

THE RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE EXECUTION OF TANZANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Tanzania is a united republic, a sovereign nation-state that came to existence in April 1964, following the union between Tanzania Mainland, then known as Tanganyika and Zanzibar. It is worth noting from the outset, however, that Tanzania's nationhood is neither a product of the aforementioned amalgamation, nor the outcome of the nationalist struggles that culminated in the political independence per se, nor the product of the Berlin Conference that partitioned the African continent in the 1880s; rather it is a product of long historical process – one that stretches back thousands of years.

This process involved the cultural, economic, social and political developments and interactions of people and civilizations, ranging from Arabs, Portuguese, Chinese, Persians, Germans and the British. The geographical location of Tanzania prior to encounters with these foreigners would reveal a large number of tribes and varied political units, some of which were complex democratic states, chiefdoms and large centralized kingdoms.¹ Those encounters, which were not always peaceful and consensual, have had a huge impact on the nations that attained political independence in the 1960s. Moreover, historical legacies and the nature of asymmetrical relationships that existed between the colonizers and their subjects, particularly in the realm of cultural interactions, persist to date, whereby the powerful prescribe and the less powerful assimilates, either voluntarily or otherwise.

Towards its independence, Tanzania Mainland had at least 120 tribes. These were mobilized and unified through Kiswahili language that originated in the east African coast and spread into the hinterlands as far as Katanga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the father of the independent Tanzanian nation once remarked: 'in Tanzania it was more than one hundred tribal units, which lost their freedom, it was one nation that regained it.' Kiswahili language, thus served as a tool for general mobilization and unification of the populace for independence of Mainland Tanzania, having been chosen for that task by the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in July 7, 1954.

In addition to unifying the nation, Kiswahili was also instrumental in the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, where most freedom fighters from Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe interacted and embraced it whilst receiving military training in Tanzania. In recent times, Kiswahili has spread further to become the tenth most used languages in the world, with over 200 million speakers globally. In November 2021, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared July 7 as World Kiswahili Language Day. It is no wonder therefore that the language is among the cherished core values of the country, others being unity, humanity, brotherhood, peace and stability. Tanzania has endeavoured to project these values in her relations with other states in Africa and beyond, invoking humanity, for instance, as a basis for its involvement in the decolonization endeavours.

Culture has been defined as a sum total of people's ways of national life, their political system, customs and traditions, juridical system, religious beliefs, literary and artistic

¹ Sutton, J.E.G. (1969). The Peopling of Tanzania. In I.N. Kimambo and A.J. Temu (Ed.). A History of Tanzania. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, pp. 1-2.

manifestations, games and amusements.²Being a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, Tanzania is truly diverse. Whilst some countries struggle to cope with such diversity, Tanzania has thus far managed to benefit from it owing to the deeply rooted culture of unity, tolerance and mutual respect.

Diplomacy is the management of relations between independent states through negotiations and mutual accommodation. It is a peaceful – that is non-coercive method employed by states to influence actions of other states with the view to achieve their foreign policy objectives that are determined by national interests. National interest as a concept has been defined widely. Simply put, these are goals and objectives necessary for achieving national security and prosperity. Each and every nation-state has its own goals and objectives, but the most paramount, also dubbed vital interests, are the ones that determine its survival as a sovereign and cohesive entity, with its chosen politico-economic system and cultural identity.

Cultural diplomacy is, therefore, the application of culture in the conduct of relations between sovereign states. It is a set of actions that are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, information, art, lifestyles, value systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests.³The classical theories of international relations, namely realism and liberalism, despite their many differences, both believe that states are the principal actors in international relations, whether being anarchic in nature in pursuit of self-interest and power and cooperating with each other in pursuit of common global public goods.

What the two theories have in common, however, is the belief that culture is not an important element in these theories, worthy of consideration. Constructivism on the other hand, perceive culture as an important element in international relations, firmly believing that every human behaviour, whether driven by self-interest or the desire for cooperation is influenced and determined by the individual's cultural orientation.⁴ Given the application of cultural diplomacy since the end of the Second World War, especially by major powers, one finds the constructivists' argument quite compelling.

In view of the strategic importance, cultural diplomacy has been employed, to a varied extent, by several nation-states both, developed and developing. All major powers have employed and continue to employ cultural diplomacy in the execution of their foreign policies, in a manner described by Joseph Nye as “soft-power”.⁵ The United States, for example, has been employing cultural diplomacy during the Cold War to-date, through inter alia educational and cultural exchange programme. Similarly, the Russian Federation, United Kingdom, France, Germany and emerging powers such as Brazil, China and India are using cultural diplomacy in securing foreign policy objectives. In Tanzania's immediate and strategic neighbourhood there are also Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa that use cultural diplomacy in pursuit of their foreign policy objectives.

²Ruhumbika, G. (Ed) (1974). *Towards Ujamaa: Twenty Years of TANU Leadership*. Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, p. 275.

³ Cummings, M.C., Jr. (2003). *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: a survey*. Washington D.C.:CAC

⁴Idoko, B. O. (2021). A Philosophical Reflection on the Role of Culture in International Relations. *Ogirisi: aNew Journal of African Studies*. 17(1), 118 – 142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v17i1.7>

⁵ Nye, J.S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

Of course, there are many benefits of undertaking cultural diplomacy. These include, but are not limited to building mutual trust among individuals and government officials that policy makers can utilize during negotiations and forging alliances; enabling states to promote its values and interests so as to persuade others to accommodate or tolerate them; facilitating bonds that endure beyond changes in governments and/or regimes; reaching stakeholders that cannot be reached through normal diplomatic approaches; serving as a tool of rapprochement with countries where diplomatic relations have been strained or are absent; fostering growth of civil society as a mechanism for holding governments into account; countering negative and damaging publicity – that is propaganda against a people or government, especially those that can incite hatred, violence; and fostering a culture of peace and harmony among civilizations.

Tanzania like other states, including those in the global south, is aware of the benefits that emanate from well-planned and executed cultural diplomacy strategies, as a way of complementing other forms of diplomacy, such as economic diplomacy, environmental diplomacy and Diaspora diplomacy. As early as 1969, Mwalimu Nyerere underscored the essence of engaging foreign publics with the view to persuade them to adopt Tanzania's values pertaining to socialism and self-reliance, while also appreciating and supporting her firm stance against colonialism, racialism and oppression in Africa and beyond.

The Triennial Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation calls for the promotion of Kiswahili within the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and internationally. Since then, Kiswahili has been promoted as a lingua franca of the East African Community, while in 2017 the East African Legislative Assembly passed a resolution to adopt it as one of the official languages of the Community. Similarly, in August 2018, SADC adopted Kiswahili as its fourth official language, noting the contribution it had played in the liberation struggles in southern Africa. Kiswahili is also the official working language of AU, whereby the continental body has agreed to work collaboratively with EAC to promote Kiswahili as a Pan-African lingua franca and using it as a catalyst for achieving the AU's Agenda 2063. Kiswahili has the potential to unify the African states as it managed to unify the people of Tanzania.

In addition to diplomatic arena, Kiswahili has been promoted through music such as *Taarab* and *'Bongo Flava'* as well as gospel music, with new fans in Tanzania's immediate neighbourhood, the African region and world at large. Tanzania, under the leadership of President Samia Suluhu Hassan has also made great strides in sports, including in the just concluded Commonwealth games, held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Similarly, the Tanzania Royal Tour documentary that was filmed in 2021 and launched in the United States this year has showcased Tanzania's impressive tourist attractions, such as Mt. Kilimanjaro, the Ngorongoro crater, the Serengeti and Zanzibar as well as the culture of her people, which is rich in diversity. These and other cultural endeavours serve to portray Tanzania in a positive light to the rest of the world, and could, if systematically and purposefully undertaken, contribute to the realization of its foreign policy objectives and national interests, hence safeguarding its national security.

Whereas cultural diversity is desirable and cultural crosspollinations-inevitable, Tanzania must continue to guard against the threats to its national cultural identity, which form part of her vital national interests. It must also be cautious of the evolving nature of global politics, with the resurgence of old rivalries between the major powers, which scout for supporters and

sympathisers for their respective camps. Tanzania's stance pertaining to getting involved in such struggles for power and influence during the peak of Cold War was crystal clear and remains so to date.

There is also a need to be watchful and guard against the negative effects of globalization, especially in relation to disruptive communication technologies, which currently are the primary agents for eroding the natural cultural values and norms. These technologies, such as social media, provide a platform for violent extremist and terrorist to spread hate, incite violence, recruit young and desperate youth into their nefarious networks; using religious radicalism as both a bait and justification for their actions.