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Attractions and Limitations of Nigeria's Soft Power

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Abstract

Academic scholarship on Nigeria's regional credentials and influence has focused on its hard power (economic and military capability). Despite the increasing relevance given to soft power in the 21st century, this aspect of the country's status has been neglected. This article contributes to the literature on Nigeria's foreign policy by engaging the currencies of its power of attraction and the limitations that constrain the optimization of this source of power. It employs constructivism as its theoretical lens and concludes that addressing challenges such as ubiquitous corruption and Boko Haram terrorism would enhance Nigeria's credibility and ultimately its soft power projection in the international arena.

Keywords: Soft Power, Nigeria, Nollywood, Technical Aid Corps, Boko Haram, Corruption

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Introduction

Regionally, Nigeria is a force to be reckoned with. Globally, it cannot be ignored. Abuja's status in the international arena largely hinges on its economic endowment and military muscle; in other words, its hard power currencies.¹ This perhaps explains why policy makers and academics have not paid adequate attention to the soft power of this state which has been significant in its foreign policy since independence.

Tella² have defined soft power elsewhere as 'a state's non-coercive capability (ranging from its foreign policies and political values to its cultural exports) that engenders other states' attraction, admiration and aspirations'. Rather than relying on its coercive capability, a state that is endowed with soft power harnesses the attractiveness embedded in such power to pursue its foreign policy objectives. Nigeria's soft power portfolio includes its democracy; its peace keeping role; its entertainment industry, including music and movies. The country's aid and peace keeping roles radiate across Africa and beyond. Nigerian movies (Nollywood) and music are widely admired in Africa and further afield, while its democratic credentials over almost two decades have been internationally recognised. This article draws attention to Nigeria's soft power by engaging with its cultural exports in the form of Nollywood and the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Scheme as a foreign policy tool. The choice of these soft power attributes is informed by the fact that Nollywood is the most important cultural promoter of Nigeria's soft power and the TAC appears to be one of the most significant foreign policy instrument that enhances such power.

However, domestic challenges, including corruption, Boko Haram terrorism and an image problem have weakened Nigeria's capacity and subsequently circumscribed Abuja from effectively wielding its soft power. These limitations are examined in the latter half of the article.

Constructivism and Nigeria's Moral Identity

Constructivist theory is a reaction to the Realists' position on the primacy of material factors. Instead, constructivists argue that ideational and normative factors shape states' international relations. 'In the absence of norms, exercises of power, or actions, would be devoid of meaning. Constitutive norms define an identity by specifying the actions that will cause others to recognize that identity and respond to it appropriately'³ The theory offers an explanation of international politics in terms of how identities and interests are knitted together. Constructivism was introduced to the parlance of international relations by Nicholas Onuf in his masterpiece, *World of our Making*. He argues that it:

does not draw a sharp distinction between material and social realities – the material and social contaminate each other, but variably – and it does not

grant sovereignty to either the material or the social by defining the other out of existence. It does find socially made content dominant in and for the individual without denying the independent, “natural” reality of individuals as materially situated biological beings.⁴

According to Copeland⁵, there are three major tenets of constructivism. Firstly, international politics is determined by the players’ shared norms, ideas and values. Second, the ideational structure influences actors’ interests and identities in their international relations. Third, circular causality provides an apt description of the relations between ideational structures and actors. This implies that a state’s actions in relation to other states are significantly shaped by the inter-subjective shared ideas and norms which make states redefine their interests in accordance with the ideational structure. While actors’ interests and identities are determined by ideational and normative structures, the structures could also be refined or altered by actors’ practices. Over time, the structures are codified into formal rules which are internalized by actors.⁶ A state’s identity explains the predictability of its international behaviour. Expectations can only be sustained between states when there are stable intersubjective identities that enable ‘predictable patterns of behavior’.⁷ Thus, a state’s action or inaction in relation to other states is largely determined by its identity. States’ behaviour towards friends and enemies is different because unlike friends, enemies are threatening.⁸ ‘Interests presuppose identities because an actor cannot know what it wants until it knows who it is, and since identities have varying degrees of cultural content so will interests’. ‘A world without identities is a world of chaos, a world of pervasive and irremediable uncertainty, a world much more dangerous than anarchy’.¹⁰ In a nutshell, identities determine states’ interests.⁹

Against this background, Nigeria has striven to promote a positive image across Africa and beyond through its soft power attributes. The regional power has constructed the identity of a peace builder. There is no gainsaying that it is a major peace builder on the continent and the globe at large. Nigeria’s peace keeping role in Africa such as in Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone has significantly boosted its soft power in Africa. Furthermore, it is a significant aid donor and big brother in its engagement with other African countries and has provided aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as a means to strengthen South-South cooperation. Abuja has thus created the identity of a benign regional power in the eyes of its African compatriots and globally. However, Nigeria has also been ascribed negative identities such as drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism. It is imperative that Abuja effectively mobilise its soft power credentials to counteract these negative images and promote its positive attributes that have been recognised in the international arena.

Soft Power Attractions

Cultural Attraction: Nollywood

Given the ubiquity and admiration of Nigerian movies and music in Africa, African entertainment arguably wears a made in Nigeria label. Prentice¹¹ argues that in

terms of its movie and music exports, 'Nigeria has the most "soft power" of any African country'. The movie industry (Nollywood) in particular has become the most significant platform to transmit Nigerian culture across Africa and beyond. It is interesting to note that Nollywood is not confined to Africa. It is visible in countries with large African diaspora such as the US, UK, Caribbean countries (Haitians in particular) and to a lesser extent in countries such as Germany, Italy and Spain.¹² Thanks to the DSTV (a South African satellite television provider) platform, Nollywood movies are screened across the continent. Indeed, it seems to be challenging the dominance of Hollywood because its audience can relate to the African cultural heritage and the circumstances depicted in its movies, unlike Hollywood that exhibits Western values and experiences. Miller¹³ argues that 'in Nigeria and in countries throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, it (Nollywood) has eclipsed Hollywood, Bollywood and much local production to dominate the movie sector ...' Thus, it has also displaced local content in African countries. Indeed, Nollywood has replaced Hollywood as the second largest film industry in the world based on the volume of movies produced.

Nollywood has provided a platform for Nigerians to tell their own stories and challenge the unsubstantiated and stereotypical portrayal of the country and its citizens in foreign media. Among others, these include criminals, drug dealers and terrorists. A series of interviews conducted by the BBC in 2010 on other African nationals' perceptions of Nigerians revealed that Nollywood has been a critical promoter of Nigeria's image.¹⁴ The movie industry has generated admiration and fame for Nigerian artists such as Genevieve Nnaji, Patience Ozokwor, Ini Edo, Mercy Johnson, Funke Akindele, Olu Jacobs, Pete Edochie, Mr Ibu, Osita Itheme (Aki and Pawpaw), and Jim Lyke, among others. Popular soap operas such as *Tinsel* and *Jacobs Cross* add to this positive image.¹⁵ Against this backdrop, celebrity diplomacy could be employed to promote Nigeria's interests. This would entail promoting the country's culture and values in engagements with the foreign public.

Beyond their entertainment value, Nigerian movies have promoted the country's foreign policy objectives in two significant ways. First, they serve as a significant source of national wealth. Nigeria's recalculation of its GDP in mid-2014 revealed that the entertainment industry (particularly Nollywood) is a significant contributor to national revenue. Thus, as other African nationals consume Nigerian movies, the regional power derives economic gains. Second, Nollywood transmits Nigerian culture across Africa. This is evident in the embrace of Nigerian traditional attire, mimicking of the Nigerian accent by other Africans and appreciation of Nigerian Pidgin English. According to Nye¹⁶, a state's culture is an important source of its soft power 'in places where it is attractive to others'. Thus, admiration of Nigerian culture exhibited by Nollywood has reinforced Nigeria's soft power. Ukwueze and Ekwugh¹⁷ observe that Nigerian movies have promoted an understanding of Nigerian culture in the hearts and mind of its audience. Nollywood could therefore play a pivotal role in the Nigerian government's attempts to revamp the country's image that has been punctured by negativity. This would require increased appreciation of the utility of Nollywood to achieve this end. It is therefore important that the Nigerian government empowers the industry to boost the quality of production and possibly

take advantage of its advancement in space technology to encourage homegrown satellite television with Africa-wide coverage. This would mean that it would no longer have to rely on South African owned DSTV to transmit its movies and culture to its African audience.

More importantly, if well deployed, Nollywood could be a tool to advance Nigeria's hegemonic potential in Africa. Adebajo¹⁸ observes that Nollywood 'is a veritable source of 'soft power' that could be a cultural resource to challenge French artistic hegemony in Africa'. This is significant in the light of France's remarkable influence in Africa which seems to counteract that of Nigeria and South Africa. Nollywood provides the platform for Nigeria to enjoy cultural hegemony in Africa and stand tall above its regional challengers like South Africa, Egypt and Algeria and above great powers like the US, UK and France. It is also instructive that Nigeria uses Nollywood to showcase its military strength, economic endowments and its contribution to public good in Africa and the world at large. Hollywood has been successful in this regard. Nollywood's display of Nigerian military and economic power has the tendency to make its audience look at the regional power in awe. Broadcasting the country's contribution to public good in Africa such as its participation in the struggle against colonialism across the continent and its leading role in African integration will also boost the image of the regional powerhouse. This would promote a more positive image of Nigerians, possibly forestalling xenophobic attitudes and attacks targeting Nigerians particularly in South Africa and anti-Nigerian sentiments across the world.

Foreign Policy Attraction: Technical Aid Corps Scheme

The TAC is a voluntary international service scheme that was established by the Ibrahim Babangida administration in 1987 to provide technical assistance to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. Unlike traditional financial aid, it aims to provide Nigerian technical knowhow to developing countries in critical skills such as medicine, engineering, law, and lecturing, to name but a few. Nigerian professionals volunteer to serve in developing countries for two years.¹⁹ Their salaries are paid by the Nigerian government, easing the financial burden on recipient states. This undoubtedly enhances Nigeria's image and South-South cooperation. As outlined on the website of the Directorate of Technical AID Corps (DTAC), its major objectives include:

- 1) Sharing Nigeria's know-how and expertise with other African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries;
- 2) Giving assistance on the basis of assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries;
- 3) Promoting cooperation and understanding between Nigerian and beneficiary countries; and
- 4) Facilitating meaningful contacts between the youth of Nigeria and those of the recipient countries.

It thus ensures that Nigeria enjoys international goodwill. Nye²⁰ notes, that, 'sometimes countries enjoy political clout that is greater than their military and

economic weight would suggest because they define their national interest to include attractive causes such as economic aid or peace-making.' Nigeria's peacekeeping role in places such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chad and Mali and its aid under the umbrella of the TAC in states like Angola, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Kenya, Fiji Island, Dominica, Guyana, and Jamaica reinforce its soft power. Since the establishment of the TAC, it has provided technical aid to more than 30 countries. While there were 102 volunteers at the inception of the scheme between 1987 and 1988, by 2013, more than 200 volunteers were working in recipient countries and 1 500 were providing technical knowhow in fields as diverse as engineering, agriculture, law, medicine, architecture, accounting, radiology, meteorology and lecturing between 2014 and 2016.²¹

This novel initiative means that, unlike other African states, Nigeria is not only a recipient of aid, but an important aid donor, boosting its image in the international arena. Its contribution to the development of Africa rekindles its role of big brother on the continent. It also reinforces NEPAD's vision of African ownership of development initiatives and African solutions to African problems. Through the TAC, Nigeria (the primary impetus alongside South Africa in the formation of NEPAD) has proven that its commitment to this vision goes beyond rhetoric and has taken practical steps and led by example in realising its objectives. This enhances its image as a significant promoter of African cooperation in particular and broader South-South cooperation. Former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E Meles Zenawi highlighted the TAC's contribution to the socio-economic development of African, Caribbean and the Pacific states.²² Indeed, high-ranking Ethiopian officials stated that: 'even though their country was receiving similar manpower training aid from Japan and Britain, their observation in the two years of the TAC scheme in Ethiopia has shown that Nigerian volunteers were the most dedicated.' They added that 'Nigeria's efforts in deepening South-south cooperation ... had renewed their faith in the ability of Africans to help themselves'.²³ Similarly, former President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma said that, 'Nigeria has continued to grant development assistance and personnel to support my government's socio-economic programs, including the Technical Aid Corps Agreement under which Nigerian experts work in Namibia'.²⁴

The international goodwill derived from the TAC is highlighted by the fact that it has received accolades from international organisations and bodies such as the Commonwealth, the United Nations Volunteer Service, ECOWAS Volunteers Programme and the Japanese Agency for International Cooperation.²⁵ Personal contact between Nigerians and recipient countries' nationals is critical in transmitting Nigerian culture in these countries and has endeared the state to other countries. It is perhaps for this reason that the Nigerian government has considered sending Nigerian teachers to teach Yoruba (one of the dominant Nigerian languages) in Brazil. Furthermore, centres for the study of Yoruba culture and language have been established in countries such as Benin and Brazil.²⁶ Continual requests for Nigerian volunteers under the TAC among APC countries and beyond testify to the fact that skilled Nigerian workers are admired. This serves as a veritable tool to debunk the unsubstantiated negative portrayal of Nigerians across the globe. In the words of former Nigerian foreign minister Bolaji Akinyemi who was responsible for the establishment of the scheme:

... So, that when people talk about 419 [Advance Fee Fraud] and the 'ugly Nigerian' in a particular country, they will remember that there was that engineer who helped to build our express road, he was a Nigerian; or the nurse who helped save my baby when my baby was sick, was a Nigerian; or the medical doctor that was attached to the State House was a Nigerian²⁷

In summary, the TAC is a significant image booster for Nigeria. Other sources of Nigerian soft power that endear the regional power to other states include its peace keeping role in Africa and beyond, its music and multinational corporations, and its democratic credentials. It goes without saying that Nigeria's peacekeeping role, especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone has accorded Abuja the status of a major peace maker in Africa. Its music industry has transmitted Nigerian culture across Africa, while its multinational corporations have established their footprint on the continent and its successful transition from authoritarianism to democracy, global commendation of the 2015 presidential election that ushered in Muhammadu Buhari and its promotion of democracy across the continent are worthy of emulation. However, despite such robust soft power, there are inherent contradictions in Nigerian domestic politics that circumscribe Abuja from effectively mobilising its soft power to achieve its foreign policy objectives. The following section examines these limitations.

Soft Power Limitations

Pervasive Corruption

It is axiomatic that corruption is one of the ills that Nigeria has been identified with in the international system. This clearly has dire consequences for its soft power. Countries such as Russia, Indonesia and even China with similar levels of corruption have different levels of economic performance.²⁸ Nigeria's decentralised or disorganised corruption is very destructive not only to the economy but to the image of the country. As opposed to centralised or organised corruption, in such a situation, an investor has to bribe different agencies and individuals to obtain a licence for the provision of government goods or services. Corruption is pervasive in Nigeria at all levels, across the public and private realms. Since independence, successive regimes, both authoritarian and democratic, have been enmeshed in devastating corruption. It therefore came as no surprise when former British Prime Minister David Cameron recently described Nigeria as 'fantastically corrupt'.²⁹ This illustrates the damage corruption has caused to Nigeria's image in the eyes of the global audience.

Nigeria's ranking and scores in the Transparency International corruption perception index have further compounded its image problem and ultimately the attractiveness of the country. Azeez³⁰ observes that this has caused embarrassment to Nigerian government officials during visits to other countries and has significantly dented Nigeria's leverage in the international community and its ability to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Indeed, aside from factors such as its economic prowess and military arsenal, its image and soft power are major sources of any country's influence in the international arena. In the 21st century, states that are serious about achieving their foreign policy objectives understand the significance of soft power to

supplement their hard power. Perceptions of Nigeria as a corrupt country limit its soft power and capacity to play a hegemonic moral role in its region and beyond. States such as Switzerland and Canada enjoy prestige and influence in the international arena arising from their soft power and positive image.³¹ Nigeria's influence has been constrained by its levels of corruption. For example, on what moral grounds can Nigeria as a regional power preach for the eradication of corruption and embrace of good governance in countries such as Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and Sudan when it is notorious for corruption in the eyes of the global audience? Its preaching will definitely fall on deaf ears. Table 1 below shows Nigeria's ranking and score in the corruption perception index between 2010 and 2015.

Table 1: Corruption Perception Index 2010-2015

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Score/Scale	2.4/10.0	2.4/10.0	27/100	25/100	27/100	26/100
Rank/Number of Countries Surveyed	134/178	143/183	139/176	144/177	136/175	136/168

Source: Adapted from Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2010-2015.

Table 1 clearly reveals that Nigeria's levels of corruption are significantly high, ranking among the countries with the highest levels of corruption. Corruption dents the attractiveness of a state and discourages FDI that is critical for economic development such as creating employment, boosting productivity and the transfer of technology and technical know-how.³³ In their empirical analysis of the nexus between corruption and FDI in 33 less developed countries including Nigeria, Azam and Siti³⁴ note that corruption hinders FDI inflows partly because it raises business costs; ultimately, multinational corporations are not inclined to invest in such countries. Over a decade ago, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) argued at a forum in Lagos that Nigeria's bad image has hindered the attraction of much-needed FDI to grow its economy.³⁵ Similarly, foreigners are very cautious about engaging in economic and business activities in Nigeria for fear of being swindled.

In an age of unprecedented interconnectedness, states have realised that they cannot influence other states through coercion alone. Prestige, respect, attraction and admiration matter. Accordingly states often endeavour to project a positive image and counteract any negative one that they have been identified with. In this light, successive Nigerian governments have attempted (at least at the level of rhetoric) to combat the country's corruption through various institutional

frameworks. Notable among these initiatives are the Obasanjo military administration's Jaji Declaration (1975-1979), the Buhari military regime's War against Indiscipline (1983-1985) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) which were launched by the Obasanjo civilian administration in 2000 and 2003, respectively. Despite these efforts and the EFCC's notable successes such as the prosecution of Tafa Balogun, then Inspector General of Police, Bode George, then deputy national vice chairman (South-West Zone) of the ruling People's Democratic Party, and James Ibori, the former Governor of Delta state, corruption is still pervasive. This is a consequence of among other factors, the lip service paid to these initiatives rather than actual crusades against corruption and the use of the agencies to witch hunt political opponents. While many politicians are alleged to have been involved in corrupt practices, very few have been convicted.³⁶ The Halliburton scandal comes to mind. Nigerian public officials were bribed to the tune of about \$200 million for the award of a \$6 billion Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas construction contract. Despite the global ignominy and public outcry in the country that accompanied the scandal, no charges have been laid against the culprits because three former head of states and other power brokers were allegedly involved.³⁷ Adebawo and Obadare³⁸ capture the activities of the post-1999 fight against corruption thus:

In the case of Nigeria, the civilian regime's prosecution of an anticorruption campaign has ironically coincided with the reported theft of state resources on a scale that is unprecedented, even by the standards of the country's egregious history of official larceny. Indeed, instead of being eroded, existing networks of patronage and clientelism have consolidated, even expanded, whilst the shady mutuality of state and informal institutions has further encrusted the country's iconography as one of Africa's myriad "shadow states".

It is important to put this observation into proper perspective. Agbibo³⁹ shows that 'between 1960 and 1999 alone, Nigerian leaders siphoned more than \$440 billion out of the economy. This is six times the Marshall Plan, the sum total needed to rebuild devastated Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War'. If the scale of corruption of the civilian regime that began in 1999 is truly unprecedented as argued by Adebawo and Obadare, one can only imagine the extent of the damage it has caused to Nigeria's economy. Former foreign affairs minister Ike Nwachukwu argues that Nigeria's battered image in the international arena is largely a consequence of the high levels of ubiquitous corruption which have engendered disregard for good governance, transparency and accountability.⁴⁰ Given this reality, it is not surprising that corruption has constrained Nigeria's moral authority, dented its soft power and punctured its regional hegemonic potential.

Boko Haram Terrorism

It is common knowledge that Boko Haram terrorism is the major challenge confronting Nigeria. Indeed, the activities of the sect have threatened the territorial integrity and survival of the state. Boko Haram has challenged one of the pillars of

Nigeria's hegemonic claim – its military prowess. While it has been successful in conflict zones in African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Nigerian military has struggled to cope with the terrorist group. This begs the question of hegemony or survival. Does Nigeria desire and have the potential to assume a hegemonic role in Africa or is it struggling for domestic survival amidst Boko Haram terrorism?

There can be no doubt that Boko Haram has dented Nigeria's credentials as a powerful military force to be reckoned with on the continent. In the 2015 global terrorism index, Nigeria ranks 3rd, below Iraq and Afghanistan at 1st and 2nd, respectively. Nigeria scored 9.213 out of a possible score of 10 in the global levels of terrorism. Similarly, the report shows that the sect has emerged as 'the most deadly terrorist group in the world' even deadlier than the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁴¹ While Boko Haram's killing of innocent civilians and bombing of symbolic buildings captured global attention, the incident that reverberated across the world was its kidnapping of around 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014. This was complicated by the Jonathan administration's handling of the matter. Indeed the incident revealed the ineptitude of the Nigerian government in its fight against the Islamic sect. For instance, the Jonathan administration only made an official statement about the girls three weeks after they had been kidnapped. Furthermore, it claimed it was negotiating with the sect for the release of the girls but the sect denied the claim. By the time the president vacated office in mid-2015, the government had still been unable to locate the girls. This caused global anger and condemnation of the Nigerian government by world leaders, media houses such as CNN and the BBC, civil society organisations like Transparency International and ordinary citizens across the globe, culminating in the popular campaign, #Bringbackourgirls. Transparency International⁴² noted that 'the slow response to Boko Haram's abduction of the girls is a legacy of an institution not fit for the purpose.'

Warner⁴³ argues that '... the nature of the Nigerian government's reactions to the Chibok kidnapping has come to stand as a microcosm of its larger approach to Boko Haram, which many have read to be half hearted, confused, self-damaging, and duplicitous.' Clearly, rather than been perceived as a hegemon, Abuja is seen as a safe haven for terrorist activities. Nigeria has become a laughing stock and its government has lost face in the international system due to its seeming incapacity to tackle Boko Haram. The audacious bombing of symbolic buildings such as the United Nations building and the Police Headquarters in 2011 and the on-going killing of innocent civilians in the northern part of the country are just two examples of a reign of terror that has undermined Abuja's soft power in the eyes of the global community and raised questions about its capacity to protect life and property. Indeed, some observers and civil society organisations have likened Nigeria to a failed state. For instance, in the 2016 Fragile States Index (formerly Failed States Index), Nigeria ranked 13th out of 178 countries.⁴⁴ In summary, Boko Haram terrorist activities have undermined Nigeria's regional hegemony in its West African sub-region⁴⁵ and have punctured its pretensions to be a continental hegemon. While the country's peace-making efforts on the continent and further afield garnered it enormous soft power, Boko Haram has challenged this status. Rather than being

perceived as a guarantor of peace in the region, Nigeria is increasingly seen as a source of insecurity.

The manner in which the Nigerian government has conducted itself in its fight against Boko Haram has also raised global eyebrows. There have been gross violations of human rights including extrajudicial killings, rape and the intimidation of residents in Boko Haram hotspot states.⁴⁶ These tactics have been condemned by governments around the world, nongovernmental organisations such as Transparency International, and Human Rights Watch and even some Nigerian citizens. For instance, Human Rights Watch⁴⁷ observes that:

When the army has acted it has often done so in an abusive manner, rounding up hundreds of men and boys suspected of supporting Boko Haram, detaining them in inhuman conditions, and physically abusing or even killing them. Many other community members have been forcibly disappeared, allegedly by security forces. When Boko Haram suspects escaped in March from a famously abusive detention center, Giwa Barracks, Nigerian security forces reportedly recaptured and summarily executed hundreds of them.

While it is understood that the fight against terrorism is not an easy one and sometimes calls for desperate measures, the Nigerian forces' counter-terrorism operations relegate human rights issues to the backburner. Their disregard for international human right laws might have been responsible for some of the great powers' reluctance to supply the weaponry required to tackle Boko Haram. Human Rights Watch⁴⁸ notes, that, Nigeria's allies' reluctance to provide security assistance stems from the fear of complicity in such abuses. It should be noted that the extrajudicial killing of the founder and former leader of Boko Haram partly contributed to the hibernation and re-emergence of the sect as a more brutal and ruthless group in 2009.⁴⁹ Since 2009, the security forces have arrested tens of thousands of suspects, many of whom have died in prison.⁵⁰ Human rights and democracy are political values that are widely admired across the globe. A state that upholds such values enhances its soft power in the international system. The activities of the Nigerian military have shown that the country does not take human rights values seriously. This damages its soft power in the hearts and minds of global audience.

Boko Haram's effect on Nigeria's soft power is seen in fewer tourists visiting sites in the northern part of the country and the country's increasing unattractiveness to foreign investors. For instance, the Canadian Prime Minister noted in 2012 that, 'we cannot allow our citizens to be killed unwarrantedly ...'⁵¹

However, the Buhari administration has achieved noticeable success in its fight against the group, including the recapture of major towns, the seeming weakening of the group and the recent release of 21 and later 82 of the around 200 kidnapped Chibok girls. It remains to be seen if these gains will be maintained and sustained in the near future. Despite the president's claim that Boko Haram had been technically defeated in late 2015, the killing and bombing of civilians across the northern part of the country still make headlines in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

The twin challenges of Boko Haram and corruption seem to be the most damaging for Nigeria's image and its capacity to exert its soft power. However, other negative perceptions have punctured the country's image. Chief among these are drug trafficking and advance fee fraud (popularly called 419 in Nigeria). While these perceptions are often exaggerated, they contain elements of truth. For instance da Cruz & Stephens⁵² note that Nigeria is responsible for a third of the heroin and half of the cocaine seized by the US and South African authorities, respectively.⁵³ Bach observes that, as early as the 1990s, the US authorities identified Nigeria as the hub of the illicit drugs that emerged from Asia and Latin America en route to North America and Europe. This negative image is compounded by Nigerians' notoriety for advance fee fraud. The Nigerian criminal network is visible across the globe, including the US, Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan and other African countries and many have fallen victim to Nigerian scammers.⁵⁴ Clearly, these criminal acts have painted Nigeria in a negative light across the globe, undermining its soft power and influence among the community of nations.

Conclusion

While successive Nigerian administrations have not adequately recognized the significance of soft power, the country can be argued to have some elements of such power. Nollywood radiates beyond Africa and has emerged as veritable cultural diplomacy. Nigeria is the largest democracy in Africa and its success in the last presidential polls is worthy of emulation by other African countries where democratic consolidation is still a major challenge. Abuja's big brother role exemplified by its peace keeping role and its aid, particularly through the TAC, has enhanced Nigeria's soft power.

However, Nigeria's soft power has been constrained by its negative image in the international system. This stems from among other things, Boko Haram activities, endemic corruption and Nigerians' role in drug trafficking and advance fee fraud. This negative image has frustrated the gains the country has garnered through its soft power sources. This suggests that they have overshadowed Nigeria's soft power attributes. Thus, Nigeria is unable to effectively harness its soft power resources and will continue to punch below its weight if these challenges are not mitigated. Addressing these constraints would enhance the country's credibility and ultimately its soft power projection in the international arena. This would translate into moral authority and influence and ultimately promote Nigeria's global admiration. More importantly, the effective combination of the regional power's soft power and its hard power will be fundamental to its aspiration of a hegemonic role on the continent.

In a nutshell, Nigeria's capacity to effectively influence decisions of regional consequence and assume its 'manifest destiny' to champion the cause of Africa at the global level will be largely determined by the extent to which Nigeria is able to counteract the impediments that obliterate its sources of soft power and fine-tune this source of power with its hard power resources. This will entail paying more attention to the utility of soft power in the international system, directing global attention to the country's soft power and embarking on carefully crafted soft power initiatives that have the potential to accrue regional and global admiration.

Notes

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