

Chapter 4

Cultural Diplomacy as a Dimension of Geopolitics

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ABSTRACT

The term “cultural diplomacy” denotes a deliberate effort on the part of a government through its agencies to promote its national interest by projecting its culture to the world. This conception poses a great threat to other cultures, especially in this era of globalization. Through cultural diplomacy, cultures of presupposed lesser countries are swallowed by that of super-rich countries. What is seen as the emerging global culture is actually the culture of the few elitists countries projected on others through cultural diplomacy. This is another dimension of geopolitics, the promotion of cultural hegemony by the people of the Global North. Using philosophical methods of analysis and hermeneutics, the chapter contends that the people of the Global South, especially Africa, should also explore the avenue of cultural diplomacy to retain their identities in this era of globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to establish that cultural diplomacy is actually another dimension of geopolitics. This chapter tries to argue that beyond what is explicitly presented as the focus or goal of cultural diplomacy, that there exist implicit motives which are covert and may not be in the interest of all parties. Cultural diplomacy is an instrument of competitive struggle by elitists’ countries to assert their interest on the rest of the world. It is a geo-political movement. One of the popular definitions of politics was given by Harold Lasswell. For him, politics is all about, who gets what, when and how. Cultural Diplomacy is a subtle way through which countries from the Global North, continues to dominate and dictate for those in the Global South especially Africa. In geopolitics, there is this continuous battle for who gets what, when and how. Countries of the world struggle for better positioning to achieve this. Each has specific and personal interest to protect or gains to make. This chapter argues that what is today known and seen as cultural diplomacy is actually another dimension of geopolitics. It involves a

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situation where countries, especially those from the Global North project and sell their interest to the rest of the world through culture. To a large extent one may refer to it as the act of enforcing cultural hegemony or cultural imperialism.

In this chapter, the paper will mainly focus on the impact of cultural diplomacy on Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria. The concept or idea of cultural diplomacy is multi-disciplinary in nature, but this chapter will approach it from a philosophical perspective. It is obvious that the politics involved in cultural diplomacy is actually dividing Africa as a war spoil. The Asians are already getting it right while Africa continues to play the ostrich. It is interesting to note that Asians have started taking advantage of cultural diplomacy in selling their image to the world. The question is; how is Africa going to turn the tide that is already against her? In recent time, the Euro-American world has succeeded in what this paper will refer to as image propaganda; presenting itself as the modern ideal for almost everything, while African culture is projected to represent the opposite. The challenge for Africa is that the West through cultural diplomacy has impressed their culture so much in the psychic of the average African mind that, Africans are on their own rejecting everything indigenous to them and at the same time, have become agents of promotion to Western values and culture. This has permeated all facets of life ranging from religion, dress code, language, movies, food, marriage, consumption, system of learning and so on. To buttress this point further; on the issue of religion, in most African society especially in Nigeria, African Traditional Religion worshippers are seen as being fetish and magical while followers of Western religion are held in high esteem. This was pointed out by Chimamanda Adichie (2021) in her speech at the Humboldt Forum, where she posed the question; “what could be more magical than the story of a man who dies and magically rises again?” She was trying to make a comparison between Euro-Christian Religion and Traditional African Religion. Her point is, if we can fault African Traditional Religion on the ground that there are certain illogical or magical elements associated with it, the same illogical or magical elements also exist in Euro-Christian Religion. For Adichie, so long as a belief system fills the spiritual need of a people, it is valid. On the aspect of marriage, in some African societies, one is not considered fully married until he or she performs the white wedding, even after performing all Africa traditional rites. In the area of consumption, the average African mind prefers to patronize Euro-American products to local (made in Africa) products. The list is unending, but all these were achieved through cultural diplomacy. This probably might be part of what has inspired the decolonization movement.

In the view of Iver B. Neumann (2018), diplomacy is about communicating with the other and the essence of this communication is to change people’s minds. This boils down to impression management which is a face work. There is this constant cultural propaganda in the form of cultural diplomacy by the people of the Global North to place their values and culture as the paradigm others should follow. The West started with colonization, and currently through the instrumentality of cultural diplomacy they have continued to plunder Africa to their advantage. They currently represent the standard for everything. The idea of International Poverty line, how does it reflect the actual state of an African woman in an African village who may not need to go to the market to buy her food since she has all her needed food in her farm. She goes to her farm every morning to gather enough food to take care of her family. By Western standard, she might be classified as being poor, because she has no earnings, or when the earnings are translated to Dollar does not meet certain specified range. Yet, her daily needs are met through the farm.

This chapter will consider the meaning and nature of cultural diplomacy. Effort will be made to explore the concept *vis a vis* philosophical hermeneutics. This will open up the geopolitics inherent in the concept, the soft power politics and the negative implications of ignoring it. The paper will further argue on how Africa can also explore this avenue of cultural diplomacy to retain her cultural identity.

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