays essential roles in the foreign policy process. As a reservoir of human capital, the Nigerian Diaspora has high technical experts, and investment potential that if properly organised, motivated, harnessed, and mobilised, can play significant diplomatic and economic roles in the nation's foreign policy processes in different countries (PAC, 2005). Effective performances of these roles largely depend on how the potentials of 17 million Nigerian Diasporas in different countries are mobilised. Drawing specific instances from the United States of America, Britain, India, Ireland, Netherlands, Canada, Germany, and Libya, we discover that Nigeria has significant Diaspora population in different countries to adequately complement the functions of its diplomatic missions abroad. The population of the Nigeria Diaspora in some selected countries as presented below shows that the nation has sufficient citizens abroad to perform these tasks.

Table 3: *The Population Strengths of Nigeria Diaspora in selected Countries*

Year	Country	Population of Nigerian Diaspora
2004	US	3, 240,000
2006	Ireland	16,300
2006	Canada	19,520
2009	Netherlands	9,453
2009	Britain	154,000
2011	Libya	7,125
2011	India	10,000
<i>n.a.</i>	Germany	17,903
Total	8 Countries	3,474,301

Sources: Adebayo, A. (2010); <http://www.leadership.ng/nga/articles> (accessed 28/01/2012); <http://www.nigeriandiaspora.com> (accessed: 28/01/2012).

The population of three million, four hundred and seventy-four thousand, three hundred and one (3,474,301) Nigerian Diaspora is only for 8 countries out of the 95 countries where Nigeria maintains diplomatic missions manned by few staff at home and abroad (PAC, 2005; Eke, 2009). The implication is that the official diplomats are overstretched by duties of the headquarters as well as the embassies, high commissions, and consulates abroad. Hence, they cannot in any way adequately advance Nigeria's foreign policy extensively to the nooks and crannies of each country. This calls for the teaming population of Nigerians abroad to complement their functions especially in periods when official diplomacy is strained. The Nigerian Diaspora could therefore serve as the country's ambassadors by exhibiting the most exemplary conduct, good behaviour and etiquette at all times if they are adequately mobilized and oriented (Udoh, 2011).

In addition to the diplomatic roles of the Nigeria Diaspora, their economic activities are very instrumental to national development. Many of the Nigerian Diaspora are specialised in medicine, education, teaching, research and development, information technology, and engineering etc (Adebayo, 2010). Among the Nigerian Diaspora in the US, 25,000 persons are medical doctors, while 185,000 persons are information technology professionals (PAC, 2005). These are special fields where Nigeria is in dire need of proficient human resources to explore adequately. Apart from the issue of the Nigeria Diaspora being a reservoir of human capital, they also constitute substantial source of financial capital for the country through remittances as presented below.

Table 4: Annual Remittances from the Nigeria Diaspora, 2003-2010

Year	Amount in US (Billion) Dollars
2003	\$3
2004	\$2.3
2005	\$0.3329
2006	\$5.4
2007	\$17.9
2008	\$9.98
2009	\$18.6
2010	\$10
Total	\$52.1329

Sources: PAC (2005); World Bank (2005); Eke (2009); Onwuliri (2011).

Essentially, the financial capital remitted by the Diaspora to their families in Nigeria could be used for various development projects in addition to the consumption needs of the relatives (Udoh, 2011). In order to further explore the economic potentials of the Nigerian Diaspora expressed in their human and financial capitals to meet the expected future remittance which Onwuliri (2011) estimated at \$100 billion by 2015, the formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy needs to be focused more on protecting the interests, welfare and security of all the citizens abroad.

Why Nigeria's Foreign Policy should serve the Legitimate Interests and Diplomatic Needs of all Nigerian Diaspora

There have been arguments as to who should be protected by the government among the Nigeria Diaspora. Certainly, there is express support for the government to serve the interests and diplomatic needs of the legal Nigerian migrants who also engage in legitimate activities. But the protection of illegal Nigerian migrants who may or may not engage in legitimate activities abroad has remained controversial. In this light, Ashiru (2011) argued that: first, Nigeria cannot, and should not ask the host countries of Nigerian Diaspora not to apply their local laws on those who flout them because they would suffer similar penalty if they were found guilty of similar offences in Nigeria; second, Nigerians are not the only immigrants who are mistreated abroad; third, the question of rendering consular services and other assistance to Nigerian Diaspora should not be extended to the illegal immigrants who give Nigeria bad name and image abroad because they are undesirable elements; fourth, Nigeria's foreign missions are not adequately funded to shoulder the cost of rendering consular assistance to the citizens when they get into trouble in their host countries. These arguments hold serious implications for the Nigerian Diaspora because they were advanced by (Olugbenga Ashiru) the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the primary purpose of government is to ensure the welfare and security of its citizens at home and abroad without discrimination (Eze, 2009). Hence, although it is acknowledged that citizens should be punished for offences committed, it should be recalled that such punishments are meant to correct rather than destroy the recipients. Besides, as observed earlier, the jailing of some of the Nigerian Diaspora did not follow due process of the law while others suffered extra-judicial killing. The implication of not protecting and negotiating the release of those Nigerians in foreign jails especially those who have not been tried, is that one day they could as well be victims of extra-judicial killings. It is also very important to note that the longer the Nigerian Diaspora stay in foreign jails, the more they constitute vital international corruption index against Nigeria.

It is very essential to note that there are also some legal arguments which explain why Nigeria's foreign policy should serve the legitimate interests and diplomatic needs of legal Nigerian Diaspora who allegedly engage in illegitimate transactions as well as the illegal immigrants. First, international law like all other laws accommodates the presumption of innocence in any criminal allegations until the accused is proved guilty beyond all reasonable doubts (Eze, 2009). Hence, the detention without trial and denial of legal counsel to Nigerian citizens abroad, like Tobenna Achalugo who was arrested in China in 2007 for fake travel documents, are questionable (Iloka, 2011). Second, the fact that one is accused or found guilty of any criminal acts does not suffice to subject the citizen to any form of inhuman treatments or be denied the rights of communication with relatives as suffered by Ezekanne Michael jailed in China for drug related offence (Eze, 2009). Iloka (2011) further rightly pointed out that immigration related offences

should ordinarily attract more or less repatriation rather than incarceration as suffered by many Nigerians abroad.

Summary

The foregoing expositions reveal that the contentious issues concerning the Nigerian Diaspora which demand more serious attention of the Nigerian government in the foreign policy process include: the jailing of Nigerians without trial; the denial of legal counsel to the incarcerated citizens; the denial of communication rights with the relatives; the torture of Nigerian citizens which occasionally result in death, and; extra-judicial killing of accused Nigerian Diaspora. Such mistreatments of the Nigerian Diaspora without expression of adequate concern by the Nigerian government tend to demoralise the victims and other Nigerians abroad from being patriotic to the nation. This negatively affects their performances in complementing Nigeria's efforts towards effective diplomacy and national economic development in the foreign policy process. In order to fully exploit the diplomatic and economic potentials of the Nigerian Diaspora, the government needs to render consular assistance to all of them without discrimination and in accordance with the provisions of both national and international law.

Conclusion

The argument here is not that the Nigerian Diaspora should not be punished for offences committed abroad, they should be tried in their countries of abode or where the crime was committed. They may as well undergo imprisonment outside Nigeria in execution of the sentence of a court of law in respect of a case of which the citizen has been tried and found guilty. However, where such conditions apply, the Nigerian government through its diplomatic missions abroad should ensure that such other country follows due process in the case of trial and that prison conditions are not subhuman. Where such other state fails, Nigeria should not continue to keep the terms of such agreement based on the doctrine of diplomatic reciprocity. It is only when such measures are ensured that the Nigerian Diaspora can take their proper place with guaranteed confidence to participate and contribute towards the advancement of Nigeria's foreign policy.

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