Cultural diplomacy in post-apartheid South Africa's international relations: cosmetic or genuine change?

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the extent to which South Africa responds to recent major paradigm shifts in international relations. We record that the country's readmission to the international cultural relations arena after the collapse of apartheid in 1994 has brought about new challenges for it to tackle. Two of these are: how to project a new image of a united society with diverse cultures in harmonious co-existence different from that of the past; and how to shift from a previous government-centric diplomacy to a new public-participatory alternative. We support the prompt drafting of a cultural diplomacy policy initiated by law makers in order to mediate the afore-mentioned opposites. The study followed qualitative methodological approaches to arrive at the arguments and conclusions made.

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1 Introduction

The readmission of South Africa to the international cultural relations space after the fall of apartheid in 1994 brought about unresolved challenges. During apartheid, South African culture was racial, ethnic and tribal. The displays of racial, ethnic and tribal cultures were explicit as if they were welcomed by everybody. Worse, a fraction of the puzzle was presented as representing the whole but eventually polarised society into secluded residential, recreational and business enclaves. As such, the polarised environment allowed little or no room at all for easy cross-cultural pollination. The racially-based culture consequently spread beyond South African boundaries, but it was countered by the international community through a wide range of agencies that embarked on a campaign of isolating the country from world activities since the 1950s until apartheid's eventual demise.

Commonly known as the cultural boycott, the campaign discouraged any form of individual and collective interactions with South Africa in the academic, artistic, sporting, and media spheres, among others. Notwithstanding the merits and demerits thereto, the action brought about unintended consequences. On the one hand, it pushed the government of the day to harden its stance on its separatist doctrine. To this end, a wide range of organisations and concomitant programs flourished. In so doing, "cultural practitioners were actively engaged in a new discourse, pre-empting, as it were, the contours of cultural policies and practices in a post-apartheid South Africa" [Zegeye and Kriger, (2001), p.2].

Here in South Africa, the cultural diplomacy label resonates with the ancient African philosophy of 'Ubuntu' that guides some of its visions and missions. This is declared through a statement by the Deputy Minister Marius Fransman at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation's annual conference in 2010:

> "Cultural diplomacy in South Africa is not simply about 'culture' in the narrow sense. It is about a country projecting its power in the domain of ideas – to influence the ideas and outlook of states, international organisations, and non-state actors in order to pursue its national interests and enhance its geopolitical standing. The practice of cultural diplomacy is in-line with our domestic policy – which in turn informs our foreign policy – because our foreign policy is the externalisation of our domestic policy." (Fransman, 2010)

Despite this annotated declaration, South Africa is not exactly sure how and in what direction to chart the way forward, hence Deputy Minister Fransman said to qualify the statement: "I look forward to receiving the outcomes of this Annual Conference which should help us understand the concept of cultural diplomacy better, and how we can leverage it better as a country" (Fransman, 2010). We therefore take the advantage of the overt pronouncement to examine to what extent South Africa has aligned and leaned itself to the aforesaid paradigm shifts on international fronts. The article is divided into thematic thrusts to guide the discussion.

2 Definition of concepts

Cultural diplomacy as a concept stems from public diplomacy, cultural relations, diplomatic relations, and cultural exchanges. Mark (2009, p.2) writes that conflicting views on semantics around the term *culture* emulate its mutable nature. Lack of common understanding of *culture*, Mark argues, leads to different interpretations and applications, resulting in ambiguous outcomes. Generally, the word *cultural* from *cultural diplomacy* is fluid, associated *high culture* and later *popular culture*. From a simplistic angle, both terms denote artistic features of culture over and above others – such as the economy and politics. They also reflect class and other variances within societies in general. *High culture* mirrors the tastes and etiquettes of the elite components of societies at the expense of the less fortunate. *Popular culture*, on the other hand, has mass appeal, but ironically does not necessarily guarantee acceptance by the elites.

To bridge the afore-mentioned social divides, it becomes prudent to adopt a broad definition of culture embraced by supreme international cultural bodies such as the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). This is a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits created by man who is a member of society. A group of people is related to each other through persistent relations, or a large social grouping sharing the scarce geographical or virtual territory, subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations" [Kim, (2011), pp.3–4]. Inferred in this definition is the matter of *diplomacy*.

Topić and Sciortino (2012, p.10) postulate that 'diplomacy is conventionally understood to mean government-to-government (and diplomat-to-diplomat) exchange'. According to Bolewski (2008, p.145), "interdependency between diplomacy and culture can hardly be denied" because "negotiation styles are strongly influenced by the cultural background of the negotiation parties, as well as the perception of time, and the setting of priorities within interactions", hence the term *cultural diplomacy*. Mark (2009, p.16) is concerned that the interdependence between *culture* and *diplomacy* is not always guaranteed because "the boundaries between the terms are not always very clear, and as the two practices overlap, are becoming less clear". The American scholar, Milton Cummings, melts the two concepts into a single entity through the following definition:

> "Cultural diplomacy is 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." [Cummings in Mark, (2009), p.6]

Cultural diplomacy has become a common feature of public policy so much so that the affinity of the two has led to them being used interchangeably or even as synonyms in certain situations. A case in point is whereby "cultural diplomacy is [regarded as] the linchpin of public diplomacy" [US Department of State, Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, (2005), p.1] or "culture in politics" [Kim, (2011), p.3].

Coined in 1965 by E. Guillon, *public diplomacy* refers to state diplomacy that is not exclusive to government agents but also involves the general public (Ryniejska-Kiełdanowicz, 2014; Mark, 2009). The distinction between *public diplomacy* and *cultural diplomacy* is that "public diplomacy incorporates a wider set of activities than cultural diplomacy, primarily those government media and public relations activities aimed at a foreign public in order to explain a course of action, or present a case" [Mark, (2009), p.15]. If at all cultural diplomacy is 'culture in politics' (Kim, 2011) and public diplomacy is the promotion of national interests through cultural exchange. Bound et al. (2007, p.15) observe that "cultural exchange has been intertwined with the pursuit of foreign relations throughout history" as the reciprocal exchange of gifts between high profile individuals or officials. In this way, "people have used culture to display themselves, to assert their power, and to understand others".

In the main, from the South African perspective, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) defines cultural policy from two perspectives: the simple and complex. The simple definition of cultural diplomacy is articulated as "the dissemination of values, ideas and habits from one government to an alien society as part of a foreign policy objective". The complex alternative considers cultural diplomacy as "the construction of a cultural identity in order to share a cultural heritage and a current popular culture, having as main goals peace and understanding" [Molobi, (2013), *np*]. Distinction is further made from cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. DIRCO defines public diplomacy as "the art and practice of communicating a country's policies, values and culture to other people with the major purpose of building long-term and sustainable socio-economic and political relationships…" [Molobi, (2013), *np*].

3   Theoretical dimensions of Ubuntu philosophy

In its preamble, the White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy states:

> "South Africa's unique approach to global issues has found expression in the concept of *Ubuntu*. These concepts inform our particular approach to diplomacy and shape our vision of a better world for all. This philosophy translates into an approach to international relations that respects all nations, peoples, and cultures. It recognises that it is in our national interest to promote and support the positive development of others…" [DIRCO, (2011), p.4]

For its prominence in the doctrine, Ubuntu deserves further explanation to understand in depth how it is located within body politics and international relations.

3.1   Description of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an ancient philosophy according to which Africans view their world. The philosophy permeates almost all facets of their being. Central to this assertion is that an individual's whole existence is inextricably linked to the group's interests or survival on the basis of values such as solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity

(Mokgoro, 1997; Ngubane, 1963). This ideology is succinctly articulated by the mantra: *motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of the other). From this perspective, the philosophy could be metaphorically portrayed as the ultimate calibrator of relations among Africans in general, or more philosophically "the potential of being human" [Kunene in Mokgoro, (1997), p.2]. Whilst there is no dispute about the African origins of the philosophy (McDougal, 2009), its impact transcends African borders into the diaspora. For instance, the dictum *I am because we are*, associated with some African-American scholarship (Hord and Lee, 1995) resonates with *Ubuntu*.

3.2   Ubuntu and South Africa's political culture

Ubuntu is located within the context of the height of the struggle against apartheid within the South Africa borders with the view to examine how it was embedded into the country's body politic. *Ubuntu* and politics nexus in South Africa is explored from the black consciousness (BC) perspective during the political turbulence of the 1970/80s wherein "the peaceful assertion of pride in one's blackness and basic demands for human rights was guided by the ideology of BC" [Maake, (1992), p.593]. On the flip side however, the tenet of respect for authorities made some black people, particularly the older generations perceived as submissive to white authority. In retaliation to the perceived subservient attitudes towards whites, the youth retaliated by fighting their parents, sometimes even physically assaulting them in public. In so doing "Ubuntu philosophy was compromised" [Maake, (1992), p.593].

3.3   Ubuntu and international relations theory

An abridged definition of international relations theory (IRT) is difficult to tender owing to its long evolution and its "multiplicity of meanings" [Meyers, (nd), p.4]. Probably, the last phrase implies various schools of thoughts associated with it. To name but a few: Idealism, Liberalism, and Scientism. A sum total of ideologies from the bureaus generate the following definition according to Meyers:

> "International [Relations] theory is that part of the study of international relations which offers descriptive and explanatory statements about patterns, regularities, and change in structural properties and processes of international systems and their major component units. It is concerned with classes of events (typical behaviour or trends), not with specific occurrences…"

IR as an academic discipline in South Africa is almost synonymous with the study of the traditional foreign policy realm and security/conflict studies. Owing to the aggressive role South Africa plays in the continent, the focus of the international world after apartheid was on how to bring about security and stability on the continent. The scarcity of knowledge on the subject for South African scholars due to the previous academic boycott implies that that they are relatively lagging behind compared to their international counterparts (Smith, 2009). Against this backdrop, "South Africa IR can thus justifiably be labelled parochially with some exceptions" [Smith, (2009), p.536]. The grey area identified presents an opportunity for *Ubuntu* to enrich IRT in substantive ways. A seminal study by Kim (2011) in this regard is worth consulting, separately.

Ubuntu and the law in South Africa is a replica of the title of a specific study of *Ubuntu* in South Africa (Mokgoro, 1997). The essence of the inquiry is extorted herein to highlight how *Ubuntu* permeates South African legislation. In this study, it is claimed that "African values which manifest themselves in *Ubuntu* are in consonance with the values of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 generally and those of the Bill of Rights in particular" [Mokgoro, (1997), p.10]. It is asserted that the Constitution calls for the upholding and protection of positive human values with the view to entrench the culture of human rights, compassion and friendship among its citizens. Furthermore, it also shows respect for African customs, from which *Ubuntu* is derived, by recognising African traditional leadership and its role in the society.

4   Genealogy of cultural diplomacy in South Africa

IR is a specialised academic inquiry in South Africa with established institutions backed up by body of knowledge including journals, books and scientific research outputs. Owing to time and space constraints, only important intervals are concisely highlighted from a governance perspective. The origins of foreign relations can be traced to 1840s period when 'the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State signed treaties with other countries and sent diplomatic representatives to Europe and the USA. These treaties did not enjoy serious recognition as by then the country "had no independent foreign policy decision-making competency" [Siko, (2014), p.56]. The situation changed in 1910 when South Africa became a Union, a British dominion after the unification of its four colonies: Cape, Natal, Orange River and Transvaal. The colonies corresponded with the Boer Republics. Both forms of governance were superimposed on existing African traditional administration; meaning that there were three layers of political administration of particular pockets of South African political geography at given intervals and spaces. Each of these had their own ways of interacting with their allies, stakeholders, and interest groups.

During 1948–1994 epochs, the country's foreign policy under the national party (NP) administration was more political than cultural. The overall goal of the country's foreign policy was "one of trying to ensure the security, status and legitimacy of the state within the international system against the background of preserving a white controlled state" [Barratt in Evans, (1991), p.5]. Consequently, the country sometimes arrogated itself the status and authority to act as the guardian to its regional neighbours. Some of the methods it applied to assert its presence and role in the region included military invasions, economic and cultural blockades against those countries (such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola) it particularly saw as hostile to it by, among others, harbouring South African political exiles who launched military attacks against it from their borders. Subsequently, South Africa soon earned the image of the "polecat of the world, isolated, treated as a pariah if not a rogue state" [Van der Westhuizen, (2003), p.11] by the international community.

The isolation unwittingly gave rise to "the diplomacy of defiance" [Siko, (2014), p.55] whereby the NP hardened its stance against the international community by withdrawing its participation from the Commonwealth and United Nations activities whilst simultaneously establishing and closing ranks with 'other pariahs' together with whom it embarked on "clandestine propaganda and sanctions-busting" [Siko, (2014), p.55]. The withdrawal and isolation further meant that South African cultural relations

were focused inwardly or domestically rather than externally. This changed with the ANC taking over the government as a ruling party in 1994 with new ideologies and philosophies long chiselled around its century-old "theory and practice of internationalism, international solidarity, world peace, African unity, African Renaissance and an African agenda" [Landsberg, (2012), p.1].

A decisive turn from the old to new international relations could be attributed to two symbiotic political processes from the late 1980s to early 1990s. The first is the reaction of the South African government to internal and international pressure to abandon its segregation doctrine and the second is ANC's preparations for government take-over. As part of attempts to ease off pressure from the international community in the form of economic sanctions, among others, the NP government launched a campaign to project itself as undergoing genuine change. Strategically, it unbanned political organisations, released political prisoners and allowed for the return of exiles. It also embarked on institutional and structural reforms which led to new configurations of government departments and deployment of personnel; one example of which was the merger of Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Information and the subsequent appointment of Van Heerden as the Director-General until 1992. Van Heerden promptly pronounced policy change towards a 'new diplomacy' as opposed to 'new foreign policy' (IGD, 2012; Evans, 1991; Van Nieuwkerk, 1994; Van Nieuwkerk and Van Staden, 1991). The distinction is worth explaining. Foreign policy denotes the nature and character of state's relations with each other while diplomacy refers to the instrument or method used to affect the former (Barratt, 1993).

Strategically, South Africa's 'new diplomacy' means the change of attitude in dealing with the African continent through peaceful means rather than aggression (Evans, 1991; Van Nieuwkerk, 1994; Van Nieuwkerk and Van Staden, 1991). The claim is regarded as more cosmetic than substantial by some observers (Van Nieuwkerk, 1994; Dopcke, 2003). It is seen as no more than just an attempt by South Africa to gain some respect and acceptance by the international community. The new diplomacy does not make an unequivocal pronouncement about "change in the composition of the passengers, the purpose of the journey or significantly, [and] the eventual destination" [Evans, (1991), pp.4–5].

While the NP was busy trying to rebrand itself, the ANC prepared itself to take over the government by initiating new policy discourses. Among these was the circulation in 1993 of a policy document that later served as the bedrock of the new South Africa's foreign policy called *Foreign Policy Perspectives in a Democratic South Africa* after it went through severe scrutiny. The final version raised seven salient points which were not part of the apartheid policy amongst others, respect for human rights beyond the political, justice and international law to guide relations between nations (ANC, 2011). These points not only promoted international relations that included trade, finance and culture, but also in the process asserted its 'Africanness' through its *soft power*[1], especially towards its African counterparts (Ndlovu, 2010) while simultaneously maintaining its partnership with its other allies such as Brazil, Russia, India and China through the forum aptly abbreviated BRICS (Bohler-Muller, 2012).

The intercession between the NP and ANC's foreign policy processes has clear consequences for the current juncture. There is a shared strong argument that the interactions characterised by proponents of the two camps sharing ideas as part of the negotiations towards a political settlement led to cross-pollination of political ideologies

so much so that the supposed new foreign policy not different from the old one (Evans, 1991; Du Pisani, 1991).

5   Cultural diplomacy institutional mandate, designs, and performance in South Africa

Governments all over the world are highly organised. Different as they may be, they generally share some common characteristics. Common among these is that they rely on highly sophisticated systems, structures and programs to survive. Chief among these are laws that certify their legal status, regulate their operations and monitor compliance to rules and regulations thereto. They also invent institutional structures for execution of their mandates. This section examines two of these features in South Africa, namely the legal framework and organisational (re)structuring.

5.1   Cultural diplomacy legal framework

It is a common knowledge that laws are generally not created in a vacuum. Like in any part of the world, laws in South Africa, including the afore-mentioned Constitution, exist within a particular socio-political and geographical context. They are extracted from various sources such as political ideologies, culture and religion. Not all current laws in the modern South Africa are new. Some have been sourced from the previous political dispensations – with modifications to suit the new era -owing to the fact that the current South Africa political idiom is a product of a negotiated settlement. Agreements reached at the pinnacle of negotiations have been drawn from debates that raged for decades from all sorts of socio-political formations. The tradition of contesting ideas has thus been upheld to date in the formulation of new laws. The process of law making entails consultations with the general public though public hearings, stakeholders meetings and individual or group submissions and presentations. From there, the comments are consolidated into proposals that are forwarded to parliament for further processing. Once parliament is satisfied that the text can stand as law, it is then referred to the President as a Bill for ratification to become an Act of Parliament. Failure for the Bill to receive Presidential veto, it is referred back to parliament for review until the President is confident to attach a seal of approval. However, some pieces of legislations do not necessarily have to reach the status of Act of Parliament. They remain as policy guidelines under different titles. Laws on cultural diplomacy for example, follow this route. South Africa draws legislative guidelines on cultural diplomacy from several sources. We name and discuss a few of these.

Reference to cultural diplomacy in South Africa's Constitution is obtainable from the section dealing with International Agreements (South Africa 1996, Sec 231). In this regard, it is conspicuously assigned specifically to the national government, thus: "the negotiating and signing of all international agreements is the responsibility of the national executive (cabinet)". Sec 231 (2) instructs that "an international agreement becomes binding on the Republic only after it has been approved by both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces" (NCOP). Although the Constitution does not recognise the provincial and local government spheres to engage into what is called paradiplomacy with international counterparts and non-governmental organisations

(Nganje, 2014), South African municipalities are well known to enter into twinning agreements and cultural exchanges with their international counterparts.

All matters relating to cultural diplomacy in the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (WPACH) are contained in Chapter 6, captioned international cultural Cooperation. This section stipulates, among others, that: "We shall build on our unique convergence of cultures to develop international links for cultural exchange on the basis of mutual respect". WPACH then established subsidiary structures such as the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Council (NHC) as vehicles for the cultural exchange objective (SA 1997, Sec 3h). In practice however, the majority of the cultural diplomacy functions are instead discharged by their mother body, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) which is prescribed as the principal host for culture in South Africa by laws superior to the white paper.

The Cultural Promotions Amendment Act 59 of 1998 consigns cultural diplomacy functions exclusively to the Arts and Culture Minister. The last two pieces of legislation worth mentioning in respect to cultural policy within government structures are the National Policy on South African Living Heritage (1st draft), and the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005. The spirit of the latter is drawn from Chapter 3 of South Africa's Constitution in respect to the principles and spirit of Cooperative Government. These doctrines make room for reproduction, albeit with modifications, across spheres of government. One such entity is the 1999 municipal international relations framework (MIRF) which is supposed to guide local government on how to handle matters of international relations. The applications and implications of some of the elements of these pieces of legislation are discussed in the next section.

5.2 Organisational structures

There is no uniformity on how governments configure structures to which they assign cultural diplomacy functions and deployment of relevant personnel. Save to say that general trends are observed and elucidated for reference in this article. Therefore, how South Africa deals with the structural residency of cultural diplomacy, operations and the appointment of personnel is heretofore explained. The point of departure is that cultural relations across all spheres of government are provided with or are expected to compose their own guidelines in line with the Constitution. However, legal prescriptions identify the national sphere of government, especially the cabinet, as the prime site or home-ground for international cultural relations. In turn, cabinet has bestowed the DAC and DIRCO as joint implementing agencies of its cultural diplomacy hence the next section.

5.2.1 The DAC

The DAC has established the Chief Directorate of International Relations (DIR) with full mandate on the country's foreign relations. The directorate consists of three units focusing on Africa, Middle-East, and bi-lateral/multi-lateral relations. Surprisingly, the DAC does not have a cultural diplomacy policy and international relations strategy (IRS). Nonetheless, it collaborates with the University of Pretoria on a two-year program on IR with the view towards cultivating knowledge and skills on the subject of cultural policy. The DAC, like DIRCO, is entitled by law to establish auxiliary entities to which it can refer or delegate some of its functions it is directly not able to carry out. In this regard,

the DAC has created the NAC and NHC to which it has entrusted some aspects of cultural relations secondary to their principal mandates. The NAC's role in cultural diplomacy is to, among others, dispense funds for projects or programs on international cultural exchanges, events and studies. It also collaborates on project of cross-national character with the NHC and other governments such as DIRCO, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) that serves the purpose of exporting South Africa's cultural patents.

5.2.2 The DIRCO

Unlike the DAC, DIRCO has not conceived a specific unit for public diplomacy. Instead, cultural diplomacy functions are submerged into the operations of Chief Directorate: Public Diplomacy. The mandate of the directorate is to "communicate South Africa's international relations and cooperation policy and its implementation as well as to project a positive image of South Africa both at home and abroad" [Molobi, (2013), *np*]. The communication protocol is presented and briefly explained through the diagram below.

Figure 1   The public diplomacy pyramid (see online version for colours)
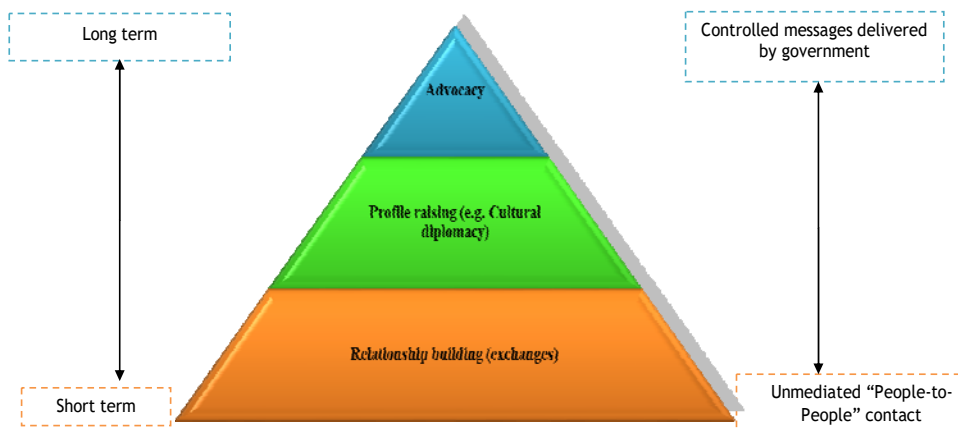
Through the use of the diagram above, cultural diplomacy functions within the directorate have short and long term objectives. The long-term objective is to build (domestic and international) relations through cultural exchanges while the short term objective is to advocate government agenda to the outside world. One of the most visible means in which DIRCO discharges its cultural advocacy role is through the provision of protocol services to the provincial and local governments. These include advising provincial governments and municipalities in protocol services in relation to international visits to and from South Africa. DIRCO is yet to pronounce how it intends to deal with the idea of deployment of cultural attaches to its foreign missions as proposed by the DAC [Molobi, (2013), *np*].

5.2.3 Other government structures dealing with cultural diplomacy

As mentioned earlier, South Africa's laws empower government departments to create subsidiary structures to which certain functions could be delegated. Legislatures in South Africa do not consign cultural diplomacy solely to the national sphere of government.

They also apply to the two others, the provincial and local governments as well as to the parliament as one of the three arms of government in South Africa. Primary legislations on local government are generally silent on cultural diplomacy, yet some municipalities engage in international relations exercises such as signing cultural twining and exchange agreements with their foreign counterparts.

In October 1998, the South African Government, through the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) – to which all municipalities are affiliated - initiated the Municipal International Relation Policy Framework to guide local councils on cultural diplomacy. This framework does not make any specific reference on cultural diplomacy. It merely sets a broad framework of the international relations spectrum. In this context, SALGA expects municipalities to, among others, 'submit plans and details of any official international visit to Council for approval at or by relevant authorities at provincial and national levels [SALGA, (2012), p.15]. Similarly, SALGA itself is yet to report on whether or not, and how, it is fulfilling its official obligations to "act as initiator, intermediary, facilitator and priority setter for municipal international relations (MIR) cooperation programmes and research and thus evaluate MIR programmes and to make information widely available" [SALGA, (2012), p.13]. Surprisingly, there is no trace of a single municipality in South Africa that has officially adopted a municipal cultural policy, let alone a cultural diplomacy policy to date.

6   South Africa's accomplishments on cultural diplomacy

The ambivalent and arbitrary configurations of structures for the execution of cultural diplomacy do not suggest that there are no substantive actions and achievements by government in the field. On the contrary, there are successes as there are also setbacks in some projects that the South African government have undertaken in the cultural relations domain. Some of these are reported to international bodies of repute in politics and culture such as the AU, EU and UNESCO. Therefore, South Africa's performance in this regard as contained in the EU (2014) document *Preparatory Action on Culture in the EU External Relations* – compiled by Rod Fisher and edited by Yudhishthir Raj Isar – as well as DAC's *Presentation on International Agreements to the Portfolio Committee on Arts and Culture – 25 May 2011* is explored (DAC, 2011).

Two critical areas are isolated and these are milestones from both internal and external cultural engagements and project; and achievements from partnership with international agencies such as the AU, EU and their subsidiary bodies. Further, four areas of internal operations by the DAC as part of Vision 2011–2014:

1   formation of a joint cultural diplomacy task team with DIRCO for the purpose of drafting cultural diplomacy policy

2   development of IR strategy by the DAC

3   the review of international agreements

4   assessment of the impact of cultural industries in the new growth path are pursued.

The operations of DAC and DIRCO in this regard should be linked to those of other spheres of government under government's Inter-Governmental Framework. Indeed, following the 2010 Cultural Diplomacy Conference addressed by Deputy Minister

Fransman as discussed earlier, a joint-team was accordingly established for the said purpose. Regrettably, six years later, no tangible report has surfaced from that direction.

With regard to performance from external cultural relations, six areas where government seems to have registered remarkable progress were identified and these are bi-lateral cultural cooperation agreements, cultural exchanges, branding of South Africa, deployment of personnel, promotion of creative and cultural industries. To date, the DAC has signed 90 bilateral agreements, but a few have lapsed. The agreements have spin-offs such as educational opportunities, job creation, and rural development. Cultural exchanges were always central to foreign relations. South Africa has cultural exchanges with countries such as China, Cuba, France and others for the import and export of cultural goods. Cultural exchanges also happen at some other levels of the society .e.g., individual artists-to-artists or municipality-to-municipality. South Africa has established more than 100 foreign missions abroad to which it intends to deploy cultural attachés through the DAC. South Africa is aware that branding itself through culture (such as sports competitions, film and music) brings concrete benefits such as international recognition and income generation through sponsorships and investments. Through the Mzansi Golden Economy Strategy, South Africa has managed to support the establishment and promotion of the creative and cultural industries initiates through partnerships with international bodies of high repute such as the EU, BRICS, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

South Africa's affiliation to what was formerly BRIC (consisting only of Brazil, Russia, India and China) on 24 December 2010 (hence the changing of the acronym to BRICS) presents it with a platform where it can interact with selected countries in a more formalised and sustained manner. By joining this group, South Africa is, by virtue of its strategic position in Africa, expected to serve as a gateway to the African continent and its 1 billion potential consumers (Hervieu, 2010). On 9 July 2007, cabinet Ministers of Culture from the five BRICS countries signed an agreement to "develop and promote cooperation and exchanges in the field of culture, including the art of music and dancing, choreography, theatre, circus, archives, publishing and libraries, museums, cultural heritage, fine, decorative and applied arts, audio-visual works, and in other creative activities" (Sputnik, 2007).

The BRICS protocol has since created opportunities for research and the creation of platforms for cultural engagements by organs of civic society from its countries and beyond, including Africa and Europe (Arterial Network, 2015; Euro-BRICS, 2015; CISAC, 2014). In addition to BRICS, South Africa is having special relationships with fellow-African countries' non-governmental and governmental structures such as the African Union (AU), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Southern African Development Countries (SADC) on cultural cooperation. Chief among these is the country's adherence to AU 2063 pan-African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens who represent a dynamic force in the global arena (AU, 2014).

7   Critique of South Africa's cultural diplomacy paradigm

South Africa's response to paradigm shifts in international relations reveals as it simultaneously conceals both its strength and limitations. It reveals in that it makes

pronouncements that are progressive or promising, but fail to register tangible progress or accomplishment. As expressed previously, government has yet to unveil a cultural diplomacy policy promised four years ago. The delay is particularly worrisome in that it is now almost a decade since the DAC has, at another level, embarked on a national cultural policy review, but to no avail. Similarly, SALGA is yet to roll out extensive assistance to municipalities towards the implementation of municipal international relations policy framework (MIRPF) put in place more than a decade ago.

As such, delays or at worst failures in implementing policy undertakings in South Africa tend to be customary rather than exceptional in some circumstances. Without necessarily making cultural diplomacy policy a panacea for international cultural relations problems in South Africa, one is still adamant that it can go a long way to alleviate them. The country should appreciate that "policy is not a response to a problem, but is part of the discourse of that particular problem" that it seeks to address [Minnaert, (2014), p.101]. Short of it, evidence of a transfer from the erstwhile foreign policy to a 'new diplomacy' cannot be seen. Therefore, continued delay or failure to produce such a policy can but only perpetuates the country's current ambivalent position in diplomatic affairs whereby the country would continue to use *culture as display* instead of *culture as proper* (Williams, 1984). Thus, the recommendation about a speedy leap over this cul-de-sac cannot be overemphasised because South Africa cannot afford to unwittingly project an image of indecisiveness in making the transition from a government-centred foreign-relations tradition to the new people-orientated public diplomacy trajectory with culture as one of the significant features.

Coming back to Ubuntu, South African foreign policy is embedded within it and it is also a source from which the South African government has extracted the *Batho Pele* (putting people first) principle to guide its operation. *Batho Pele* mirrored with Ubuntu seeks to place people at the frontline of government services as both agents and beneficiaries. However, the principle was not upheld by government in the country's foreign policy formulation process (Van Wyk, 2004).

The contents of South Africa's international programs do not display fundamental departure from the erstwhile fragmented cultural palette. Apart from a few pockets where there is evidence of genuine cultural mix, South Africa's overall geographical space, from which, it draws its cultural idioms or nuances, is still generally following the apartheid contours. Consequently, the country invariably finds itself in having to put elements of the separate cultures into rainbow mix and serve them to the whole as parts of the national culture. The mantra of *unity in (cultural) diversity* as advocated by South Africans is a subject of controversy. Prominent cultural practitioners in South Africa express scepticism over the notion of cultural diversity in the context of building a new and united society.

Van Graan (2009, *np*) captures the essence of the polemic when he reasons that "cultural diversity has in recent times been promoted as an antidote to such homogenisation, and yet, cultural diversity can be both an affirming assertion of self-respect and dignity and the premise – or tool – for conflict between nations, communities and people". Naidoo (2009, *np*) adds: "Though we now celebrate the diversity of our cultures, there is no real substance to our traditional practices; they have become perfunctory. The vital connection between the individual and insular race-based traditional cultures was lost when our society was structured along hierarchical racial lines… We place too much emphasis on cultural difference and that leads readily to

discrimination". Reflecting also on the legacy of apartheid segregation, AFAI (2014, *np*) concurs: "Respect for difference is sometimes thinly-veiled justification for segregation".

8   Conclusions

Cultural diplomacy has been put in context from historical and current perspectives. It is argued that whilst there is legal reform and reconfiguration of the machinery of the government structures in the post-apartheid epoch, cultural diplomacy is not yet fully developed and transformed. Currently, cultural diplomacy including its policies as it stands is not far removed and distinctive from that of the apartheid dispensation hence the change is cosmetic and not genuine. Therefore, there is a need to transform the legal system through maximum citizen engagement to accommodate dialogic debate on cultural diplomacy to ensure that it is embracive of Ubuntu and Batho Pele principles, and such diplomacy should be applicable locally and recognised globally in promoting social cohesion and pride of the identity of the South African people in the continent and international community. This needs a complete genuine overhaul underwritten by DAC and DIRCO in this democratic dispensation.

Joining BRICS League of Nations in 2010 is evidence that it is time South Africa should undergo drastic cultural diplomacy change that is genuine, formalised and sustainable. In this way, South Africa should be well positioned to participate actively in the global space beyond just culture for its citizens and the rest of the African bloc to socio-culturally, economically and politically benefit from the BRICS protocol and the rest of the international community.

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Notes

1   The term soft power is coined by Joseph Nye to describe the ability by governments to persuade whoever through the use of culture rather than via coercion.