

TÜRKİYE-AFRICA RELATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL TOOLS OF TÜRKİYE'S PROJECTION IN THE SUB-SAHARAN REGION

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Doktora: Napoléon Vigny EPANSANG MBEE

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi

Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

nepansangmbee@yahoo.fr

ORCID: 0000-0002-4261-0312

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ABSTRACT: For the last two decades, Türkiye is engaged in being together with Africa. In facts, in favor of the coming into power of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in 2002, Ankara has engaged an ambitious and active foreign policy on the triple political, economical, and social plans that has contributed to increasing and reinforcing its position on the continent, especially in the Sub-Saharan part. The growing engagement of the country on the continent that resulted from this policy has created a kind of emulation within the Turkish academic milieu to explain and understand these recent trends in the African and Turkey relationships. However, most of the studies mainly analyze the political and economic aspects of the cooperation leaving aside the cultural dimension. This study is an attempt to explore the cultural deployment of Türkiye in Sub-Saharan Africa. The aim is to explain how Ankara uses cultural tools to promote mutual understanding and foster its cooperation with that part of the world. We, therefore, assume that to maximize its interests, as highlighted by realist theories, Turkish authorities have developed a new approach and the mobilization of cultural tools well explained by constructivist perspectives can be understood by the fact that the promotion of interpersonal and intersociety relations that involved local populations is capital to increase the country's visibility on the continent.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, cultural diplomacy, Türkiye, Sub-Saharan Africa.

Türkiye-Afrika İlişkileri: Türkiye'nin Sahra Altı Bölgesindeki Kültürel Araçlarının Yansımalarının Değerlendirilmesi

ÖZ: Türkiye son yirmi yıldır Afrika'yla birlikte olmayı hedef belirlemiştir. Aslında, 2002 yılında AKP'nin (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte Ankara, kıtadaki, özellikle de Sahra-altı bölgesindeki konumunu güçlendirmeye ve varlığını artırmaya katkıda bulunan üçlü siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal planlar üzerinde oldukça ihtiraslı ve aktif bir dış politika yürütmüştür. Bunun sonucunda Türkiye'nin kıtadaki giderek artan etkinliği, Afrika-Türkiye ilişkilerindeki bu son gelişmeleri izah etmek ve anlamlandırabilmek noktasında Türk akademik camiasında da bir tür öykünme yaratmıştır. Öte yandan, yapılan çalışmaların çoğu, kültürel boyutu bir kenara bırakarak iş birliğinin siyasi ve ekonomik yönlerini analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Sahra Altı Afrika'daki kültürel yayılımını ortaya çıkarmaya yönelik bir girişimdir. Amaç, Ankara'nın karşılıklı anlayışları teşvik etmek ve dünyanın bu bölgesiyle iş birliğini geliştirmek için kültürel araçları nasıl kullandığını açıklamaktır. Bu nedenle, realist teorilerin de vurguladığı gibi, Türk yetkililerin nüfuzlarını maksimize etmek için yeni bir yaklaşım geliştirdiğini ve konstrüktivist perspektiflerle iyi açıklanan kültürel araçların seferber edildiğini varsayıyoruz. Bu durum, yerel nüfusun dâhil olduğu kişiler arası ve toplumlar arası ilişkilerin teşvik edilmesinin, ülkenin kıtadaki görünürlüğünü arttırmak için büyük değer taşıdığı gerçeğiyle anlaşılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dış Politika, kültürel diplomasi, Türkiye, Sahra Altı Afrika.

Introduction

As the youngest continent in the world¹, Africa with its huge natural resources and its cultural diversity is at the center of the global lust. Unlike some countries like France and Great Britain whose presence is ancient on the continent, the redistribution of material capacity that occurred in the international system since the end of the Cold War has contributed to the emergence of new global and regional powers, that want to increase their influence in Africa. Among these countries, there is Turkey. The country undertook a reorientation of its foreign policy toward African countries these recent years following its

¹ According to several international reports including the United Nations Data for World Population Prospects of 2017, with 60% of its population under 25 years old, Africa is the youngest continent in the World.

1998 « Opening to Africa policy ». Since then, the relationships between this middle power² and the Black continent, especially its South Saharan part, have gone through major transformations that led to the densification of their political, economic, and socio-cultural cooperations.

In reality, on contrary of what can be imagined, the ties between the continent and Turkey are not particularly new. In the article « Turkey's increased Engagement in Africa: The Potential, Limits and Future Perspective of Relations », Savas Genç and Oğuzhan Tekin trace those ties to the period of the Ottoman Empire. As they explain, the expansion of the Empire on the continent can be situated between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries (Genç and Tekin, 2014, p. 91) when countries in the Northern part of Africa including Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, as well as some others in the Sub-Saharan region like Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti Somalia, Niger, and Chad were either partially or totally parts of the Ottoman authority (Özkan and Akgün, 2010, p. 530). During that period, most of the Muslims leaving in Ghana, Mali, Kanim Bornu, Timbuktu, etc. were under the Ottoman Empire's power (Genç and Tekin, 2014, p. 92). Alike, strong alliances and defense pacts were signed between the Ottoman administration and many kingdoms in the South of the Sahara. Unfortunately, the creation of the modern Republic of Turkey in 1923, profoundly slowed down the relations between the new Turkey and Sub-Saharan Africa as the result of the new identity priority of the new elites led by Mustafa KEMAL ATATÜRK but also to the security-based foreign policy of the early years of the Cold War (Yunus Turhan, 2020, P.6). As the result, those relations remained weak till the end of the Cold War, while they continued increasing with North African countries due to the common history, religion, and traditions that both parties shared since the Ottoman period (Tepeciklioğlu, 2017, p. 3).

In the late 1990s, in light of the active foreign policy conducted in the middle of the 1980s under the leadership of Turgut Özal, Turkey adopted the 1998 « Opening up to Africa » plan that marked a fundamental shift in the history of the modern Republic of Turkey's foreign policy. Yet, the related plan really took off in 2005, when the AKP of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, that came to power three years before, decided to launch the « Year of Africa » following a strategic document of 2003, related to the promotion of the economic cooperation with the continent. In 2008, the cooperation between Turkey and Africa witnessed another important step with the organization of the first « Turkey-African cooperation summit » in Istanbul. All this helped Turkey to improve its relations with Africa in all domains without giving a priority to any region and to pursue its foreign policy priorities as well as its national security needs (Özkan and Akgün, 2010, p. 534).

This recent revival in Turkey-Africa relations has progressively ended the long-time neglect of the continent in Turkey's foreign policy. Similarly, it has been noticed a relatively growing interest of Turkish scholars in African topics in such a way that today there are considerable research papers related to it. Much of this literature, focus either on the recent rise of Turkey on the continent or the economic patterns of this strong engagement. Among these scholars, Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu in her article « Economic relations between Turkey and Africa: Challenges and Prospects », explores Turkey's economic engagement in Africa and its « recent initiatives in Africa's energy ». She argues that, while « the attention paid to African issues has changed, the pace of the development in the relations with Africa » need to be reinforced. Many other academicians analyze these relations in light of the growing engagement of the country to show how taking advantage of its ongoing multilayered foreign policy, Turkish has made Africa « one of its prime orientations »³. In this regard, the majority of the articles mainly analyze the political and economic components of the relations and generally do not explore their cultural declinations. Meanwhile, the opening to Africa, which constitutes today's roadmap of Turkey's projection on the continent did mention the enhancement of cultural ties as one of the key instruments that need to be improved to accompany Ankara's growing ambitions on the continent.

While taking into consideration all these previous researches, we aim to examine the cultural instruments or tools used by the Turkish public and private sectors to increase the country's presence in sub-Saharan Africa⁴. The effort to include the non-state actors here is justified by the fact that, as Ahmed

² Recalling Hale (2013), BUĞRA SÜSLER, argues that the concept of middle power is mostly appropriate to qualify Turkey's international position (2019, p. 7).

³ The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey consulted on 14th May 2020.

⁴ According to the United Nations conception, Sub-Saharan Africa is constituted of all countries that geographically is situated in the South of the Sahara. However, there is no unanimity about the composition of

Kösebalaban highlights, Turkish foreign policy is not more an exclusive prerogative of the state apparatus; «Turkish civilian organizations with their school, clinics, businesses, and aid agencies » (Hasan Kösebalaban, 2011, p. xiii) are also involved. Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün (2010) also acknowledge the fact that the discourses and the expertise created by NGOs in Africa have been used by the current Turkish foreign policy establishment to conquer the African markets since 2002. In this regard, it is difficult to talk about the Turkish-African relation without mentioning the important role played by the NGOs in the promotion of the country's projection in the continent (Abdurrahim SIRADAG, 2015, p. 1) Therefore, we assume that in its efforts to achieve its ambitions and maximize its interests, as highlighted by the proponent of the realist school of international relations, Ankara has developed a new approach that differs from those of other countries interested in increasing their influence in the region. In this new approach, the use of cultural tools⁵ well explained by constructivist perspectives, can be understood by the fact that, the promotion of interpersonal and intersociety relations that involved local populations is capital to increase the country's visibility.

Following this assumption, it is important to examine the Turkish approach of projection in sub-Saharan Africa before analyzing the cultural component of this approach.

Turkey's approach in sub-Saharan Africa

Academics who have studied Turkey-Africa relations are unanimous on the fact that « Opening up to Africa » has been fundamental in the shifting attitude of Turkey towards sub-Saharan states during these last two decades. Before that, those states were regarded as a far and poor zone, full of problems, and diseases and plagued by civil war (Özkan, 2014, p. 94). This negative perception, one could argue, might be one of the reasons why years after the decolonization movements, Turkey was not engaged in developing deeper political and economic relations with African states⁶. This attitude will change in favor of the elaboration of the action plan that followed the adoption of the late 1990s "Opening up to Africa" policy. Through this plan, Ankara showed that it was involved to open a new page in its relationships with Africa and therefore adopted what can be viewed as a multidimensional and multitrack foreign policy approach.

The multidimensional approach of Turkey's projection in sub-Saharan Africa

In 1998, when Turkey decided to reconsider Africa in its foreign policy, always 4 decades have passed since the first sub-Saharan states got their independence. In order to find its path on a continent where many western and non-western states were already settled, the Turkish government needed to elaborate an innovative approach. In this regard, the adoption of a multidimensional approach which constitutes today's roadmap of Turkey's foreign policy toward Africa was one of the main propositions of the Action Plan for "Opening up to Africa" as a result of the emerging multidimensional foreign policy vision that was initiated by Turkish Foreign Minister of that period, Ismail Cem. Following this plan, the Turkish projection in Africa is made through a triple dimension which is political, economic, and cultural. The latter will be examined in the second main articulation of this work.

The political dimension of Turkish projection

As mentioned since the beginning of this work, the year 1998 marked an impetus in Turkey's engagement in Africa in general and in its sub-Saharan part in particular. The Action plan elaborated that year suggested a real political mobilization which includes the activation of both bilateral and multilateral instruments to increase the presence of Turkey in that part of the world.

these states. For instance, while the UN geoscheme for Africa excludes Sudan, from these countries, the African Union includes it but excludes Mauritania.

⁵ According to the website of the Ukrainian Institut of « Culture and Creativity » consulted in August 2022 at 15:31, cultural tools, can include academic/education, professional, cultural, and student exchange programs, conferences, film industry, theatre art, art exhibitions as well as dance and music that contribute to establish and maintain a constructive dialogue and the creation of a positive image of a country. Moreover, many other scholars like Jaco Beyers, believe that religion should also be considered as a cultural tool given the fact that religion is a "cultural identity marker" (Jaco BEYERS, "Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative", Theological Studies, Pretoria, 2017.

⁶ Many scholars, including Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün, argue that after the decolonization process, Turkey recognized always all the new countries and even opened embassies in some like Ghana. However, the country did not give any special importance to Sub-Saharan Africa.

At the bilateral level, Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün explain that the Action Plan required an upgrade of diplomatic representations in Africa and the multiplication of high-level visits to African countries (Özkan and Akgün, 2010, p. 532). So, under these propositions, Ankara has strived to drastically increase the number of its Embassies across the continent. In Sub-Sahara Africa in particular, some scholars argue that this number almost tripled since the consecration of the « Africa Year » in 2005 (Dahir, 2019, p. 9). Moreover, despite the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the country continued inaugurating new diplomatic missions from 2009 to 2013, in many states including Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Mali, Madagascar, Cameroon, Somalia, Gabon, Chad, etc., with « *Ankara's largest embassy in the world located in Mogadishu* » in Somalia (Dahir, 2009, p. 9). These political and diplomatic actions were accompanied by high-level diplomatic visits and meetings that became frequent with the coming of the AKP into power. Thus, Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a visit to Ethiopia and South Africa; a visit that appeared to be the first-ever visit of a Turkish Prime Ministry in the South of the Equator (Özkan and Akgün, 2010, p. 533).

The Turkish political approach toward Sub-Saharan Africa has also been made through strong activism both as a member of global multilateral organizations and through cooperation with African regional and sub-regional organizations. The country has used platforms offered by the international fora to obtain African states' support to have access to the position of « non-permanent UN Security Council seat for the 2009-10 » (Bilgic and Nascimento, 2014, p. 1). Also, Turkey has strengthened its cooperation with African regional organizations. After obtaining the 'observer status' in the African Union in 2005, the country, three years later, was recognized as a 'strategic partner' of the same organization and it was also admitted as an extra-regional member of the African Development Bank (Bilgic and Nascimento, 2014, p. 1). Alike, Turkey has enhanced its cooperation with subregional organizations by engaging its diplomatic representations in some countries to follow up the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Partners Forum (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) (Tepeciklioglu, 2017, p. 11).

Turkey's economic approach in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Turkey's renewal of foreign policy toward the South of Sahara has also been strongly felt in the economic, and trade areas, as well as in the domain of cooperation for development. During the last two decades, the continent economic growth and potential have been one of the features of its attractiveness (Dahir, 2019, p. 13). It has experienced considerable gains in terms of economic growth despite the various economic crisis that the world has and continue to face. In its Sub-Saharan part, for instance, the average economic growth has been situated at around 5% per year since 2000 and just decrease to 3.1 % in 2018 (World Bank Report 2018). In terms of poverty, the 2019 World Bank Report highlights that it has declined from 54% in 1990 to just 41% in Africa and the prediction for upcoming years is positive despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, Africa is the world's youngest and fastest-urbanizing continent in the world. According to some reports the continent will count an average of 24 million people leaving in its cities from 2015 and 2045. This is more than what is going on in India and China combined⁷. The combination of all these statistics and other African potentials in the domains of agriculture, natural resources, and infrastructures lead to one observation: Africa, especially in its sub-Saharan, constitutes a big market as well as it represents a huge opportunity for economic and trade investments.

Turkey counts on external markets to sustain its economic growth. Hence, increasing economic presence in Africa to pursue its material gains (Donelli, 2018, P. 6) has been one of the main challenges for the country's elites since the adoption of the Action Plan of Opening up to Africa. In other to overcome this challenge and increase its trade and investments on the continent, Ankara had to develop an approach that is different from the other countries' approaches. This approach embodied in the Ankara consensus (Ibid, p. 8), which comprises ideational and practical dimensions, is a mixture of enhancing economic-trade relations and the implementation of humanitarian aid. Economically, Turkey perceives itself as the most appropriate state to promote win-win cooperation with the region. That is why the country intends through its investment and trade projects to spread in Africa the Turkish model of economic development. This means breaking up with the western colonial model and the new emerging

⁷ McKinsey and Company estimation in 2016.

powers type of dependence relations (Ibid, p. 9). In the trade sector, the AKP leaders and the Turkish vibrant business sector consider the region as a suitable market for Turkish small and medium-sized enterprises and traders. Taking advantage of its historical relations with many African states and also its « said-non-colonial past », Ankara has been able in less than twenty years to increase its position out of what could have been considered as its comfort zone. From 2007 to 2017, the Turkish trade volume on the continent has almost tripled to reach \$18.9 billion including exports and imports in 2017, with a total of \$7 billion just for Sub-Sahara states. In the same period, Foreign Direct Investments in SSA, have also increased significantly as many Turkish enterprises have invested in agriculture, construction, textiles, etc.

In the domain of foreign aid, Turkey is strongly engaged in the supply of development assistance and humanitarian aid to SSA states. Here again, the country has demonstrated its ambition to adopt a different approach from what was so far done both by other traditional and emerging donors. More especially, as it considers itself a “humanitarian state”, Ankara seeks through its aid to “move beyond the donor-recipient paradigm” and address individual needs at every level without expecting anything in return (Yunus Turhan, 2021, p. 12). The implementation of this paradigm is characterized by the implication of several actors and channels including government institutions, Turkish local NGOs, and multi-lateral institutions with the main objective to touch people at every stage of society. Comparing this model to the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) approaches, Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioglu explains that, unlike Turkey, China, Russia, and to a certain extent India which are generally hesitant in using NGOs as a channel of their humanitarian aid. Moreover, Russia and India often use multilateral institutions while Brazil mostly prefers technical assistance and technology transfer via the agricultural and health sectors (Tepeciklioglu, 2017, p. 7).

As Turkish-Africa relations experienced a new age in 2005, foreign aid appeared for the AKP elites as a strong foreign policy instrument for its projection in the Subsaharan part of the world. From that period to 2015, the amount of their aid to Africa reached about \$ 183.4 million. However, the volume of this aid started to decrease after the Arab spring notably in 2014 and continued after the military coup of 2016. Given the fact that these two events somehow affected Turkey's foreign policy during the 2010 decade, one could logically think that they have influenced Ankara decided to reduce its aid contribution to the SSA. For instance, it could be argued that the country's aid behavior toward the region in 2016 afterward, was the result of its political elites' ambition to fight back against the Güllen network for its role and implication in the military coup. Yet, as Yunus Turhan explains, the Güllen factor has never been a real determining element in the country's foreign aid attitude in the Subsaharan region. On the contrary, Ankara has always adopted a “carrot but no stick” option regarding the said-foreign aid (Yunus Turhan, 2021, P.2) as it is guided by “material factors, including its economic, security, religious, and geopolitical self-interests” as well as its humanitarian principles (Ibid, P. 14). These are perhaps the determinants that have contributed to erect the continent as the largest Turkish aid beneficiary since 2013 while Somalia became the first country to benefit from it (Dahir, 2019, p. 17).

The multitrack nature of Turkey's projection in Sub-Sahra Africa

The term « multitrack » is regularly used in the domain of conflict resolution to explain how different peacebuilding initiatives taken at different levels in society can be combined to address today's conflicts. In the field of diplomacy, it was generalized in the 1990s by Diamon and McDonald with their Lederach model (Palmiano Federer et al., 2019). The logic of multitrack diplomacy that has influenced both international organizations and state governments' policies is to interconnect public or official diplomacy with many other actors including regional organizations, NGOs, religious groups, media, civics organizations, etc. to achieve a common goal. In Turkish diplomacy, Federico Donelli assimilates the concept to the multidimensionality of its foreign policy. He argues that Ankara's engagement in SSA has shown its uniqueness through the ability to coordinate its civil society, public institutions, and state aid agencies (Donelli, 2018, p.14) as well as Turkish business elites. Therefore, recalling the former Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister and Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu, he reminds us that the trust in Turkish civil society organizations justifies the reason why the AKP government has since 2002 supported their participation in Turkey's projection on the continent.

The will to promote the participation of different stakeholders to guarantee the success of Turkey's engagement in SSA was already noticed in 1998. On this purpose, Mehemet Özkan and Birol Akgün

explain that during the elaboration of the action plan for 'Opening to Africa', ministries, agencies and the private sector contributed to the debates that resulted in the adoption of measures that were proposed to permit the expansion of Turkey-Africa relations. Besides bilateral and multilateral diplomatic representations and high-level meetings with Ankara officials, the Turkey implantation in SSA is effective through states agencies such as the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). The private sector is strongly represented by the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON)⁸, the MÜSIAD, municipalities, and several religious groups and civil society organizations. Private sector representatives and other non-state actors promote transnational relations and Turkey's implantation at all levels from the national to the local. To stimulate the involvement of private actors in this Turkish ambition to increase its role and visibility in Sub-Saharan Africa, there was a need to develop discourse within Turkish society. As we mentioned earlier in this paper, SSA was considered a risky area characterized by diseases, hunger, civil wars, and all bestiality. In domestic politics, new dialogues were built to change this negative perception and present Turkey's activism in Africa as a sign of Ankara's ambitions to acquire global status (Bacik, 2013, p. 10). Thus, many actors including politicians, the new Islamic bourgeoisie, civil society actors as well as mainstream media have been involved to repaint SSA with a positive image⁹ and the global interest it is subject to.

Concerning the contribution of civil society to Turkish visibility in the Sub-Saharan region, it has been facilitated by multiple factors. Among these, the political context characterized by the democratization process that encouraged Turkish civil society to be more involved in the country's foreign policy, the engagement of the Erdogan AKP's government to officially associate them and use their expertise and guidance to achieve government ambitions as well as the changing economic and social dynamics that pushed Turkey to increase its responsibilities and play more role in resolving global problematics (Abdurrahim Siradag, 2015, P. 17). In terms of nonprofit organizations operating on the continent we can list Tuskon, Turkish Schools and Turkish humanitarian aid associations (Genç and Tekin, 2014, p. 105) which also contribute to the cultural influence of the country in SSA.

Cultural dimensions of Turkey's projection in Sub-Saharan Africa

In today's international relations, culture has become an integral part of countries' international projection strategy. Even if some scholars trace the connection between culture and state foreign policy to the ancient Greece Porto-states, many also agree on the fact that this connection became more important in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. With the increasing confrontation between cultures well explained by Huntington in his work related to the clash of civilizations, practitioners, as well as theoreticians, started to inquire about the role of education, arts, media, film, and literature in promoting people-to-people contacts and therefore, improving countries positioning in the world arena. This approach which considers culture as the « third pillar » of foreign policy, falls into what others call cultural diplomacy or international cultural policy. However, using the term cultural diplomacy in this context may seem reductive to apprehending the Turkish cultural model of foreign policy. Because, as Ien Ang et al. suggest in their article « Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest? », cultural diplomacy is a « *governmental practice that operates in the name of a clearly defined ethos of national or local representation, in a space where nationalism and internationalism merge* » (Ang and al., 2015, P. 367). From this definition, cultural diplomacy sounds more like an instrument exclusively used by governments and their institutions. Meanwhile, Turkey's projection is not exclusively done by state actors. Non-state actors including Turkish NGOs and interest groups contribute to the promotion of Ankara's image in the Sub-Saharan region. That is what can be noted after apprehending how these cultural tools are mobilized to sustain Turkey's growing engagements in the Sub-Saharan region.

Apprehending cultural tools of Turkey's projection in the region

Turkey shares some historical cultural bonds with Sub-Saharan Africa which can be traced to the existence of the Ottoman Empire. Among instruments that are associated with the promotion of the country's cultural visibility, this work will focus on education, religion, and the movie industry.

⁸ Türkiye İşadamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu.

⁹ Tamer Taskın a businessman cited by Gokhan Bacik, said in one Turkish journal on April 28, 2011, that "In Africa, there are human beings just like you and me. Of course, there are both good and bad men there. The trick is to pick the good among Turkey Discovers Sub-Saharan Africa ».

International Education

Today more than it has ever been before, culture plays an important role in states' foreign policy as it helps to understand others, their way of life, their custom, and even their language. Many countries use their culture to expand themselves and pursue the ambitions of their foreign policy. However, to avoid being criticized for cultural invasion or cultural imperialism, many of them especially, emerging powers are engaged in what is called cultural exchange. Without being a propagation of culture, cultural exchange appears as a way to have a mutual understanding of cultural particularities whose aim is to create broad and smooth relations. The promotion of this mutual understanding not only serves vital interests but also helps to avoid useless disagreements between countries. It can be made through exhibitions, and public performances; but one of the principal means that is used today is international education. International education is central to the cultural projection of a country because it creates a framework where people from different nationalities meet and learn from each other. By so doing international education contributes to reducing stereotypes as well as promoting intercultural communication. For many years, international education was mainly dominated by a side movement since it was generally provided by the North (Western countries) to the South. This trend has changed over the past last decade since many new global and regional powers have started receiving foreign students through scholarships or exchange programs.

Since 2010, Turkey has become one of the world's new hubs for international education. In fact, during the recent decade, the country has witnessed a spectacular progression following the multidimensional domestic transformations that reinforced its capability to compete with the western cultural influence in the world by promoting and widening a non-Western model of education (Akgün and Özkan, 2020, p. 60). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Ankara cultural projection via education is made by many institutions and associations including the Yunus Emre Institut, the Maarif Foundation, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB: Yurtdisinda Baskanligi), and the Diyanet Foundation. While the last one will be examined later let us take a look at the others.

Yunus Emre Institute

The Yunus Emre Institute was founded in 2007 to promote Turkey, the Turkish language, its history, culture, and art around the world as well as to provide services to people leaving abroad who want to study the Turkish language, culture, art and to improve the friendship between Turkey and other countries through cultural exchange¹⁰. As an institution responsible for the promotion of cultural diplomacy, this instrument started to operate in 2009 (Eksi, 2017, p. 198). Today, the institution is constituted of more than 58 cultural centers abroad that provide Turkish education in cultural centers, Turkology departments, and Turkish teaching.

In the SSA, Yunus Emre Institut centers are present in many countries including Senegal, Somalia, Southern Africa, Ethiopia, etc. Those centers have become a bridge between Turkey and African citizens who are interested to learn more about Turkey. Following the missions described in the law establishing the institute, they diffuse Turkish culture, as well as history, and promote the Turkish language through teaching and various cultural activities. That is what was reminded by Gokhan Kahraman, the head of the YEE in an interview with the Anadolu Agency in these terms « Our institution promotes our culture via courses, exhibitions, panels, and concerts »¹¹. Furthermore, YEE is increasing cooperation with many university institutions to open studies on Turcology as well as carries out projects with local NGOs in the field of culture, arts, and education. On this basis, the institute constitutes an important tool to strengthen Turkey's cultural projection and visibility in SSA as well as the Maarif Foundation.

Maarif Foundation

The Maarif Foundation was created in 2016, to provide « formal education on all levels, including kindergarten and higher education, based on the universal values of humanities ». As Turkey's international education agency, it is the only institution authorized to perform Turkish formal education abroad.

¹⁰ The Yunus Emre Institut's Website was consulted on April 27, 2020, at 5'35.

¹¹ Intervention cited in TRTWorld online News, Culture and Arts headings « Turkish Institute Brings Turkey, South Africa closer: Turkey's Yunus Emre Institute in South Africa promotes Turkish culture », of July 26, 2018, consulted on April 27, 2020, at 6'20.

Around the world, it has the responsibility of managing Turkey's international investments in the education field. The foundation runs almost 323 schools, 42 dormitories, and one university located in 43 countries (Akgün and Özkan, 2020). In SSA, some of the schools run by the Foundation have been, as in many other states taken from the Fethullah movement¹² following the coup attempt of 2016. Furthermore, several memorandums of understanding were signed between the Maarif Foundation and 14 governments in the South of Sahara in order to facilitate its implantation.

As the Maarif Foundation works to « introduce Turkey and Turkish education to the international community » in general and in the Sub-Saharan region in particular, it acts to promote the country's positive image. Thus, it appears as an important tool through which Ankara projects itself through culture and education everywhere that the Foundation operates.

The Presidency of Turks Abroad and related communities

Created in 2010, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) was established to coordinate activities, and strengthen the economic, social, and cultural cooperation of Turks leaving out of the country and sister communities. In the cultural field precisely, the organization seeks to maintain the cultural links of Turkey's diaspora with their homeland by preserving their native language, culture, and identity and assure that those sociocultural values are transmitted to future generations. Also, YTB organizes some programs to help youth abroad to know more about Turkey's culture and history. Another important mission of YTB which is related to our topic is the promotion of expansion through the supply and management of Turkish scholarship.

In reality, Turkish scholarship has not started with the creation of YTB. For instance, as mentioned in the TRTWorld aforementioned report, the Turkish government started to provide educational opportunities to African students in the earlier 1990s. From that period to 2014, more than four thousand Africans have benefited from scholarships from Turkey (Dahir, 2019, p. 13). However, YTB's advent has permitted to rebuild of the Turkey scholarship system to make it more efficient and more sustainable (Akgün and Özkan, 2020, p. 62). Therefore, even though the organization is not too active on the ground of supporting and maintaining contacts with the Turk expatriate communities due to their small in SSA, YTB's implication as a cultural tool of Ankara projection in the region is made through the different long-term and short-term scholarships provided to students. Through this instrument, the institution participates in the training of alumni, which will be ambassadors of Turkish culture in their various countries.

Research centers and universities' programs concerning Africa.

The ambition to strengthen Turkey's positioning and visibility in Africa has been sustained by many universities institutions and various research centers whose objectives are to increase a better understanding of Africa. In this effect, many universities including, Ankara University, Izmir University of Economics, Erciyes University offer Research programs or have some Research Centers on Africa Study (Tepecikligu, 2017, p. 11; Dahir, 2019, p. 14). Likewise, some Think Tanks like the Turkish Asian Centre for Strategic Studies and some foundations like the Afrika Vakfi conduct policy and academic research on Africa-related topics to provide knowledge to policy-makers and other private actors in their ambitions to expand their activities in Africa.

Religion as a cultural tool of Turkey's projection in Sub-Saharan Africa

There is a growing debate about the place of religion in international relations notably concerning its role in shaping a country's foreign policy. In this subsection, our concern is to examine how Turkey uses religion as a cultural tool to strengthen its presence in SSA.

The relationship between religion and culture has been largely explored by academicians. Many of them have either demonstrated how religion is part of an individual's culture while others stressed the fact that religion is a culture in itself (Stephen M. Croucher et al., 2017, p. 1). In some countries like Turkey, religion constitutes a relevant element of the national identity, because it is not just considered as a belief but also a way of living and a way of organizing the society in certain extent. This is the essence of what Hasan Kösebalaban explains in his book « Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization » when he highlights that during the formation of the Modern Republic, Turkish intellectual

¹² Classified by Ankara under the denomination of terror organization, the Fethullah movement is known to have been established in Africa since the 1990s through a powerful network of schools and businesses.

and political elites decided to adopt « a new nation...which would essentially be Muslim but secular at the same time » (Hasan Kösebalaban, 2011, p. 1). In that case, if it is admitted that identity can be considered a source of power and that foreign policy is a reflection of that power, therefore we can agree that religion can be used as a way of projection. This can be directly exercised by the state and its agencies or through other non-states actors with the support of the state. Since 2002, religion has become an important tool of Ankara's foreign policy. Having understood the importance of the historical religious connections that the country had with some African communities during the Ottoman period, the government knew that it has to mobilize this added value to enhance its country's position in the area. That is why taking advantage of their influence as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Turkey has multiplied, since 2006, initiatives to increase cooperation and religious relations between Muslim society in Africa and Turkey.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (Diyanet) is the main institution through which Turkey promotes its unique model of Islam across SSA. Among activities that have been carried out to foster the up mentioned cooperation, it can be highlighted the organization of three meetings gathering representatives of Muslim communities from the two parts respectively in 2006, 2011, and 2019. Diyanet also constructs the Mosque complexes as it has been the case in countries like Djibouti, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad. Furthermore, the institution translates the Coran and distributes it to local communities in the region. To achieve these missions on the field, their Foundation works together with other Muslim and Turkish local NGOs operating in the area.

Turkey's projection through cinematic cultural diplomacy

Cinema or cinematic diplomacy can be said to be rooted in the United States' practice of Soft-power. In fact, during the Cold World War, the U.S. government worked with Hollywood to get American films into foreign markets and keep home any picture that might give a bad impression of the country. Cinema diplomacy is generally related to the concept of nation-branding and is described by Irina Herrschner (Irina Herrschner, 2016) as a visual representation of countries and acts that convey cultural communication and mutual understanding. Since its emergence in the area of soft diplomacy, the concept has gained a lot of importance as films serve as one of the most influential and accessible mediums of cultural diplomacy due to their ability to affect people all around the world. Movies help to educate and sustain relationships, as well as to break stereotypes among citizens from different cultures. If the USA is recognized today as the country that uses the most this instrument, many other states count on movie industries to increase their international visibility and to promote a positive perception of their culture in other communities' minds.

Recently, the Turkish film industry has increased its influence in the international arena in such a way that it is holding the second place in the export rates after the U.S.A¹³. This is the result of the creation of multiple Turkish Cultural Centers around the world by the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) but also the spread of many Turkish series through Yeşilçam. Yeşilçam is an important part of Turkish film diplomacy which delivers through entertainment the country's culture, value, and tourist potential around the world. After having spread across Europe, the United States, and the Arab world, it is now conquering the market in the Sub-Saharan part of Africa. In effect, in recent years, many African viewers are becoming used to Turkish films. Series including Fatmagul, Kara Sevda, and many others are broadcasted on African Tv channels. These movies have contributed to introducing the Turkish way of life in many parts of Africa, and have made people learn some aspects of Turkish culture including meals, names, values, and history. For many people, films have been the first and continue to be the only channel to hear and know about Turkey. As was the case with India with the Hindu series, Africans in the South of the Sahara are getting used to Turkey because they watch Turkish movies.

An Appraisal of the role of cultural tools in the projection of Turkey in Sub-Saharan Africa

The role of culture in Turkish projection in the international arena has been constantly highlighted by state's authorities since 2002. Having understood that improving its influence on the African continent constitutes an important step in its ambitions to increase its regional power and global role, Ankara uses cultural tools to sustain its political, economic, and military goals on the continent. These instruments

¹³ University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy consulted online on 17 May 2020, at 15'25.

help in creating a certain neutral framework that permits the building of a more inclusive relationship that goes beyond officials to include people and societies. Taking into account the growing critics emerging among African youths against western countries, this cultural approach helps not just to « strengthen the prestige » of Turkey but also contributes to promoting mutual understanding between African and Turkish societies and people. These mutual understandings appear as a fundamental condition to establish the base to build sustainable cooperation between the two parts regardless of changing political leadership.

Therefore, it can be considered that international education, religion, and movies seem to be the principal tools through which Turkey hopes to promote mutual trust, inclusive dialogue and reduce a negative image in its cooperation with Subsaharan African countries. However, as it has been stated early, the SSA region is at the heart of the competition between global and regional powers due to its various natural resources, and its economic potential. Moreover, there is a growing pan-African consciousness among its young populations who are engaged to protect their region and denounce all initiatives aiming to exploit their richness and abandon the area in a state of poverty and underdevelopment. For these reasons, the need to build trust and mutual understanding cooperation with other partners around the world is more required today than it has ever been before. Therefore, any country that intends to increase its position and strengthen its prestige in this part of the world should pay great attention to the way and means used to reduce misunderstandings and ignorance among ordinary people in the region as well as on the perception the people have towards the said country.

As it can be perceived, Turkey, like many other Subsahara African old and new Partners, has opted for a diverse cultural approach to extend its influence in the zone. This diversification is made through the number and the kind of tools that are mobilized with this particularity that unlike many of the new actors, including China, Brazil, and India in the Region, Ankara has adopted an approach that puts together government officials, Turkish non-governmental organizations, as well as private sectors. While those countries generally use official channels and government organisms to implement governmental cultural policies, Turkey instead makes a good combination of governmental and non-governmental actors. This approach which is said to have been developed recently is a « branch of a wider public diplomacy agenda, which was institutionalized in 2010 through the establishment of the Office of Public Diplomacy” (Donelli, 2018, P. 11).

Even though it is difficult in the state of the knowledge on the topic to quantify the impact of cultural instruments in the promotion the Turkish deployment in this part of the world, many scholars and politician recognized their importance in the country’s foreign policy and the promotion of its national values. Moreover, it is worthy to highlight the importance of these cultural tools in fighting back against the Fethullah Organization. In fact, due to their role in the military coup of 15 July 2016 (F. Donelli, 2019, P. 15), Turkish authorities have mobilized certain cultural tools to cut their “domestic links and international influence to neutralize their capacity” (Yunus Turhan, 2021, P.2), particularly in the SSA region. This has been for instance the case with the creation of the Maarif Foundation whose one of the main objective is to transfer Gülen-linked schools to a government-affiliated institution (Ibid, P. 9).

Conclusion

After being neglected by Ankara for several decades, the African continent made its comeback in Turkish foreign policy with the elaboration of the Opening up to Africa’s strategic plan in 1998. This plan provided the new dimensions that Turkey has to adopt to increase her engagement on the continent. Alike, it highlighted the necessity to take advantage of some cultural ties that the country has with some African states to achieve its ambitions. Following these propositions, the Turkish government has undertaken an active foreign policy since 2002 which implies the mobilization of many cultural tools whose role is to project a certain perception of Turkey in the south of the Sahara and facilitate a mutual understanding. In this regard, the government of President Reçep Tayyip Erdogan with the contribution of social and private partners has multiplied educational, religious, cinematic institutions, and mechanisms as channels to enhance their visibility as well as increase their role in the region. However, despite the strong mobilization of this means alongside with important political, economical, and humanitarian engagement of Ankara in the SSA, the country’s influence in the area remains low as compared with others countries like China and India. This state of things is understandable because the two parts are engaged in a new process full of apprehensions and worries. That is why cultural tools seem to be important because they help to reduce misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

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