

BOOK REVIEW

Fidel Abowei. *Nigeria's Soft Power in Anglophone West Africa: Insights from Ghana and Liberia*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024. xiii + 223 pp. \$180.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9781032500362.

This book provides an empirical, theoretically grounded analysis of Nigeria's soft power in contemporary West Africa with specific focus on Ghana and Liberia. The author seeks to understand how Nigeria, despite her internal development challenges and jaundiced international image, has deployed her soft power to drive statecraft. Schematically divided into eight chapters, it assesses the three key theories of soft power—namely liberalism, constructivism, and realism—and provides insights on how Nigeria's soft power posturing has been received, particularly by the elites in Ghana and Liberia. Soft power, seen as the ability of a state to deploy intangible resources such as culture, political values, norms, and ideals to attract or alter the behavior of another state is built on “attractiveness” as both a resource and as a behavior. The book further explores the three fundamental approaches of soft power, namely: the agent-central, the subject-centered, and outcome-based approaches. While the subject-centered approach focuses on what the subjects of power perceive, and this is often based on media projections that bring the country to an evaluation, the outcome-based approach involves the agent's resources and the behavior of the subject towards the agent, which determine the effects of the relations. If mainstreamed into national development, soft power can translate into power resources to build attraction and alter state behavior in the international scene. Such resources include political agent-subject relations, military capability, and economic resources.

The book provides an engaging diplomatic history of West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, taking into account the impact of shared historical, geographical, and economic ties in inter-state relations. The contiguous geographical nature of West Africa suffused with a common history of European colonialism account for the rapid diffusion and assimilation of sociocultural norms and values across artificially created geopolitical boundaries. European colonialism and the balkanization of the region into different spheres of influences (Anglo-phone, Francophone, and Lusophone) continue to undermine, peaceful regional inter-state relations in West Africa. The need to overcome the challenges of colonialism, the author argues, led to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and later the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria played significant leadership roles in the formation of these organizations. This strategy, including an intimidating

diaspora population, cult-like religious leaders, and cultural forces, enhanced Nigeria's attractiveness and influence within West Africa.

The author details the actors and patterns of post-independent interactions showing areas of disagreements and diplomatic manoeuvres indicative of differences in leadership idiosyncrasies. It points out key issues in Nigeria's relations with Liberia and Ghana and how the inter-state relations got strained in the 1970s through 1980s, including the expulsion of Ghanaians by the Muhammad Buhari-led military junta, the halt of oil sale, and the disregard of Rawling's leadership in Ghana. The book also documents the recent closure of Nigeria's land borders under President Muhammadu Buhari and the unwarranted attacks and closure of shops belonging to Nigerian traders in Ghana by the Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA).

More importantly, the book examines Nigeria's soft power potential across economic, military, political, and cultural landscapes. It x-rays the impact of its over 200 million population, abundant mineral resources (particularly crude oil), and large military size and arsenal in West Africa. The growth of Nigerian popular cultures, especially the Nollywood, Afrobeats, Pentecostal industries and actors, have enlisted Nigeria as one of the influencing cultures of the world. Moreover, the book demonstrates how successive political leaders have prioritized Africa as the "centerpiece" of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria has remained committed to Africa as a centerpiece of foreign policy through focused leadership, promotion of peace and security, eradication of colonialism, promotion of democracy, aid, and regional integration using platforms such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps (NTAC), the National Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF), among others. However, Abowei notes that "post-independence Nigeria has always contended with an image problem' particularly from the West due to its political and domestic deficiencies. Nigeria's international image laundering has remained unsatisfactory because of "institutional deficiencies."

In sum, the strength of the book lies in its deployment of empirical data to support theoretical postulations on Nigeria's soft power resources and behavior and its receptivity by political and academic elites in Ghana and Liberia. The book shows that both Liberia and Ghana have a significant positive perception of Nigeria from a "big brother" viewpoint. The attractive elements of Nigeria's soft power includes culture, Pentecostalism, fashion, music, and movie icons/celebrities such as Davido, Wizkid, Burna Boy, and so on. The book shows that while Nigeria's role accrued a high level of positive sentiments, the Liberians are more fascinated than the Ghanaians. The negative perceptions are mainly caused by Nigeria's ugly domestic deficiencies, such as the high level of corruption, bribery, cybercrimes, lack of electricity, collapsed educational system, insecurity, unemployment, electoral malfeasance and so forth. The findings of the book have significant implications for the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigerian policymakers should leverage on the book's key findings and recommendations to reposition and drive her foreign policy to achieve national interest. There is no doubt the book fills a yawning gap in extant literature on Nigeria's diplomatic history and will be an

especially useful source material for scholars and students of international relations, political science, and history.

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