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Abstract

The purpose of this paper on "Seme Border Closure and Nigeria's Trading Partners in Africa" aimed at exploring the dynamics of the Nigeria's land borders closure with Benin Republic as it affected her trading partners in Africa. Methodology adopted was descriptive design that relied on judgmental sampling technique. Secondary data (books, journal articles, monographs, internet materials etc) were sourced in Nigerian libraries and subjected to content validity before analyzing it qualitatively. Result of the findings revealed that smuggling of rice and petroleum product, including insecurity are the major reasons Nigeria closed land border with her immediate neighbour, Benin Republic. The closure has led to an increase in revenue accrued to the federation account and increase local rice production and consumption. Regrettably, it fostered inflation in Nigeria, triggered hardship in Benin Republic and prompted retaliatory measure from Ghana. Most importantly, the land border closure negated the essence of Nigeria being a signatory to the Economic community of West African States as well as a signatory to African Continental Free Trade Area. These findings have contributed to the understanding and further explanation of the Theory of Mercantilism. Nigeria cannot survive in isolation; hence, the paper recommends domestic policy adjustment that focuses on interest free loan to local producers as well as establishment of Joint Border Guard with immediate neighbours. These measures would lead to growth and development not land border closure that isolates Nigeria from the comity of nations and further denies her the benefit of globalization.

Keywords: *Immediate Neighbours, Land Borders, Mercantilism, Trading Partners, Protectionist Policy, Security.*

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the prominent states in West African region that shares land borders with the Benin Republic in the West, Chad and Niger in the North, as well as Cameroun and Equatorial Guinea in the East (Ekanem, 2014). Again, Nigeria's coast lies on the Gulf of Guinea and forms part of Atlantic Ocean (Ogbeide, 2008). In terms of geographical distance, "Nigeria shares 91,500 kilometres land borders with the Republic of Niger and Chad in the North, about 1,000 kilometres with Benin Republic in the West, 1,700 kilometres with Cameroun in the East and has 700 kilometres of Atlantic Coastline" (Adetula, 2008, p.79). Interestingly, Nigeria\s external relations with its immediate neighbours anchor on trade. As Hoffmann and Melly (2015) rightly observed that:

> Nigeria economy is unparallel in Africa for its complexity and dynamism. It is potentially the engine of growth for an entire region, both as centre of production and as consumer of neighbouring countries' exports…Nigeria is directly connected to a burgeoning global market. Its population of perhaps 180 million, the largest on the continent, acts as a magnet for transnational flows of goods and people in the region (p.1).

Regrettably, the long porous land borders with the neighbouring countries (Benin Republic, Chad & Niger) coupled with social factors such as ethnicity, linguistic and cultural ties foster smuggling and transnational organized crimes. For instance, in 2004, Blum (2014) maintained that about 75% of Beninoise market, especially the local areas had illegally imported petrol from Nigeria. This petrol was cheaper than the one offered by their state's owned company –SociétéNationale de Commerciation des PétroduitsPétrolers(SONACOP).

Morillon and Afounda (2005) also said that in 1998, the gasoline supplied informally from Nigeria to Benin Republic was 10% of their entire consumption. Similarly, about 80% was informally supplied in 1991, 83% in 2001 and 2002, while 72% was supplied illegally in 2003 and 2004 respectively. In the same vein, Mbaye, Golub and Gueye (2019) decried that, "despite some increases in Nigerian gasoline prices, the share of smuggled gasoline was estimated at about 80% of Beninoise domestic consumption in 2013" (p.3).Soule and Obi (2001) equally posited that:

> the ramifications of this trade even extend to countries that do not have land borders with Nigeria such as Togo and Burkina Faso. The driving force behind this trade is the difference in price on either side of the border. Taxation and exchange rate differences (depreciation of Naira and stability of the CFA France) have created a significant gap between prices in Nigeria and prices in other countries (p.15).

The irony of all this, is the fact that Nigerian state, that has not been able to reposition its local refineries are now importing its stolen crude in a refined products from other African States, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal including Cameroon. This is a huge loss, indeed. Hoffman and Melly (2015) also lamented that, "the prevalence of a large informal sector has several…consequences for the Nigerian economy. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the loss of government revenue from taxes, customs duties and tariffs" (p.2). Blum (2014) also decried that, "…Custom evasion deprives the state of important revenues which contribute to the weakening of public institutions and the state legitimacy" (p.5).

In order to avert further loses, in 1984, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), the then Military Head of State decided to close Nigerian land border with Benin Republic (popularly known as Seme border).

Heilbrum (1999) explained further that, "during this time, Nigeria's closed down all service stations with 10km of the border with Benin…to curb smuggling" (p.3). Again, in 1996, the then Nigerian Military Head of State, late General Sani Abacha closed Nigeria's land border with Benin Republic. The land border closure then was more political than economy. Nigerian government was informed that President Soglo of Benin Republic had military cooperation with United States, which late

General Abacha viewed as a threat (Golup, Diop&Igue, 2019). This led to shortage of gasoline in Benin Republic and the eventual loss of 1996 presidential elections by President Soglo. In the same vein, former President Olusegun Obasanjo closed Seme border in August, 2003. President Obasanjo closed the land border with Benin Republic in order to checkmate the criminal activities of Mr. TidjaniHamawi, a citizen of Niger Republic who resided in Benin Republic. This land border closure affected the economy of Benin Republic. "Only when he was turned over to the Nigerian authorities following a meeting between President Obasanjo and President Kerekou of Benin Republic in Badagry, Nigeria, was the border re-opened" (Golup, Mbaye&Diop, 2019, p.6).

Furthermore, following the current economic hardship, which Nigerian government is facing, and the series of measures which the government has put in place to revamp the economy, Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, on August 22, 2019 decided to close Nigeria's land border with Benin Republic. Liedong (2019) decried that,"Nigeria's economy declined in 2015 and further contracted by 1.6% in 2016, this was largely due to a worldwide drop in the price of crude oil in 2014…Foreign Direct Investment inflows have plunged by 55%. There have also been shortages of foreign exchange which have put the Naira in a tailspin, causing the government to implement stringent foreign exchange control" (p.2). The Nigeria's 2017 Economic Recovery and Growth Plan aimed at deepening investment in Agriculture as well as increasing the sector's economic growth from 5% in 2017 to 8.4% by 2020 (Liedong, 2019). According to Unah (2019):

> the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, has pursued a range of proctectionist economic policies, worries that allowing cheaper imports, will undermine efforts to push Nigeria towards self-sufficiency in local production. Since 2015, the Central Bank has placed restrictions on the sale of foreign exchange for the importation of 41 products, including rice, palm oil, beef, toothpicks, textiles, tomatoes and cement (p.2).

The restriction of the 41 products by the Central Bank of Nigeria, and the further closure of land borders not only Benin Republic (Seme border) but also Cameroun, Republic of Chad and Niger Republic have been described as welcome development. Hameed Ali, the Comptroller General of the Nigerian Custom Service, praised the initiative while appearing before the National Assembly's Committee on Finance and National Planning to defend the policy. Ali (2019) said, "there was a day in September that we collected N9.2 billion…it has never happened before" (cited in Ogunwusi, Nzeako&Utulu, 2019, p.6). Timipre Sylva (2019), the Minister of State, Petroleum Resources also maintained that, "the border's closure has led to a significant drop of 8 million litres of fuel consumption which were smuggled out of the country illegally" (cited in Unah, 2019, p.2). It is based on this development that the Nigerian government has vowed to keep the land border closed until the neighbours get their acts together: mainly quelling the lax that has enabled smuggling of contraband goods into Nigeria and petroleum products out of Nigeria. However, few questions require explanations.

(i) Which theoretical framework can explain Seme border closure?
(ii) What are the rationales for Nigeria closing Seme border?

(iii) What are the consequences of Seme border closure?

In terms of structure, the first part of the paper deals with the mercantilist theory that serves as the framework of its analysis. The second section highlights the material and methods use for the research. The rationales for the closure of Seme border is the third section while the fourth section analyzes the consequences of closing Seme border. Conclusion and recommendations constitute the last sections of the paper.

Theory of Mercantilism

Thomas Mun (1664) and Friedrich List (1841) were the major proponents of the theory of mercantilism. The word mercantilism is derived from a Latin word, "merchant." This word dominated the political economy literature in 16th to 18th century. Jhingan, Girijaand Sasikala (2011) maintained that mercantilism dominated the central idea of the economic thinkers in
England, France, Germany, Italy and even countries like Russia, Spain and Scotland. Citing Grey (1964), Jhingan, Girija and Sasikala (2011) posited that, "it had three hundred years run and so it coloured the thought and still more the actions of every country in Europe" (p.19). In terms of definition, mercantilism can be defined as, "the philosophy and practice of governmental regulation of economic life to increase state power and security" (Cohen, 1973, cited in Kegley&Willkopf, 1993, p.120). Baylis and Smith (2001) explained further that the theory of mercantilism does not focus on the individual policy makers and their choice of action rather it suggests that the world economy is an arena of competition among states seeking to maximize relative strength and power. Power, indeed, is the major and the first building block of mercantilism. International system is seen as a jungle in which each state has to do whatever it can in order for it to survive.

Baylis and Smith (2011) hinted again that:

> …the aim of every state must be to maximize its wealth and independence. States will seek to do this by ensuring their self-sufficiency in key strategic industries and commodities, and by using trade protectionism (tariffs and other limits on exports and imports), subsidies, and other selective investments in the domestic economy (p.205).

Mercantilism focuses on inward-looking though the use of state power in organizing domestic economic for the purpose of developing economic resources that gives it more credible bargaining position in international negotiations. Mun (1664) argued that the growth and development of British economy in 18th century was facilitated by the adoption of mercantilist policy. According to
Mun (1664), "imports were discouraged by the use of tariffs, quotas and subsidies but…exports were not discouraged to the same extent as import" (cited in Ravenhill 2008, p. 35). List (1841), confirmed, "institutionalized free trade worked well for Britain because they operated a nationalist policy that "stifle imports, favour domestic industry and…close the productive gap…" (cited in Ravenhill, 2008, p.35).Garner, Ferdinand and Lawson (2009) also argued that, "…international relations are inherently conflictual, that nationalist rivalries produce the major dynamics with which political economy must grapple, and that true "political scientist" must see the world characterized by free trade as a very unnatural one"(p.457). Confirming further, Jackson and Sorensen (2007) equally maintained that, "mercantilists see international economy as an arena of conflicts between opposing national interest,

rather than an area of cooperation and mutual gain" (p.101). Therefore, power is central to the theory of mercantilism.

Furthermore, wealth constitutes the next building block of mercantilism. The concept of wealth is related to power. Indeed, mercantilists, such as Mun (1664), List (1841) among others, assumed that, power creates wealth. Jhingan, Girija and Sasikala (2011) argued that, "the fundamental aim of the mercantilists was to make the country strong. The strength of the country was found on the wealth of the country especially, that portion of the wealth which consisted of precious metals like gold and silver" (p. 21). Gold was seen as a major source of wealth in Britain during the 16th century, therefore, acquiring it, enabled state to have strong bargaining power in international arena.

Hence, the mercantilist slogan was "more gold, more wealth and more power" (Jhingan, Girija & Sasikala, 2011, p.21). In order to create wealth, the mercantilists believe that nations should always ensure that it has favourable terms of trade. This could only be achieved through increase in export, but a decrease in import. Confirming this point, Jhingan, Girija and Sasikala (2011) posited that:

> the mercantilists insisted that, the value of export should always be greater than imports. In short, they advocated a favourable balance of trade. Hence, they encouraged exports and discouraged import. Export more, import less and collect the balance in the form of gold and silver, was the essence of this theory. Accordingly, every exporter was considered to be a close friend of the state and every importer as an enemy (p.22).

The mercantilists do not accept the principle of free trade. Unlike liberal thinkers like Thomas Malthus (1766), David Ricardo (1772), John Mill (1773), including Adam Smith (1723) that believed in laissez-faire ideology, the mercantilists believed that state intervention is necessary for the sustenance of wealth including enhancement of growth and development. Unlike liberalism that held the opinion that economic system works most efficiently when left to itself and also free from state intervention (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007), mercantilism, on the other hand opined that economic activities should be subordinated to the primary goal of building a strong state. "States have to be worried about relative economic gain, because the material wealth accumulated by one state can serve as a basis for military-political power which can be used against other state," (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007, p.181). Therefore, there is a need for state intervention in economy.

Relating all this to the subject matter, it should be recalled that Nigerian government started adopting protectionist policy as far back as 1983, when the General Muhammadu Buhari(rtd) was the then Military Head of State. Nigeria placed all import under licensing and closed its borders with her immediate neighbours between 1983 to 1985. Eventually, when that government was toppled through military coup d'état, the then Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) reviewed Buhari's protectionist policy, and decided to impose only 30 percent on all imported goods (Soule & Obi, 2001). Late General Sani Abacha that succeeded General Babangida (rtd) in 1993 decided to embark on selective restriction on some imported goods, such as rice, wheat, beans, tomatoes, among others. Since then, the country has been operating without serious restriction on imported goods, until 2014 when oil price in international market started declining by 60 percent (Unah, 2019). Former President, Goodluck Jonathan was managing the economy through investment on agricultural produce, even though, he did not completely ban imported products, nor close borders with neighbouring countries. It should be recalled that President Jonathan launched Agricultural Transformation Agenda in 2011 with a major aim of promoting agric-business, attract private sector investment in agriculture, reduce post harvest loses, and add value to local agricultural produce.

Fayinka (2004) hinted that, the Agricultural Transformation Agenda prioritized job creation and enhanced efficiency in the growth and production of Nigeria's key stable foods, especially rice and cassava and placed import bans on other imported stable food such as wheat. President Jonathan also introduced Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GESS). The aim of the policy was to give farmers easy access to seeds and fertilizer. "Farmers enrolled in the programme received 50 percent subsidy on fertilizers and other inputs, with expectation that subsiding farming inputs will increase crops yields" (Ajibefun, 2018, p.6). Within 2013, not less than 880,000 farmers from 34 states of the federation benefited from the scheme. The number of seed supplied also increased from 11 to 77 in 2013 (Ajibefun, 2018). Another laudable programme which President Goodluck introduced for the purpose of decreasing imported food, especially rice, beans, and cassava was Nigeria Incentive Based Risk Sharing System (NIBRSS).Under the programme (NIBRSS), the federal government provides banks with Credit Risk Guarantee (CRG), in order to assist farmers' access to bank loan. NIBRSScollaborated with Commercial Agricultural Credit Scheme, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, and Agricultural Credit Support Scheme among others, and contributed to the increase in agriculture's share of total bank credit from 1.4 percent in 2008 to 4 percent in the mid 2014.

Okoilo and Obidigbo (2015) admitted that, "Nigeria became the first African country to provide subsidies to farmers though their mobile phones, demonstrating some of the most creative development that the Agenda has enabled. Additionally, 3.56 million jobs were created between 2012 and 2014 and 88 billion investment commitments have been made as a result of the Agenda" (p.7).

Therefore, a success story of this kind cannot be toy with hence, when President Muhammadu Buhari came to power in 2015, he had no other option than to sustain the policy through protectionist policy. Nigeria's land borders with her immediate neighbours (especially Seme border) were closed. Importation for the country could only be accepted through seaport. The Central Bank of Nigeria drew up a list of 41 items, whose importation would no longer be welcomed in the country. "Rice and other food items featured prominently on the list" (Okon, 2017). Soule and Obi (2001) identified some of the imported items to include; second hand and retreaded tyres, second hand clothes, textiles and garments, second hand vehicles, rice, cigarettes among others. Hoffman and Melly (2015) also pointed that:

> Nigeria's economy remains, severely hampered by infrastructure failings, administrative hurdles, unreliable power supply, security crisis in the North-East of the country, wide spread corruption, and history of over reliance on oil combined with under investment in the rural livelihoods upon which much of the population depends.

> Living conditions are still poor for many, wealth remains very unequally distributed… (p.4).

Therefore, government has to do something in order to have favourable balance of trade that would enable it to meet some of these challenges. Operation Ex-Swift Response was constituted by the government. Joseph Attah, the Spokesperson of Nigerian Customs Service maintained that Operation Ex-Swift Response was a joint operation that made up of Nigerian Customs Service,

Nigeria Immigration Service, and Nigeria Police Force, under the coordination of office of the National Security Adviser. This security outfit is mandated to police Nigeria's borders with her immediate neighbours and ensured that all the ban products are not allowed to get into Nigeria, through her land borders. Well, little success has been achieved. Hameed Ali, the Comptroller General of Nigerian Customs Service maintained that, the closure stems the "influx of smuggled goods, especially rice and tomatoes into the country…, significantly increased revenue from import duties" (Enehikhuere, 2019, p.1). Similarly, Lai Mohammed, the Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture posited that, "illicit drugs and weapons that are being used for act of terrorism and kidnapping in Nigeria…through porous borders…have been reduced…goods on the prohibition list…such as rice, used clothing, poultry products and vegetable oil, should not be exported to the country (Enehikhuere, 2019, p.4).

Materials and Methods

This study adopted descriptive design that relied on the judgmental sampling technique. Secondary data (books, journal articles, monographs, conference papers, internet materials etc) were sourced in Nigerian libraries, subjected to content validity, before analyzing it qualitatively. The adoption of qualitative analysis helped the researcher to embark on an indebt study of Seme border closure, as well as exposing intellectual gaps in extant literature. The population of the study comprises Seme in Benin Republic, Illela in Niger Republic, Maigator in Chad as well as Mfun in Republic of Cameroon. These are the land borders Nigeria has with its immediate neighbours. The choice of Seme border in Benin Republic was judgmental, in view of the fact that Nigeria trades more with member states of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) than the Central Africa that borders with Cameroon or North Africa that shares land borders with Chad and Niger. Seme border has been the corridor through which traders from West African States (Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana and Ivory Coast etc.) pass to transact economic activities with Nigeria. Therefore, closing it, must surely affect traders from the member states of Economic Community of West African States and even beyond negatively.

Rationales for the Closure of Seme Border

Perhaps, the most important strain in Nigeria-Benin external relations is the issue of habouring of criminal by the Beninoise authorities. It should be recalled that on 9th August, 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo closed indefinitely the Nigeria's land borders (Seme) with Benin Republic as a result of incessant cross-border crimes including armed robbery, smuggling and human trafficking.

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The Nigerian government claimed that many complaints had been made to the Beninoise authorities about threats that cross-border crimes posed to the Nigerian economy, as well as the people's lives, property and investment. Despite these complaints, "there was an increase in the number of cross border crimes. It was the concern of the Nigerian government that contrary to President Kereous's promise, no noticeable action has been taken by the Beninoise authorities to check cross-border crimes" (Adetula, 2008, p.68). Nigeria, which is often referred to as the "big brother" in the West African sub-region could not afford to turn a blind eye to the nefarious activities carried out by their neighbours to the detriment of its national interest and wellbeing of Nigerians. Therefore, the Nigerian government must sit down with the various neighbouring West African countries, particularly the Benin Republic to iron out these grey areas once and for all (Ejiofor, 2010).

Indeed, it is globally acknowledged that oil constitutes 90 percent of Nigerian foreign exchange, thus, the cornerstone of Nigerian economy. Criminal activities along Seme border poses serious threat to the Nigerian economy. Nigerian goods, especially its cheap fuel are massively smuggled into Benin Republic by the militants, smugglers as well as foreign collaborators (Adetula, 2008).

Omede (2006) also confirmed that, "Beninese citizens are involved in smuggling of petroleum products. These groups of people are also engaged in piracy activities along the creeks and swamps between Nigeria and Benin Republic…"(p.10). Again, Human Rights Watch (2005) opined that, "a major threat to oil industry… arises from the activities of 'cartel or mafia' composed of highly placed and powerful individuals within the society, who run a network of agents to steal crude oil and finished products from pipelines in the Niger Delta region" (p.19). On his part, DemondDaukoru, a former Presidential Adviser on Petroleum and Energy Matters, declared that: crude oil theft is one of the two ways (the other being communal unrest by which Nigeria has lost $30 billion between 1999 and 2003. What this loss meant, is the reduction in the financial ability of the government to meet people-oriented programmes, including funding of peace initiative in the crisis proned Niger Delta region.

Though it is difficult to ascertain the total number of barrels of oil stolen in the Niger Delta to neighbouring countries like Benin Republic and other African countries (Ghana, Togo, Cameroun, Chad, Niger etc) attempt has been made to give a little detail. For instance, James Ibori, the former Governor of Delta State maintained that about 300,000 barrels of Nigerian crude oil have been stolen each day. Frank Efeduma, Shell's External Relations Manager in the Western Niger Delta estimated oil theft at around 70,000 to 100,000 barrels per day in the Western region of Shell Nigeria's operations in the Niger Delta. He also estimated 150,000 barrels per day to be the stolen product from the Niger Delta, most of these barrels are smuggled to unscrupulous refineries outside Nigeria by international syndicates. In March 2004, the Federal Government of Nigeria declared that 10 to 15 percent of Nigeria's two million barrels of crude oil output, produced in 2003, were siphoned off illegally by bunkering gangs for sale overseas. In 2005, the Federal Government also estimated that about 300,000 barrels of Nigerian crude oil is illegally bunkered (freighted) out of the country each day. This estimate represents a loss of about US$8.5 million per day. During that period, the average price of crude oil had gone up from US$31 per barrel (2003) to US$41 per barrel (2004); bringing the total value of stolen oil in 2004 to $4.49 billion (Davis, 2008).

Similarly, the estimated value of stolen oil and shut-in production between January 2000 and September, 2008 in Nigeria required further detail. In January 2000, Nigeria lost 140,000 barrels of oil per day; while 72,417 barrels of oil per day was lost in 2001. In 2002, Nigeria lost 699,763 while in 2003 the quantity stolen decreased to 300,000 per day. Similarly, in 2004, Nigeria lost 300,000 barrels of oil per day while in 2005, the lost decreased to 250,000 per day. Again, in 2006, Nigeria lost 100,000 barrels of oil per day, and maintained the same 100,000 barrels per day in 2007. Between 1st January to 30th September 2008, Nigeria lost 150,000 barrels of oil per day. (The Policy Brief No. 15 of October 2010).

However, the increase in allocation to 13% for oil producing states in 2002 and increased surveillance over oil facilities could account for the decrease in oil theft between 2002 and 2008. The table 1 below illustrates more.

Table I: Estimated Value of Nigeria's Stolen and Shut-in Oil Production, January 2000September 2008

Year	Average price of bonny light per barrel (in USD)	Volume of oil stolen per day in barrels	Value of oil stolen per annum (in USD)	Volume of oil shut-in per day (in barrels)	Value of oil shut-in per annum (in USD)	Total value of oil stolen or shut-in per annum (in USD)
2000	28.49	140,000	1.5 billion	250,000	2.6 billion	4.1 billion
2001	24.50	724,171	6.5 billion	200,000	1.8 billion	8.3 billion
2002	25.15	699,763	6.5 billion	370,000	3.4 billion	9.9 billion
2003	28.76	300,000	3.2 billion	350,000	3.7 billion	6.9 billion
2004	38.27	300,000	4.2 billion	230,000	3.2 billion	6.4 billion
2005	55.67	250,000	5.1 billion	180,000	3.7 billion	8.8 billion
2006	66.84	100,000	2.4 billion	600,000	14.6 billion	17.0 billion
2007	75.15	100,000	2.7 billion	600,000	16.5 billion	19.2 billion
2008	115.81	150,000	6.3 billion	650,000	27.5 billion	33.8 billion

Source: Judith Burdin, "Blood Oil in the Niger Delta", Special Report 229, United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C., 2009, p. 6.

The above illustration is not derived from any other part of Nigeria, except the Niger Delta region.

According to Davis (2008), "when production in areas such as Jone Creek are shut-in due to conflicts and company staff withdrawn due to the risk to life, illegal bunkerers are free to steal oil without the company knowing how much is stolen" (p.6). Nigerian government cannot relax and allow its economy to collapse as a result of illegal bunkering. Thus, between January and July 2003, not less than 4 ships and a number of persons including 10 foreigners (Senegalese, Burkinabes, Togolese, Ivorians and Beninoise) were arrested for oil smuggling (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Also, 33 persons including 5 Ghanaians were arrested while boarding 2 ships carrying 10,000 tons of illegally bunkered Nigerian crude in March 2004. More recent cases of arrest of illegal oil bunkers include 14 Filipinos in July 2008, 6 Ghanaians in October 2009 (Ojakoroto, 2008). The surprising aspect of these arrests was that, they were made off the coast of the Niger Delta (Facados Rivers, Escravos, Benin River, Dodo River) and Lagos offshore base; while few took place on the high seas.

These arrests suggest that the major route for the illegal oil trade is Seme border. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had to order for the closure of Nigeria-Benin borders on 9th August, 2003; and asked his counterpart, President Matthew Kerekou to come to terms with him, before the borders could be reopened. The response of the Beninoise authorities to the closure of the border was prompt. A delegation of the two countries spent three days to work out details on modalities of controlling cross-border crime, which finally resulted in signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries. "President Matthew Kerekou later pledged to cooperate more actively with the Nigerian authorities" (Adetula, 2008, p.71).

Consequences of Seme Border Closure

Since the re-introduction of protectionist policy in Nigeria on 20th August, 2019 as manifested in land border closure, total ban on selected stable food (rice in particular) as well as non-issuance of foreign exchange on 41 prohibited items by the Central Bank of Nigeria, there has been mixed feelings from Nigerians, as well as foreign partners. Singh (2020) maintained that, the ban on foreign rice has enabled the local farmers to increase their production as well as sale of local rice.

Local rice such as Onyx Rice and Quarra Rice "has recorded huge patronage and high profit from local processing and milling companies. This positive and remarkable achievement was as a result of border closure which prevented smuggling and import of rice and Agro Allied Chemical and other agricultural tools and inputs" (Singh, 2020, p.232). In the same vein, Ani, Baajon, and Samuila (2020) argued that, "despite the fact that, Nigeria has 13,000 hectares (30,000 acres) of cultivable land, only 4500 hectares are being used for cultivation of rice…"(p.7). The sector is not profitable in the face of competition from Asian rice, but since the border closure, locally-milled rice has started selling and the entire rice value chain has been positively impacted by the closure" (Ani, Baajon&Samuila, 2020, p.28). Nigerian government sees the protectionist policy as the best option that could rescue the nation from stagnant growth and general underdevelopment. Hameed Ali, the Comptroller General of Nigerian Customs Service maintained that, "the closure of Nigeria's borders was undertaken to strengthen the nation's security and protect its economic interests…closure would stem the influx of smuggled goods, especially rice and tomatoes into the country; insisting that the closure has significantly increased revenue from import duties" (cited in Enehikhere, 2019, p.1). In the same vein, the former Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (2019), said that, the decision to close border is part of the measure to preserve foreign policy in the national interest. Sanusi (2019) further argued that, "we cannot allow our neighbours to open their doors to this unfair competition and through the back door undermine our industry" (cited in Enehikhere, 2019, p.2).

Though, the closure of Seme border and the subsequent ban on the imported rice into Nigeria could be seen as good policy on the part of government and rice farmers, regrettably, ordinary Nigerians have a bad story to tell the public. Liedong (2019) posited:

> while Nigerian rice farmers are happy about their government's action, there are concerns about whether domestic food production can meet domestic demand. In 2017, demand for rice in Nigeria reached 6.7 million tons, almost double the 3.7 million tons produced drastically. Since the border closure, the price of 50 kilogram of rice has increased from 9,000 Naira ($24) to 22,000 Naira ($61). This is good for the farmers, but it is hurting consumers (p.2).

Lamenting on the high cost of food items in Nigeria, due to Seme border's closure, Bovillon (2019) hinted that in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, that has about 3 million inhabitants, the price of rice has increased by 9%. According to Bovillon (2019), "…the price of one (1) bag of 50kg of rice has skyrocketed from less than ten thousand Naira (N10,000) to twenty thousand Naira (N20,000) roughly more than the entire monthly salary of a Nigerian who receives the minimum wage of eighteen thousand Naira (N18,000)"(p.233).

Indeed, the Seme border's closure has also led to inflation in Nigeria. Singh (2020) confirmed that, "…the general inflation especially on food stuff was recorded to be increased to 13.51% following the land border's closure, through which majority of the food stuff, items and grains were being imported to Nigeria via Niger and Benin Republic" (p.233). Similarly, Rasheed (2020) cited in Ani, Baajon, and Samuila (2020) reported that, "traders in Lagos Island, a vast market of made in China textiles and gadgets, say the closure of the borders has crimped supplies via Benin's Cotonous. Because of the situation, the annual inflation rate has edged up to 11.24 percent, while inflation ran at 13.51 percent in September, 2017" (p.28).

Extensively President Buhari protectionist policy has affected Nigeria's immediate neighbours as well as her trading partners in Africa. Benin Republic is worse hit than any other neighbour. Nigeria and Benin Republic have had a long economic history.

According to Essessinou, Degla and Hounsa (2020), "southern states…in Nigeria benefit from Benin-Nigeria's cross-border mobility dynamics…the market of Dantopa and Ouando in the heart of the two major cities of Benin: Cotonous and Porto-Novo, serve as a platform for economic exchange between Benin and…southern states of Nigeria" (p.78).

It is important to note that, the Benin Republic is a small country that has population of about 12 million people, but bound with neighbours like Nigeria with a population of about 200 million people, Togo with a population of about 7.8 million, as well as Burkina Faso, with a population of about 19.1 million people (World Bank, 2017, cited in Oguntoye, 2020). Oguntoye (2020) further added that, despite the small population, "data from the Thailand Rice Export Association shows that Benin has been the largest importer of rice from Thailand for sometimes now…Benin imports more rice from Thailand… than even the most populous country in the world, China" (p.1). The truth is that Benin Republic does not have the required population that can consume this quantity of rice. Singh (2020) explained further that:

> Benin Republic has a population of 12 million people only but Benin Republic is the 5th importer of Rice in the world. That in 2018 alone, Benin Republic imported rice worth $996 million U.S. Dollars, whereby 98.2% of these imported rice by Benin are then exported to Nigeria from Benin Republic without payment of custom duty, tax and so on, rather through smuggling via porous border (p.230).

In the same vein, Ani, Baajon and Samuila (2020) hinted that, "Benin strategy centred on being "entreport state" i.e serving as a trading hub, importing goods and re-exporting them legally, but most often illegally to Nigeria…" (p.29), this is economic sabotage indeed, therefore, there is no country that hopes to grow can open border to this type of neighbour. The closure of the land border with Benin has negative effects on the border communities such as Mandecali, Segbana, Neganzi, Basso, Waria, Adekambi, Pobe, Porto Novo among others.Ghins and Heinrings (2020) hinted that, "the sudden shut down has caused thousands of small holders farmers to lose their produce and default on credit" (p.1). It is worthy to note that aside from formal importation of petroleum product from Nigeria, Benin Republic also imports poultry, rice and vegetable oil that could be valued at $100 million US Dollars from Nigeria.

The Beninoise that depends on trade with Nigeria cannot be silent and allow their economic lives to ruin. Okon (2019) reported that the Beninoise have called for the resignation of their President, Talon. "Thousands of women and youths allegedly gathered in Cotonou to register their frustration and displeasure with the government shouting "Talon, you must go" (Okon 2019, p.3). Responding to this call, President Talon of Benin Republic met Nigerian President, Mohammadu Buhari, during the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama, Japan and pleaded with his Nigeria's counterpart to open the land border, so as to save his people from suffering. Nigerian President, Buhari promised to look into it. Similarly, the Director General of Benin's Custom Administration, Moussa SacaBoco, met with the Comptroller General of Nigerian Custom Services, Hameed Ali, on 9th October 2019 and demanded for the re-opening of Nigeria-Benin land border. Ali did not give him any assurance. Okon (2019) also reported that the Beninoise Minister of State for Planning and Development, Abdoulaye Bio Tchane, expressed fear that, "if allowed to linger, the closure could reduce Benin's tax revenue and impact on its expected economic growth for 2019 and forecast for subsequent years" (p.4).

Furthermore, President Muhammed Buhari's protectionist policy has also affected Ghana negatively. Ghanaian businessmen are the major trading partners in Nigeria. Ani, Baajon and Samuila (2020) maintained that, "Ghana depends on the Abidjan-Lagos Highway for overland access to markets in West Africa, which was closed due to the Nigeria-Benin border closure" (p.31). Their businessmen are unable to access Nigerian markets due to the closure of the land border. They decided to petition Ghanaian Government through their union; Ghana Union of Traders' Association (GUTA). Regrettably, the Ghanaian government cannot force its Nigerian counterpart to re-open the land border. John Mahama (2019), the former President of Ghana condemned Nigeria's action and stated clearly that:

> closing your border is the simplest thing to do, any country can say I'm closing my border to imports from any neighbour, but it doesn't help to build the kind of integration we are trying to build in West Africa…He also expresses the fear that by the time the borders are re-opened, some businesses that rely on each other's export may have collapsed (cited in Enehikhuere, 2019, p.3)

It was as a result of losses, due to their inability to access Nigerian market, that the President of Ghana Union of Traders' Association (GUTA), Joseph Obeng declared that, "if Nigerian authorities are saying Nigeria first, Ghana authorities should also say Ghana first" (cited in Ayeni, 2020, p.2). Immediately, this statement was made, Ghana Union of Traders' Association invaded Nigerian shops and shut down almost 70 businesses belonging to Nigerians. Ogunwusi, Nzeako and Utulu (2019) explained further, "Ghanaians claim foreign retailers (referring to Nigerians) violated section 27 of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) Act 865, which stipulates that, "the sale of goods or provision of services in a market, petty trading or hawking or selling of goods in a stall at any place must be reserved only for Ghanaian citizens" (p.3). On 19th June, 2020, armed Ghanaians violated the Nigeria High Commission in Accra, Ghana. They looted all what they could see and finally demolished the building. All this annoyance emanated from the Seme border's closure.

Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister, Geoffrey Onyeme described the vandalism as "outrageous and criminal." In the same vein, the former Ghanaian President, Mahama condemned the attacks, and further said that, "it beat my imagination how a violent and noisy destruction could occur without our security agents picking up the signals to avert the damage" (cited in Ayeni, 2020, p.2).

The ugly aspect of this protectionist policy is the fact that, Nigeria is a respected member of Economic Community of West African States, as well as African Union. Nigeria has multilateral engagements with these international organizations; therefore, commitment to its principles is a point that Nigeria cannot toy with. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on 28th May, 1975 with a purpose of promoting sub regional economic integration. The Revised Treaty of ECOWAS, which was signed by member states on 24th July, 1993 aims at liberalizing trade as well as removing tariff and non-tariff barriers in the West African sub region. Indeed, the essence was to create an economic community. Regrettably, Nigeriangovernment through ill advice from Hameed Ali, the Comptroller General of Customs Service decided to ignore ECOWAS Treaty and imposed trade barrier by closing land borders with neighbouring countries. Ogunwusi, Nzeako and Utulu (2019) decried that, "Nigeria's recent border closure is…inconsistent with, its 44 yearlong commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – West Africa's regional economic community which Nigeria spearheaded in 1975…"(p.3).

In the same vein, Ryan (2019) decried that, "the border closure is inconsistent with Nigeria's multilateral commitments, including ECOWAS and the AFCFTA, and is a major disruption to Nigeria and the entire region" (cited in Unah, 2019, p.1). It should also be recalled that on 7th July 2019 Nigeria formally signed African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) as a member.

Ogunwusi, Nzeako and Utulu (2019) posited that, "the AFCFTA is expected to boost intra-Africa trade, given its potential of bringing over 1.2 billion people together into the same market." (p.5).

African Development Bank (AFDB) also stated that, "the AFCFTA will stimulate intra-African trade by up to 35 billion per year, creating a 52 percent increase in trade by 2022 and a vital 10 billion decrease in import from outside Africa (cited in Ogunwusi, Nzeako and Utula, 2019, p.5).

Despite all these economic benefits which the AFCFTA would bring to the entire African Continent, Nigerian government decided to jettison it completely. As Liedong (2019) put it, "in August, just three months after celebrating its signing the AFCFTA, Nigeria slapped ban on the movement of all goods from countries with which it shares a land border…"(p.1).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The promoters of mercantilist thinking (Ravenhill, 2008, Baylis& Smith, 2001) focused their argument on the success stories of the East Asians, especially Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. They maintained that, in Japan, for example, "the Japanese state has played a very comprehensive role in the economic development of that country. The state has singled out strategic industries, protected them from outside competition and supported their development even by regulating the competition between firms" (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007, p.183). Again, contrary to the popular opinion that Japan adopted inward – looking policy at the early stage of their economic growth, the truth is that, Japan also demanded foreign assistance. Allen (1980) rightly said that, "at the time, the Japanese had little experience of the conduct of foreign trade…the creation of trading relationship with the outside world was largely a task…western mercantile banking and shopping enterprise predominated in the first few decade…"(p.19). Gareffi (1993) equally confirmed that, "foreign companies were authorized by the state to enter certain segments of domestic markets, where local capital was relatively weak or absent" (p.416).

Regrettably, policy makers in Africa are bad learners. They do not follow the steps taken by others, before jumping into policy adoption. Imagine poor nation like Sudan closing its border with Libya and Central African Republic, Kenya adopting same policy with its neighbour; Somalia, even Rwanda (a war ravaged state) doing same to Republic of Congo under pretext of stopping Ebola outbreak. Again, Ghana enacted"2013 Ghana Investment Promotion Centre Act" (GIPCA). "The Act designates certain enterprises for its citizens…foreigners wanting to set up shops in Ghana must have a minimum equity capital of $10,000, that alone limits the number of foreigners – particular from the poorer surrounding West African countries – who can successfully work in Ghana" (Ayeni, 2020, P.3). The question that begs for answer is: how would African countries develop in the present global economy in view of their insistence on protectionism?

Nigeria had traded this path in the time past but met failure. Regrettably, President Muhammadu Buhari is not a good student of history. Nigeria adopted Import Substitution Industrialization Strategy in 1960, as well as Export Promotion Strategy in 1986, which were products of protectionism; yet the economy could not grow beyond paper work. Due to protectionism, Roberts and Azubuike (2005) decried that, Nigeria's industrial policy and strategy …consisted of an improvised amalgam of ad hoc objectives and instruments, intended to influence the behaviour of firms and other stakeholders" (p.3). The fact is that, the silent prerequisites that require for effective take-off of industrialization such as; transportation, water supply, electricity supply and telecommunication are still lacking. Ekpo (2014) posited that, "following long period of neglect, most infrastructure facilities in Nigeria are in deplorable state…roads are in different stages of disrepair while the rail system has collapsed. Added to…inadequate and erratic power supply in the country which is inimical to industrial development." (p.10).

This is the basic reason the paper suggests that Nigerian government should secure interest free loan to the local manufacturers. The interest-free loan would enable them to pay for those essential services (electricity and water) which government has failed to provide and compete effectively with their foreign counterpart without necessarily banning foreign products in Nigerian market, nor closing border with neighbouring states. Banning foreign products could lead to inflation as the nation has witnessed. According to International, Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast on Nigeria "the inflation rate should be 11.3% in 2019 and 11.7% in 2020; but due to the border closure situation, inflation could increase further in percentage point of 0.82 in December 2019" (p.79). In the same vein, Guarino (2019) lamented that, "domestic firms may also be hurt financially, since they may have to purchase parts to make their products and then pass the increased cost on the consumer. Overall, global competition is a key factor in keeping the price of numerous goods and products down and give consumers the ability to spend" (p.3). The interest free loan to local manufacturers would force the price of the goods down and increase local productivity. Eventhough Hameed Ali, the Nigerian Comptroller General of Customs Services had said that the land border closure has no "time limit…it will continue as long as we can get the desired result" (cited in Unah, 2019, p.3).

Furthermore, Nigeria needs international cooperation not isolation. The present world is global in nature, thus, no nation is an Island. Nigeria has been a founding member of Economic Community of West African States since 1975 as well as a signatory to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement in 2021.Regrettably; the present government of President Mohammed cannot be trusted.

It approbates and re-approbate at the same time. "The closure of the Nigeria's border goes against the spirit and the letter of AFCFTA" (Ayeni, 2020, p.2). Ogunwusi, Nzeako and Utulu (2019),therefore, advised that, the Nigerian government…urged to consider its stand since it admitted that the prevalence of smuggling has been mostly as a result of corrupt Nigerian Custom

Service…Nigeria should pull out of AFCFTA before her actions and inactions immobilize the collective efforts of other African countries" (p.8). The truth is that Nigeria needs international assistance for it to sustain growth and development. The policy of protectionism should stop immediately. It is an outdated idea, which cannot work, in the modern economy. Again, if smuggling is the major factor that triggered protectionism in Nigeria, the paper suggests that Nigeria and her immediate neighbours (Benin Republic, Niger, Chad and Cameroun) can form Joint

Border Guard. The former President of Ghana, John Mahama also "…lauded the creation of joint security taskforce on the borders of Nigeria, but warned that the continued delay is harming the economy of the West African region" (Enehikhuene, 2019, p.2). The western countries can assist in training the border security outfit and providing them with the necessary technology that would assist them to deliver. David Paradang, the former Comptroller General of Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) had revealed that, "although the country has only 84 approved land border control posts, there are also more than 1,400 illegal borders in the country" (Enehikhuere, 2019, p.1). A porous border of this kind is difficult to police without the help of international community with a sophisticated technology. Luckily, Unah (2019) had hinted that, "Nigeria is also moving away from a heavy reliance on physical monitoring of entry point. In late April, the government approved N52 billion for electronic monitoring of 86 border posts and over 1,400 illegal routes to tackle smuggling and criminality" (p.3). This is the way to go, not the closure of land border as currently implemented. Foreign partners should key into this direction by providing training and technology to the proposed "Joint Border Guard." Nigeria cannot afford to continue with a policy that isolates it from the comity of nations. As Isaa (2009) had warned that, "to reject globalization would be an expensive error… the costs would be even higher – destroying opportunity for billions in developing nations and undermining global political cooperation" (p.34).

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