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The Nigerian State and Cultural Diplomacy: Conscious Efforts or Knee Jerk Reactions?

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Abstract

In a world torn apart by war, insurgency, corruption, hatred, and leadership crises, no one will doubt the relevance of culture, diplomacy and leadership in the struggles of individuals and nations to attain peace and enduring development. More specifically, no Nigerian who has witnessed the gradual collapse of values and accent into abject poverty and anarchy will doubt the need to look deeper into the relevance of cultural diplomacy as a tool for interpersonal, communal, national and international understanding. This paper therefore, takes a look at what cultural diplomacy and good leadership mean and how they are employed by other nations such as the US, Germany, France and a few others. This is done in a bid to compare how these nations manage and employ cultural diplomacy with what obtains in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper examines various attempts by cultural diplomats at defining this concept as well as the uses to which it has been put. It also highlights the successes of cultural diplomacy as well as the effects of its neglect by some nations on their acceptability by other nations. It submits that successive Nigerian governments have only paid lip service to the concept at the detriment of national development and that for Nigeria to benefit from cultural diplomacy, its leaders must pay more than lip service to this very important tool by jettisoning their corrupt practices for truly patriotic ones, without which the nation cannot be taken seriously in international circles.

Introduction

Based on the belief that discussants of any issue must begin by having a good grasp of what they are talking about for ease of communication and understanding of positions, it is important that we aggregate opinions on what cultural diplomacy is and clear all doubts about the meaning of this concept. This is because as simple as the concepts 'culture' and

'diplomacy' may seem to many people, scholars are still divided on what these concepts mean specifically. The fusion of these words as a tool of communication further creates more problems for scholars and practitioners concerned with culture and diplomacy.

Several scholars have proved the centrality of society in defining man. However, both

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the creationist and evolutionist theorists of human existence are, at the end, agreed that man is in constant state of development as evident in various cultural, scientific and technological advancements of man. My point is that both the evolutionist and the creationist agree that the being called man is ever growing in knowledge of his environment and of himself and, by extension, that either as a created or evolved being was at a lower level of consciousness when he arrived on this planet and that over millennia, he has grown mentally, spiritually, psychologically and he is still growing. However, this position does not totally align with Edmund Burke's who Raymond Williams (1960) quotes as saying that:

. . . man as an individual left to himself is wicked; all human virtues is the creation of society, and is in this sense not 'natural' but 'artificial'; art is man's nature. The embodiment and guarantee of the proper humanity of man is the historical community.

However, we can borrow from Burke that society is not only central but is the core of man's entire claim to civilisation and growth. This brings us to another problematic of the connection between society and culture; what do 'society' and 'culture' mean? Society can be defined simply as 'common doing'. Defined more comprehensively, society is a group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interests, participation in characteristics, relationships, shared institutions and a common culture.

It may, therefore, be necessary to define culture before proceeding to establish the inseparability of the concepts; society,

government and diplomacy. Therefore, let us attempt to define culture, which is a rather difficult concept to define. In doing this, we do not need to go the way of Kroeber and Kluckhohn who, in their *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definition* collected 168 definitions and divided them into six types with each emphasising a certain aspect in the different definitions. Instead, let us examine the concept within society and individuals who belong to different disciplines. This is because the concept, 'culture' has been defined variously by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, artists among others with each one of them basing his/her definition within specific occupational optic. For instance, the definition of culture by the Marxist-Leninist cannot ignore material and historical considerations and the effects of these on politico-economic development of a given society at a point in its history. The point being made here is that as a technical term that emerged in the writings of anthropologists in the mid-19th century (Ajayi, 2005), culture is a broad concept whose definition reflects the field of everyone that attempts to define it. According to Ajayi, one of the earliest anthropologists to define the concept was Edward Burnett Taylor who says that, "Culture or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Recognising the importance of culture to man, and since culture is a thing created by man to set him apart from lower animals, the

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United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2002 defined culture as; "a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition to art and literature, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs". We must observe here that there seems to be no fundamental difference in the various definitions of culture as all the definitions echo the fact that:

- (a) culture is a creation of man
- (b) culture sets man apart from lower animals
- (c) societies are distinguished by their culture
- (d) culture allows us to know the developmental stage of a given society in history, and
- (e) culture is material and spiritual or non-material.

While there are various definitions of culture, we shall accept Kolker's (2006:6-7) definition of culture for our discussion. Kolker defines culture as:

The sum total of the intricate ways we relate to ourselves, our peers, our community, our country, world, and universe. It is made up of the minutiae of our daily lives; from the toothpaste we use, and the fact we use toothpaste at all, to the music we like; the political ideas we hold; our gender; the image we have of ourselves; the models we want to emulate. Culture is more than ourselves because our selves are formed by a variety of influences and agreements. So, culture is also made up of the general ideological components, the web of beliefs and things we take for granted in the society we live in; politics, law, religion, art, entertainment are

all part of our culture. They form its ideological engine, the forces of assent, the values, images, and ideas we agree to embrace and follow or struggle against.

This definition has brought together all the concepts; government or the way societies have chosen to organise themselves, their ideological positions as well as their hopes and aspirations. It provides a logical explanation for the importance of people with varied cultures to work together to create and nurture a national culture which, in turn, would be projected to the world. For a better understanding of the discourse, we shall proceed to a definition of diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. Since the beginning of civilisation, man has been attempting to balance the forces of war and peace. Since most people agree that peace, rather than war, promotes development, there is a need for nations, just like individuals, to fashion out ways to maintain peace while still preserving their sovereignties. Simply put therefore, Arndt (2011) defines diplomacy as "the attempt by nation-states, similar to individuals but very different in detail, to apprehend and where possible shape the natural ongoing flow of these relations so as to minimise misunderstanding and maximise national interests".

Ade Adefuye, (1993) a former Nigerian diplomat and ambassador to the United State of America notes that,

The distinction between "us" and "them" is largely a matter of culture. Culture is acquired. It is *largely* learned through the medium of language over a period of time. It is not inherited nor is it acquired by instinct. The fact that culture has to be learnt or acquired is important in understanding why

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people behave and react to events the way they do. After the process of learning, culture becomes an integral part of the daily lives of individuals. (1)

From the above, we come to the understanding that diplomacy recognises that societies and nations are prone, to misunderstanding and strife. Therefore, to relate in an atmosphere of peace and mutual benefit to one another, nations create alliances, friendships and opportunities to relate at different levels; political, economic, cultural, technological and many more. These alliances and friendships between nations are referred to as diplomacy. Akadiri (2003:8), defined diplomacy as, 'A conduct and management of relations between sovereign states, in accordance with established rules and usages, with a view to obtaining maximum advantage for the diplomat's own state, and with minimum friction or resistance'.

In all of the above, we note albeit subtly, that power is central to diplomacy. This is because every sovereign state recognises the need to preserve itself in the global community and for this reason, nations seek out other nations with whom they can collaborate to either preserve their sovereignty or infringe on the sovereignty of others for expansionist and other reasons:

... in more recent times and within recorded history, all leading historians of the Greek world have demonstrated exhaustively that the need to consolidate communal power, either defensively in the face of imminent danger from superior adversaries or offensively for purposes of territorial aggrandisement, has invariably induced human societies to seek "diplomatic" dialogue with potential allies (Akadiri, 12).

At no time, therefore, has the world been in need of diplomatic ties than in this age of globalisation, and age where the world has become a global village and where no nation can claim to have it all. For this reason, and since the end of the World War II, nations have been seeking ways to avert conflict by resorting to diplomatic ties to build alliances and cultural integration and understanding. To achieve this, nations realised that an understanding of one another's culture will foster friendship first, between citizens of sovereign states and secondly, between governments. Simon Mark (2009) quotes Cummings as defining cultural diplomacy as,

... the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding' which 'can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or "telling its story" to the rest of the world (9).

Nigerian Culture and Cultural Diplomacy

What, then, is the Nigerian culture that the cultural diplomat is expected to promote? Who is responsible for the creation of this culture? What is the state of this culture? What are the expected outcomes of promoting this culture and why promote it, in the first place? What is the role of language in cultural diplomacy, and why are nations learning the languages of one another? Since we have established the fact that culture is a product of society and that it embodies the total way of life of a people, it follows that the Nigerian culture can only be understood through all

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the constituents and communicative tools of culture namely, language, art, music, dress codes, films, literary productions, religious observances, rites of passage, and many more. We must note that all the vehicles through which a peoples' culture can be apprehended are not necessarily codified in one particular place; they are scattered and can only be glimpsed in several of the things done by the people that distinguish them from others. Despite the fact that Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nation, certain threads run through these disparate people to create a distinctly Nigerian culture. So, when one talks about the Nigerian culture, it is important to distinguish this from the sub-culture of the country such as the Yoruba culture, the Hausa-Fulani culture, the Igbo culture, the Kalahari culture, the Tiv culture and so on. The Nigerian culture is an aggregation of all the sub-cultures of Nigeria that reflects an aspect(s) of any or a blend of the sub-cultures of the country and which is recognisable by Nigerians as belonging to them collectively despite its sub-cultural source. As Kafewo (2005) aptly notes,

Understanding Nigeria should take us to our traditional societies and a deep look into the numerous festivals and ritual performances. The festivals and rituals, as the greatest artistic institutions, have a strong religious base. Most of the festivals are attached to a 'supernatural being or deified ancestors'. Also, certain incomprehensible societal phenomena are explained, e.g., the seasons, rainfall, harmattan, etc. rituals are evolved to explain them and their regulation.

The quote above reveals some of the core ingredients/constituents of the Nigerian culture such as religion, ritual observances,

festivals and artistic productions including literature and film. For this reason, to invest in these artistic and cultural products for the purpose of selling them to the world or to a particular country in order to make promote the positive image of the country is known as cultural diplomacy; the use of culture and cultural products by nations to promote their foreign policies. Therefore, for us to speak of Nigeria's cultural diplomacy is to say that the Nigerian government consciously engages in the production and promotion of certain aspects of its culture to achieve a given goal. We shall come to take a closer look at whether the Nigerian nation consciously does this or not.

Why Invest in Cultural Diplomacy?

Cultural diplomacy, as a tool of international cooperation and understanding, is seen by some scholars and diplomats as an appendage of public diplomacy/or international relations. As a powerful tool of projecting a nation's culture to other nations, its practice and impact on individual and national consciousness go back to the origin of human societies. All through human civilisation, nations have been interested in not just projecting their cultures to other cultures but also in imposing their cultures on other cultures that they see either as inferior or as economically, socially and culturally beneficial to them. The superiority-inferiority position of one culture over the other has led to wars and genocides. Ardnt Richard (2011) traces the history of cultural diplomacy to the Egyptian Pharaoh, Akhnaton. What began in Egypt, however, was mastered by the Greeks and Romans after them. The USA remains

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today a leading force in the effective use of cultural diplomacy as a tool for building international peace and understanding. Arndt's submission on the power of cultural diplomacy is instructive:

Certainly neither the Yanks, nor even the French, invented the diplomacy of cultures. Humankind has done it for four millennia, and probably much longer. The Greeks were masters at it, as the great Library in Alexandria shows; the Romans had impressive public libraries as well, as did the Islamic empire. In the days when overwhelming military force was not easy to husband, and surely no less costly than today in relative terms, humankind sought other means first for building the kind of intellectual relations which permitted flourishing trade, commerce and exchanges of art and learning. The endurance of the Hellenistic world is a case study of cultural tools coming first, with the military stepping in to help the police when peace was threatened (13).

In a sense, therefore, in an age of globalisation where competition is stiff and nations are seeking peace, economic growth, political advantage and cultural relevance among others, cultural diplomacy becomes a potent tool. In fact, the realisations of countries like the USA, Britain, France, Germany, and the Asian Tigers that the use of "soft power"- as Joseph Nye (2003) calls it - instead of "hard or military power" to win people and nations to their countries made these countries to invest massively in cultural diplomacy. As the Afghan Minister of Higher Education says in 2002 to a US audience at a conference on Rebuilding Afghanistan, "If you really want to foster democracy and fight terrorism, send us 25,000 English teachers and rebuild our universities".

Sadly, the US which is the most powerful nation in the world today, learned only after 9/11 that just as it is loved by many so is it also hated by many too, and with a passion. The reason why America is now seen as an enemy of some countries, especially some Islamic countries is because the nation that was built on freedom of every wo/man has become, over time, overbearing because of its military and technological might. While this country invested in cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, it did not only cut down funding for cultural diplomacy to its cultural agency that was responsible for promoting its culture abroad, the USIA, which was founded in 1953 but closed it down a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Sofia Kitsou (2013) noted, "negative perception of a people or nation is better managed through cultural diplomacy". To support this position, Schneider (2006) quoted Walter Laqueur as saying of the neglect of cultural diplomacy by the USA that:

Nor can it seriously be argued - as some have - that these tools of US foreign policy are no longer needed now that the Cold War is over and America no longer faces major threats..., far from being on the verge of a new order, the world has entered a period of great disorder. In facing these new dangers, a re-examination of old priorities is needed. **Cultural diplomacy, in the widest sense, has increased in importance, whereas traditional diplomacy and military power — are of limited use in coping with most of these dangers.**

From the foregoing, it is interesting to note that America, a country that once led the world in the art and politics of cultural diplomacy is now working assiduously to

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follow the examples of Britain, France, Germany and most recently, China by re-inventing their cultural agencies all over the world to rebrand and launder America's image internationally. Where hard power has failed, soft power is sought. This is not the first time in human history that military power will bow to intellectual and cultural power; it happened in Greece where the Romans defeated Greece militarily while the Greeks defeated the Romans culturally and intellectually as evident in Rome's adoption of the Greek intellectual, technological and religious views. Today, as Philip Coppens noted, most of what we know of European culture and civilisation which is traceable to Greece, has its roots in Greece. These roots, we must add, are firmly earthed in Egypt. Among other facts supported by Egyptologists to counter various anomalous positions of Western historians who are seeking means to deny Egyptian source of Greek, and by extension European civilisation, Coppens writes that,

Though many will look towards the story of Atlantis and its Egyptian source, it is actually Plato's philosophy that is the best example of this anomaly. Plato stated that many souls of the deceased reincarnated, both in animals and humans. This concept was unknown in Greece, where it was believed that death signalled the end; only an "underworld" lay behind the veil of death. It were the Egyptians who believed that death was only a passing, the soul continuing to exist beyond that event.

He goes further:

The same veil of ignorance is maintained when it comes to philosophy. Both Plato and Pythagoras, identified as icons of Greek philosophy, stated that they and other Greek

philosophers had studied and learned that knowledge in Egypt. Many had studied many years at Egyptian schools, to return to Greece as the "first philosophers". Greek myths take the evidence further. They clearly state that the first "Greeks" were Egyptians, who had colonised the Greek isles and mainland. Diodorus Siculus wrote that Kekrops originated from Egypt and founded Athens as a colony of the *Egyptian* town of Sais. The goddess Athena was in truth the Egyptian Neith, matron of the city of Sais.

The above reveals the power of culture on societies for while Greece eventually can be said to have conquered Egypt militarily, the latter conquered Greece culturally just as the Romans later bowed to the superior culture of Greece when they conquered it. At this juncture, it is important to examine Nigeria's cultural diplomacy and its place in the 21st century.

Nigeria and the Crises of Culture and Integrity

Like most African nations, Nigeria came into existence through the balkanisation of Africa by her numerous colonial masters. Based on this, the country has been battling with problems of identity. A country with over 250 ethnic nationalities, with each nationality trying to assert its cultural supremacy over the others, it has become necessary for successive governments to seek ways to create a brand, a culture that could distinctly be called "the Nigerian culture". Fifty-four years after independence, Nigerians are still asking some of the questions asked by their founding fathers:

- (1) Is there a Nigerian culture?
- (2) Is this culture deserving of being

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- called a 'brand'?
- (3) What are the components of this culture or brand?
 - (4) Are Nigerian leaders, past and present conscious of the Nigerian brand?
 - (5) Have they done enough to promote this brand?
 - (6) Are Nigerian leaders aware of the place of cultural diplomacy in the projection of the Nigerian brand?

While this is not a place to respond to all the questions posed above, suffice it to say that it is important to understand when Nigeria recognised the need to promote her culture and how. Ben-Iheanacho (2011) reveals that:

State recognition and deliberate utilisation of the numerous cultural activities of the diverse ethnic groups of Nigeria as a tool for social engineering dates back to the post civil war reconciliation efforts of the General Yakubu Gowon administration which hosted the all Nigerian Festival of Arts in 1970 as a unification/reintegration project. However, the platform of the people's cultural expression as a vehicle for attracting foreign tourists and as an instrument for cultural diplomacy was elevated through the Second World Blacks and African Festivals of Arts & Culture (FESTAC) which held in 1977 during the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration.

Despite the above, successive governments did not leverage on previous efforts by Generals Yakubu Gowon and Olusegun Obasanjo to deliberately invest in cultural diplomacy as a tool for international recognition and economic gain through tourism and importation of Nigeria's rich and

diverse cultural heritage. Some scholars like Ben-Iheanacho have noted that successive Nigerian governments did not see the economic and political potentials of investing in cultural diplomacy. In fact, the ministry of culture, until recently, was subsumed under information. However, she also noted that after many years of the neglect of the culture sector and over-reliance on oil as a source of revenue:

The Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) hit the right chord when it classified attention to the culture and tourism section among the six priority areas of focus, was driven by a commitment to diversify Nigeria's economic base with projected cultural tourism activities as alternative to the exhaustible, oil-dominated economy.

Before 1999, however, a Nigerian Cultural Policy was birthed in 1988. Olu Obafemi (2011) observed that despite the birth of the Nigerian Cultural Policy, certain problems exist that militated against the proper implementation of the policy.

A Nigerian Cultural policy, after decades of fiddling from colonial times to nearly two decades of independence, was finally launched in 1998 by the Babangida Military Government. It was, however, never fully or truly implemented, in spite of its obvious blemishes and deficiencies ... as it is usual of Nigerian governments, policies are hardly properly envisioned and thought-through, since they are essentially products of politics or political brinkmanship, rather than a systematic articulation of national needs in any enduring and strategically implementable formats.

Obafemi's position, above, finds credence in the fact that many of the ten parastatals

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that were established with the creation of the 1998 Nigeria's Cultural Policy were never fully funded by government to enable them perform their statutory functions both locally and internationally.

As mentioned earlier that cultural diplomacy is *sine qua non*, a conscious and enduring effort by governments to promote their culture and arts for political, cultural and economic gains, we note that the Nigerian government has not tapped into this as other governments have done. One can then argue that the huge success and international recognition accorded to Nigerian arts and culture, specifically Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry which has grown to become the biggest and most popular in the world is NOT derived from what Obafemi refers to as "systematic articulation of national needs". This observation accounts for the themes and quality of Nollywood films which many, Azeez and Ewenla (2013), Fosudo and Adekoya (2012) and Ejue (2007) criticise so vehemently. This is because film and other art forms is a powerful tool of diplomacy that governments all over the world fund and regulate to achieve national goals. Sofia Kitsou cited above uses the French example to capture it aptly:

For the French, cultural products and services - films, TV programs, books, music, etc. - in addition to offering entertainment, are ideological items that embody social values and messages, and consequently influence the organisation of entire social systems (26-27).

Kolker also adds that:

... film is part of world politics and national policy. Some governments support filmmakers as means to express their national

culture to the world. Other governments have caused international incidents over film, particularly when copyright and piracy issues were at stake. Hard to believe, but sometimes international policy concerning film can lead to aesthetic consequences. After World War II, in 1946, for example, a major agreement was drawn up between France and the United States: the Blum-Brynes Accord. This agreement came as an unequal compromise in the face of France's concern about getting its own films shown on its own screen. The French public wanted American films. The Accords forced France to accept American films in an uneven ration (1).

The above shows a direct and deliberate interest by the governments of France and the United States in film as a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy for while the French saw the need to preserve their culture which they saw as being overrun by American culture though the screening of American films in France, America also had a desire to "Americanise" the French public in a subtle way. This is not the case with Nollywood which is funded by individual filmmakers without any support or interest from the government. While the Nigerian Film Corporation as well as the National Film and Video Censors Board exist, they do not function to ensure that Nigerian films consciously promote the policy of the Nigerian government. What is said of Nigerian film is true of all other art forms produced in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The above reveals the state of affairs in Nigeria with regards to cultural diplomacy. It reveals that as a nation, Nigeria is far from making appropriate investment in its culture

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(materially and ideologically) with a bid to deriving political and economic dividends on such an investment. There is still a need for the nation to properly identify and define what constitutes the Nigerian culture and its relevance in the promotion of its set-goals, both locally and internationally. More often than not, Nigerians are still much cocooned in their ethnic and religious enclaves. Most of them feel safer in their geo-political zones than in any other one despite the number of years that they have spent living in these zones and despite the fact that most of them have no strong affinity socially and politically, with their places of birth. Why this is so after over five decades of our claim to nationhood calls for a deeper study of social, cultural and political history. How can the nation overcome religious and ethnic bigotry and forge ahead as a people despite obvious similarities in languages, dress codes, cuisines and other aspects of culture that ought, naturally, to serve as catalysts for integration? As mentioned earlier, all politics is local before they become internationalised. In the same way, all cultural diplomacy must begin as a conscious effort by a people and their government before becoming good products that could and, indeed, must be exported to other parts of the world. As Olu Obafemi Ajayi, "In Nigeria, with the experience of colonialism, there is a need for a conscious effort of civilisation-retrieval, re-orientation and re-positioning through cultural rebirth and renaissance".

Therefore, the home video, today, is relieved to be the primal tool of cultural diplomacy of Nigeria. Kolker, again, captures it well when he opined that:

The reason that attention must be paid to film is that most of us get our stories-our narratives and myths- from it or from its close cousin, television... And film is part of world politics and national policy. Some governments support filmmakers as a means to express their national culture to the world.

While this is the case with governments that are concerned about national image, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. But, while the power of cultural diplomacy cannot be undermined, it must not also be overrated as we must note that any nation that wants to benefit from the power of cultural diplomacy must have a laudable image in the international community as no amount of cultural diplomacy can sell a bad product. As Mark (2009) notes:

Cultural diplomacy incorporates activities undertaken by, or involving, a "wide range of participants such as artists, singers and so on, but also the manifestations of their artistry (such as a film), the promotion of aspects of the culture of a state (language, for instance), and the exchange of people, such as academics. Activities undertaken within cultural diplomacy's scope manifest an aspect of the culture of the polity the government represents.

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