

The Role of Media in Supporting Cultural Diplomacy of Great Power A Case Study of French Cultural Diplomacy in Africa

دور وسائل الإعلام في دعم الدبلوماسية الثقافية للدول الكبرى
الدبلوماسية الثقافية الفرنسية تجاه إفريقيا نموذجا

Birem Fatima *

University of Constantine -3- Salah Boubnider Algeria

Fatima.birem@univ-constantine3.dz

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Abstract:

In today's world, the influence and persuasive power of the media have become crucial factors. Just as weapons were critical in the past, excelling in media today can lead to economic, political, and cultural leadership. This has intensified international competition among great powers, each vying to spread its cultural and economic influence globally.

France stands out as a powerful country that prioritizes the role of media in international relations, especially in its strategic objectives toward the African continent, where it has a traditional sphere of influence due to its geostrategic location and vast resources. Hence, this research paper will examine how media outlets are utilized to advance French cultural diplomacy in Africa.

Keywords:

Africa, Cultural diplomacy, Cultural globalization, France, The media- Directed Media.

Introduction

The media, in all its forms and its supports, plays an important role in contemporary societies. It has become the main source of news, and information transmission, and has put humanity in confrontation with a new era that worthily deserves to be entitled "the age of media sovereignty", under its great impact on the formation of the cognitive and perceptual construction of the individual, as well as his perspective towards the various issues of his society, and how far he would go to analyse and comprehend them also to take the appropriate behaviour toward them, the media is able to change the behaviour and patterns of society, because of its role in managing the affairs of knowledge and organizing the collective memory of the society, and then reformulate its cultural template.

The dimensions of media and communication roles have been increased through satellites and live broadcasts, as well as the unprecedented upswing of several space stations, especially with the widespread use of the internet that linked the societies of the world with one information network that was previously unavailable. These communities, particularly the vulnerable ones, have become increasingly affected by the influence of different media channels, and have confronted those who create and promote this media. Media and communication play a crucial role in relaying intellectual and knowledge-based information to people in a contemporary and effective manner and in shaping society's culture, identity, and perception within the context of cultural globalization.

The global spread of media and communication has sparked intellectual and political debate since the late 20th century. This debate has been fuelled by the rapid proliferation of media outlets in developed countries, and their increasing influence on the Third World. The resulting social and cultural changes require thorough analysis and evaluation across various dimensions.

The global interest in media and communication, its industry, production, marketing, and follow-up, is the greatest evidence of the importance of the media in orienting and influencing the lives of societies and countries, for which the great countries are working to achieve and ensure its continuation. Today, under the banner of globalization and free transcontinental economy and investment, some international media players have entered the playground with agendas that go beyond news, entertainment, and free opinion expression to generate inclusive changes in the basic structures of the states, aiming to disperse any resistance towards domination, even theorists and policymakers have come to rely on the effectiveness of the role that the media can play, in supporting their countries' cultural policy and attaining their countries' external goals and objectives.

France is one of the most prominent of those great powers that have become very dependent on their media, to spread and promote their culture and language throughout the world, and so achieving their strategic objectives in various regions, particularly the African continent, this last is considered to be a traditional sphere of influence for it, and it strives to maintain that leverage by relying heavily on one of

the most important elements of its foreign policy, which is its cultural diplomacy, through which it aims to exert the influence that would ensure the accomplishment of its national objectives and interests in the continent; therefore; it has employed a wide network of media outlets of all kinds; traditional and new ones.

In light of this perspective, the following research question arises:

How do the media contribute to the promotion of French cultural diplomacy in Africa?

This key question is associated with the following sub-questions:

- What is cultural diplomacy? What role does culture play in shaping international interactions?
- What role do the media play in implementing the countries' foreign policy and supporting its diplomacy?
- How does France employ the media in Africa? And what are the underlying objectives?

To answer the earlier research question as well as the sub-questions, we suggest the following hypothesis:

The information and communication technology (ICT) revolution has greatly advanced the media, enhancing its role in expanding and activating French cultural diplomacy. This development supports France's soft power and serves its national interests in Africa.

This study is structured into four main sections to investigate the role of media in supporting French cultural diplomacy in Africa:

- The first section sets a clear foundation by defining the core concepts of media and cultural diplomacy.
- The second section explores the broader role of media in implementing the foreign policy of great countries, providing context for France's specific approach.
- The third section focuses on French cultural diplomacy and analyses its function as a tool for strengthening France's soft power.
- Finally, the fourth section delves into the heart of the study, investigating how media specifically supports French cultural diplomacy efforts in Africa.

To thoroughly analyse this issue, we have used a descriptive and analytical approach to uncover the connection between the use of media by great powers and the success of their cultural diplomacy in advancing their national interests. This approach involves examining and breaking down the different concepts and variables of the study, aiming to understand their importance and making connections to address our inquiries.

Our study was based mainly on adopting a case study approach to gain a deeper and more accurate understanding of the subject. Upon further contemplation, we examined the media's role in supporting France's cultural diplomacy as a great

power toward the African continent. We thus tried to reach general conclusions for the topic of our research as a whole.

Firstly: Conceptual Framework

To begin with, we need to have a clear understanding of the fundamental concepts related to media and cultural diplomacy. This involves exploring the interaction and impact of these two aspects on the international stage. Once we have established this groundwork, we can use this understanding to examine the specific case of France. The analysis will focus on how France leverages media to further its cultural diplomacy objectives, ultimately playing a part in its overarching foreign policy goals.

1. Defining Media

In Arabic, media encompasses publicity, advertising, and news reports pertaining to a subject or originating from a specific source. Its sole purpose is to deliver accurate news, reliable information, and hard facts, allowing individuals to form informed opinions about various issues. The ultimate goal is to provide Enlightenment through data, facts, figures, and statistics.¹

There are individuals who perceive the media as more than just a source of information and education, viewing it as a tool to influence attitudes and mobilize groups toward specific objectives. In essence, the media shapes a vision of the future that motivates people to take action, and has the power to alter the fabric of society.²

Generally speaking, it signifies those means by which mass communication is connected, characterized by the ability to communicate messages at the same time and at great speed to a wide audience of different directions and levels, with the ability to transmit news, information, opinions, and values, capable of creating a public opinion and developing attitudes and patterns of behaviour that do not exist in the audience.³

So the media sometimes works to transmit the facts, and some other times falsify and commercialize them under some forms that serve certain parties, which led to the spread of the phenomenon of international targeted media, which occurred with the emerge of oriented international satellite channels, that are defined as: "Channel directed from a certain State to other States outside its borders", which their programs are in languages appropriate to the populations of the States to which they are headed for, therefore it goes beyond one country's territory to other people of other countries, and must therefore be broadcasted to other countries' people and never to the local audience, so it is issued from foreign borders and broadcasted its programs for an audience outside their country's territory, it aims to reach a particular community or people using its own language and dialect, for the purpose of influencing it psychologically to achieve political, economic, religious or cultural objectives of the source or the sponsoring entity."⁴

Among the significant international television channels targeting the Arab region are "Al-Hurra," an American channel, "BBC," a British channel, "Russia

Today," a Russian channel, the French channel "France 24," and other prominent channels.

2. Defining Cultural Diplomacy

Culture represents the group of aspects of the human communication space, meaning human beings' perceptions of their reality and the significance they assign it to, the projects they adopt to change and liberate it, and the patterns of relations they establish among themselves. Thus, this classification includes everything that touches the ideological, cognitive, and behavioural aspects without discrimination or limitation.⁵

Culture plays a crucial role as a tool for communication and strategic influence in a state's foreign policy. This role has become even more significant in light of the technological revolution and the advancements in media and communication. This is evident through the practice of cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy focuses on the influence of cultural factors on international relations. When a state incorporates culture into its foreign policy, it seeks to exert influence on the global stage by utilizing this "fourth dimension of foreign policy," in addition to the traditional dimensions of economic, political, and military influence.⁶

Furthermore, cultural diplomacy is considered amongst the effective means to achieve the objectives of foreign policy, which is by engaging the soft power resources presented with basics of culture through attraction, persuasion, and the application of political values with virtue internally and externally, in a way to make it legitimate but also moral and ethical authority for the others abroad.

The importance of investing in the promotion of national culture cannot be overstated, remarked the British diplomat Anthony Parsons: "When one is familiar with a people's language, literature, and their love for their country, cities, arts, and its people, one becomes naturally inclined to seek from them, to support them when they are right, and to be more forgiving when they make mistakes."⁷

In this sense, cultural diplomacy requires exploiting the opportunities offered by many sectors, including the arts, education, ideas, history, science, etc., to mould specific thoughts, impressions, and demonstrations.

By analysing the patterns of cultural diplomacy in terms of objectives, countries are divided into two types:⁸

The first type tries to protect and preserve its heritage from extinction or penetration, leading to negative change.

The second type of countries attempt to export their culture and social, political, and economic values. The two objectives can be combined into a single policy, which is closely tied to the foreign policy goals pursued by the state and the level of influence it possesses to actualize these objectives. Within this context, the classification of great powers is based on their cultural and innovative advancements, which are perceived as markers of civilization and humanitarian progress and as contributing to the overall strength of the state. These factors play a role in bolstering

the state's foreign policy efforts and its pursuit of international recognition and prestige.

From this standpoint, a borderline can be defined between the concept of "cultural diplomacy" and the concept of "hegemony" or "cultural imperialism." The first concept is ethical, granting it a high moral value that makes it legitimate and acceptable. In contrast, the last concept lacks this characteristic, as it seeks to eliminate civilized or public political values. This classifies it as a cultural spread or a risk of distortion of cultural relations.

From what preceded; the cultural factor plays a major role in formulating policies and shaping the perceptions of international actors and their behaviour towards various issues, and in distributing international interests, structures, and institutions and the desired or rejected international system, the international system reflects; besides the distribution of material capabilities and interests; the distribution of thoughts and cultures that express the multiplicity of cultural, social and political upbringing (formation), thus its impact is reflected in the patterns of interactions characterizing international politics, as expressed by researcher Nadia Mahmoud Mustafa: "Cultural and civilizational dimensions mean the dimensions connected to the impact of differing worldviews, evaluation criteria, behaviour motivations, and identity foundations. These dimensions influence the following levels: new bases for world division, a driver for international interactions, a determinant of its pattern and the state of the international system, a tool and subject of policy, a determinant of elite and grassroots discourse, and finally an explanatory or justificatory element for alliances and a component of power."⁹

The world has experienced significant transformations due to the changes that affected the process of interaction between the material interest-based, intellectual, and cultural constructions, and a new identity has been shaped by conflict interactions, where the transition has been made from the domination of ideological conflict to cultural and civilizational conflict so that a talk is made about the formation of the pattern of international conflict and the whole international system, and the global geopolitics, then the conversation about the shift from an ideological approach of the study of international politics to a cultural and civilizational approach; becomes a focus of attention for political scholars and decision-makers.

The concepts of "The End of History," "The Clash of Civilizations," and "Globalization" are all applied to American behaviour, as it seeks to internationalize the global system and redefine it according to its perceptions and culture. The United States is deeply committed to shaping the international system in the realms of security, economics, politics, and culture, often without regard for the will of the global community, its cultural and political diversity, and the multitude of individual identities.¹⁰

We can also use the cultural approach to explain many international behaviours, such as the rigid European attitude towards Turkey's accession to the European Union, where it internalizes Europe's image of Islam and the burden of Muslim

Turkey, as the firmness of the West in general and the United States in particular, and their position against Iran's acquisition of nuclear technology, but their silence toward the Zionist nuclear arsenal, etc.

Through these ideas about the role of the cultural dimension in Post-Cold War international relations, we conclude that the pattern of the international system is decided by the main performers – the great powers – who possess the elements of power and who give the system an identity derived from their values, culture, and norms, which in turn maintain their dominance and reproduce their resources. Hence, all these Western slogans hide behind the logic of the domination policy and the fight against the systems of resistance and independence.

Secondly: The Role of Media in Cultural Diplomacy: A Tool of Great Powers

In the past, foreign policy did not value or consider the media. Diplomacy was secretive and undisclosed, and people did not care about international affairs, so international interaction was done by official institutions representing countries .

However, the continuous and great development of the media offices of different countries abroad has clearly shown the importance of the media in serving the policies of foreign countries and their diplomatic objectives, as the media has become one of the most dangerous weapons in the life of Nations, especially after the Second World War, where diplomacy has become public in practice if diplomacy is one of the means of the state to implement its foreign policy, the media has become an effective means like economics, politics and military, whether formally through official state offices or informally, such as the civil offices activated by assemblies of the people.¹¹

If the state has been striving in the past years to communicate its values, and visions to the citizens of other countries through radio stations, cultural centers spread in other countries, or magazines and newspapers, then today it is addressing the public and decision-makers directly, they have opportunities to win by responding to support and promote their aspirations, and the goals of their cultural diplomacy and foreign policy without restrictions.¹²

Diplomacy, as an instrument of implementation of foreign policy that relies on informal mechanisms, still needs the media to break out of the closed circuits and aristocratic atmosphere in which diplomats move and which isolate them from the currents of the world in foreign societies, this makes the reports prepared by the diplomatic staff tend to echo what the highest-ranking responsible wants to hear, which distances the information of these reports from objectivity, because the nature of the diplomat's work does not allow him to communicate with all samples of public opinion of the country in which he works, his reports, therefore, often reflect only limited categories of public opinion.

As a result, the media, whether journalism, radio or television, etc., are considered the best way to influence the foreign public opinion trends for two reasons:¹³

1- It collects, diffuses, disseminates, and broadcasts information and news about daily events in the society in which it is issued .

2- They analyse and interpret information and news. Their interpretations and analyses usually reflect public opinion, and if they do not express it clearly, they participate in creating it .

However, international media serves the supreme national interest of the country, according to the size, weight, and role of a country or another in the existing international equivalents and its influence and impact on the daily evolving world events.

The level and nature of media consumption differ between developed and developing nations. Influential nations leverage these channels to shape the views of policymakers and public opinion in developing countries and advance their own agendas. This is achieved through well-established media and propaganda institutions, utilizing the substantial influx of information from developed countries to still developing countries.¹⁴

All of that is happening in the context of cultural globalization, which means the elimination of cultural boundaries and barriers between nations and societies and the making of the world a small village through modern means of communication, the Internet, and technology.

Might at first appear that cultural globalization is about letting other cultures express themselves and moving from their narrow scope to massive and wide horizons of the world with equal opportunities so that cultures interact with each other within the communications revolution, which facilitates the transfer of cultural and civilizational patterns from one region to another. However, the reality is completely different because the flow of information is going one way from West to East, and there is inequality as a result of media superiority as well as the West's fortification against cultural influences, especially Islamic Arabs, by distorting the image of Islam and Muslims in the eyes of the Western citizen.¹⁵

It can be said that cultural globalization is an attempt to mainstream its cultural model to other societies by influencing cultural concepts, cultural values, and behavioural patterns of the members of these communities through different political means and multiple techniques because it aims to put an end to cultural multiplicity and to withdraw its cultural identity in favour of only one culture which is the cosmic culture, cultural globalization has thus become a real threat to cultural security: values, customs, language, and culture¹⁶.

The objectives of cultural globalization can be outlined in:

- Penetrating different societies, cultivating cultural values and ideas of dominant power .
- Establishing a new cultural and civilizational identity for the hacked communities after dropping inhibition and resistance elements.

- Enforcing an information policy capable of reformulating morals, values, and customs and imposing a new cultural dominance favouring developed countries' interests.

On this basis, great countries devote considerable attention to the media and spend millions of dollars to own them to shape and build individuals' mental or psychological images and control their attitudes and beliefs because those who control information control the world¹⁷.

The media are very influential cultural tools and constitute the primary means of obtaining culture and all forms of creativity for large sectors of people. Although an enormous amount of cultural expression still retains its direct traditional forms, today's mass media provide cultural augmentation and shape the cultural expertise of millions of people. It can, therefore, be claimed that the responsibility assumed by the mass media is enormous, as it not only plays the role of communicating and publishing culture but mainly affects the selection or creation of its content. Culture does not develop by locking itself within its local borders but rather develops by free exchange with other cultures, so free exchange must be based on equality and mutual respect¹⁸.

Since the current global information map indicates the widening gap between the developed industrialized countries in the North, their monopoly on modern means of communication, and between the majority of developing countries in the South and their lack of minimal, sophisticated media means, so there is no doubt that this unfair portrait has negative consequences on culture and cultural conditions in both the countries of center and the marginalized ones, as reflected in cultural globalization¹⁹.

The imbalance in media flow between major and third-world nations has led to the emergence of the so-called one-way flow from top to bottom; this flow, whether it is news, information, programs, or cultural products, mostly goes from States possessing technological potential to the third-world States. This one-way, vertical flow causes extreme damage to the national rights of developing peoples, whether in culture or media fields, which helped to consolidate the various images of media and cultural subservience in particular with the control of major news agencies to collect and broadcast news; this is because its extensive operations all over the world make it a near-monopoly Centre for international news diffusion.

The world receives 80 percent of the world's news from Paris, London, and New York.²⁰ Globalization clearly penetrates identities and cultures not through the old traditional methods such as violence and warfare (hard power), but depending on ideological, political, and cultural concepts, it marginalizes them and replaces them with new concepts (soft power)²¹.

The media's globalization is considered a pressure of time and place because it has made it possible to separate the place from identity, leap above cultural and political boundaries, and reduce feelings of affiliation or belonging to a specific place²².

This mechanism - the media- has the influential power that underpins globalization with its different tendencies and trends. Despite the advantages of information circulation, it has been transformed into a destructive device. It is likened to an informatics bomb because of its negative effects on forming ideas, ethics, and values. It establishes a fragile knowledge structure based on superficiality and Westernization²³.

Thirdly: Cultural Diplomacy: A Means to Amplify French Soft Power

In varying degrees, all countries practice soft power policies as an element that integrates with investment in military and economic fields of a purely material nature, so the Great countries provided the main tasks of planning, proposing, and following up the implementation of programs of exercising soft power, to the mechanisms of the so-called cultural diplomacy, which represents the foremost feature of soft power politics; that have been inspired by their long-standing historical experiences; lessons and theoretical abstracts; to crystallize the concept of soft power as regards to international relations in the new age.

Therefore, the development of cultural diplomacy institutions in their different patterns and forms has become indispensable for the expression of the State's foreign policy through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or through a National Council of Culture comprising all cultural institutions in the country and abroad.²⁴ Cultural exchanges grow and develop outside the scope of the Government's action: Tourism, languages, literature, arts, etc., but these elements are not diplomatic, and do not establish soft power unless they are integrated into the context of thought-out programs, and strategies for a given country that places them within its national interests.

To point out French cultural values and norms are considered as one of the structural and organic parameters of its foreign policy that define the philosophy of its foreign policy over years and decades by believing in the need to preserve a distinct cultural and linguistic universal position, particularly at the level of its historical sphere of influence. Since the French Revolution, there has been a dual idea that France is the living expression of universal values and is responsible for disseminating them into the world. It was striking that despite the diversity of rulers, different regimes, and the governing majority, France considers itself delegated to an important achievement, which is meant for the benefit of all humankind: that is, the task of disseminating its own civilizational, social project throughout the world, this mission has made France a global force with an unchallenged human dimension.

France offers a model of a State with a soft power based on traditional cultural and linguistic diplomacy. It benefited from its pioneering in literary and intellectual history since the Enlightenment and was devoted to the French Revolution. In this context, France was the first to introduce the term "cultural policy" into the language and make it popular,²⁵ from the time when monarchs and in particular François I (1515-1547) and "Louis XIV" (1643-1715), were France's first protectors and defenders of literature and arts in France. This policy emerged due to the steadfast

pursuit of the royal and republican authorities to care for spiritual, artistic, and creative literary activity; it considers their national wealth rightly. From these attitudes, the idea of political, then legal, and finally financial and administrative responsibility of France towards the arts and creativity in general has gradually evolved. The foundation of "The Academy of the French Language" by "Cardinal Richelieu" in 1653, could be regarded as the first institutional appearance of French cultural policy to promote French thoughts throughout Europe.²⁶

Diplomacy has been viewed as a vital organized sector of public policy in France, which showed a particular interest in its cultural influence abroad from the end of the 19TH century to the beginning of the 20TH century; in this era, France was among the first pioneers in this field. It attempted to regulate its cultural spread worldwide, by establishing unified rules for teaching French abroad by founding "The French Association" in 1883.²⁷ In 1909, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established "the Office of Schools and Services" abroad, which regulates conventions between France and other countries to determine the conditions of teaching the French language*. At that point, especially in the time between the First and Second World Wars; French cultural institutions were spread around the Mediterranean region, and expanded to South America and the rest of Europe, to reach the Asian continent among which we list: Florence Institute in 1908, London Institute 1910, Lisbon Institute 1928, Stockholm Institute 1937, etc.²⁸

French efforts in this context were strengthened by establishing a strong institution for managing cultural activities affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The General Department of Cultural Relations," in 1945. France, therefore, considered cultural relations in French foreign policy to be part of its relations with other countries. Thus, the position of a cultural counsellor has been created in all French embassies since 1947.²⁹

However, France's cultural policy acquired its final institutional form during President Charles de Gaulle's reign, with the founding of the "Ministry of Cultural Affairs" in 1959. Since then, the position of "Minister of Culture and Arts" has been held by many prominent French statesmen who had great reputations in culture and arts in France, but the most important part of the development of the idea and institutions of French cultural policy was performed by both Ministers of Culture: "André Malraux" as a theorist and "Jack Diwamil" as an administrator and reformer. In this context, "Malraux" says: "There are nations that become stronger only when they become stronger in the eyes of others,"³⁰ referring here to the power of French culture and its role in shaping and highlighting the role and place of France universally.

The new international phenomena brought about by globalization, have threatened societies more than countries. The countries see their functions changing without a review of their sovereignty.³¹ This has generated a significant challenge for French cultural diplomacy, because France is well aware that the withdrawal of great countries begins with their exit from the sphere of soft influence over the flow of

intellectual theories, and their weak ability to formulate or model humanity according to their perspective.

There is a significant concern among French decision-makers and diplomats: France is declining in the battle of cultural and linguistic outreach, which is strategically interpreted as a drain on the resources of overall power, that determine France's political and economic competition in the world of great power. The French political mind retains a firm conviction that soft power and cultural diplomacy, as a tool, is connected to France's future in the map of international powers strategically and economically.

In light of these transformations and the challenges they carry to French privacy and cultural role, French efforts are focused on re-establishing their cultural diplomacy, aiming to profit from globalization and thus end the Anglo-Saxon spread.³²

These efforts began at the time of "Charles de Gaulle", when the "Supreme Council of the French Language" was established in 1966 to find an alternative to substitute the English words that swept into French society. In February 1986, President "Mitterrand" announced the establishment of the first Francophonie summit in Paris in the presence of 42 countries' delegations. The French Government also announced in June 1988 the appointment of a "Minister of the Francophonie," to organize and enhance the French language.³³

Cultural centers and French schools in 137 countries, are considered among the most active centers for promoting French culture, and language and for the effective wherewithal of France's presence in these countries. The number of French schools abroad reached 540 in 2022;³⁴ it receives more than 310,000 students. It activates and manages French education abroad under the guardianship of "the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;" which has the dual task of ensuring the endurance of the public service for the education of French children overseas, and contributing to spreading the French language and culture abroad.

France's international activities in the audio-visual field are an important part of its strategy to spread its values, and culture worldwide and to share its perspective with the world. French cultural diplomacy is based on the following main themes:

- AFP News Agency (French News Agency): is one of the most important and largest international news agencies, formerly known as the "Havas Agency"; which is considered as the very first founded agency in 1835 by the Frenchman "Charles Havas." Advanced electronic technology is used in news-providing processes, and it is interested in political, economic, and cultural topics through a network of reporters covering 165 countries on every continent of the world.³⁵
- International media such as TV5 Monde, viewed by more than 220 million families in 24 hours, France 24 by 200 million families in 24 hours, Radio France International RFI and its Arabic-speaking sub-station Monte Carlo International.
- French cinema is the most widespread in the world after American cinema, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is accompanying some French film production projects

abroad in partnership with specialized institutions, such as “UniFrance” Film, the Bureau of Music Export, etc.³⁶

- Books in France also lead the cultural sector with sales of approximately 3 billion euros per year; foreign markets represent 25% of the workload of French publishing houses. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, therefore, accompanies the activities performed by the publishing sector in the world's markets in close cooperation with the International Bureau of French Publishing Houses, and through these activities, the Ministry looks forward to encouraging ideas, authors and francophone publishing houses in the south, and their promotion in order to preserve the dynamism of French publishing houses as regards export in a way that shows an extreme cultural competition.³⁷ In addition to the roles assigned to 'la Francophonie' to enhance and disseminate the French language.

Fourthly: The Role of Media in Implementing French Cultural Diplomacy in Africa

The media in France is an important force, influencing both the essence of national policy and the process by which it is formulated, particularly regarding foreign policies, through the way these media organs operate their business internationally, and which has been most visible in the media's relationship with the French regime, and the relation of both of them with national governments around the world.

All this has led to the media's close association with the French political system. The media process has been allowed to access decision-making procedures in France unofficially, making it the Government's supporter regarding foreign policy and international relations, in which the media has become the mediator between the countries that France relies on to explain the nature of its relations with the other countries, through direct contact with the masses and peoples using media as a mechanism for disseminating and enhancing its orientations, culture, and language, Strengthening its international role and for further linking and dependency between it and other countries, especially Africa.³⁸

Franco-African relations relied on their historical advantage since France maintained its presence in Africa, based on adopting a distinctive foreign policy towards it in general and Francophone Africa in particular. The words of the late President “François Mitterrand”, do not escape French decision-makers and policymakers' memory: "France does not exist in the twenty-first century without Africa."³⁹

Africa is, therefore, considered France's first strategic project, which explains the eagerness of all French leaders to maintain a sustained and strategic solid presence of their country in Africa at all levels: military, economic, political, and cultural.

Indeed, French cultural interest in the African continent has been characterized by investing in soft power tools, and the need for public diplomacy in order to control mental perceptions through media and cultural exchanges, as well as even

educational curricula under the pretexts of cultural and political reform. This is because of the importance and vitality of the cultural dimension in political direction because it works in secret and seeks to try to change ideas, attitudes, and intellectual perceptions, thereby securing French interests permanently and ensuring the flow of African resources, consequently avoiding the losses often caused by direct military invasion, this can be described as the policy of: "cannons' suppression and continual benefits".

Even though African countries have gained their political independence from the French colonial domination however, the observer of the cultural, political, economic, and civilizational landscapes, in general, recognizes that the autonomous movements have not achieved their main and central objectives, especially if we know that French still reigns in these countries, and that the largest influential newspapers are French-speaking. The number of viewers of French channels through the concave antenna of Africa's population is very large, according to a French study that recommended a field plan to link the inhabitants of its former African colonies with the visual media in particular.⁴⁰

As a result, since the middle of the last century, France has invested big money in directed media in order to feed the African cultural system with French: radio programs, informational TV shows, theatre, and music to graft the French cultural sensitivity in the region's inhabitants, in a way to give greater credence to the cultural and civilizational project advocated by the ruling political elite which will necessarily support the success of the French cultural project, which inevitably does not separate the breaking of the national language and the psychological shattering of Africans towards their civilization.⁴¹

The French Government relies on a range of media adapted to African societies in order to achieve this. This includes French International Radio, Monte Carlo International Radio, the renowned French-speaking magazine 'Jeune Afrique', and the French news agency, which has a widespread presence throughout Africa.⁴²

Moreover, the French Government attaches great importance to the 'la Francophonie' field and continues controlling its ancient colonies' linguistic and cultural composition. In 2006, France reinforced its TV package with 'France 24', the Project launched by "Jacques Chirac" in his second term. A lot has been said about the prolongation and huge budget assigned to that project by the French Foreign Ministry. In addition, the TV5 Monde channel is viewed by more than 220 million households in 24 hours.⁴³

Major and long-standing newspapers such as "Le Monde" and "Le Figaro" were also interested and launched copies adapted to Africa. They guided a group of journalists to care for the continent and supported their expertise in investigating. They also launched Canal Plus, a channel specializing in African affairs under the name "A +."

Similar to the European multilingual channel "Euro News", concerned with international and external European affairs, which launched at the beginning of 2016

the African version "Afrique News" in Lyon (a French city). These are signs of the continued encroachment and media mobilization towards Africa, where France is one of the influential and powerful forces, especially with its military presence in more than one country. "Radio Africa", launched in 1981 with French funding, is also considered an important station in France's region.

In addition, France has constantly financed the French-speaking local African press since independence. It also provides all facilities for distributing these newspapers in French territory. Many French-language newspapers continue to distribute, publish in, and benefit from publicity despite the scarcity of demand in African societies.⁴⁴

The media is therefore seen as an instrument of influence and propaganda to dominate the minds of societies and repeat ideas and incidents, providing psychological and public cover for more useful practice for the French Government to erase the local language and the cultural identity of these peoples; seeking to attach them culturally to the French civilization, planning to achieve the economic and geopolitical interests of France in this region. France and the West, in general, admit only the civilization of the white man who should lead and submit to the world for his own benefit. Culture and civilization can be recognized only within these limits, namely, the limits of subservience and cultural and civilizational attachment.

Conclusion:

In this study, we aimed to explore how great powers utilize the media to advance and implement their diplomacy to support national interests. We specifically focused on the French model as a case study. France relies heavily on the cultural dimension of its foreign policy to accomplish its strategic goals, particularly in regions such as Africa.

Upon thorough analysis of the relationship between the media and cultural diplomacy of great powers, with a specific focus on France, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

- The gap today exists between those who control the use of media discourse for their interests and objectives and those who receive it. The power of the media's influence has been and remains under the control of the great powers—advanced and dominant politically, economically, culturally, and informatively—over the group of Third World nations whose image, civilization, and culture have been tarnished.
- The cultural policy towards Africa in the French approach was based on a war of ideas to control mental perceptions through various media. Using the various audio-visual media as one of the most important soft power tools, the French described and defined events and topics from their own perspective within the framework of the so-called cultural diplomacy.
- The French media simplifies the stereotyping of tastes and relations to fit the French plans in the region culturally (pro forma), politically, and economically

(esoteric) because, eventually, the entire dimensions of French foreign policy cannot be separated.

- The modern Western world, including France, is a world of authority and money through its military and economic institutions but also a world of knowledge through the cultural, civilizational, cognitive, value, and psychological models it produces, so confronting this world does not have to be with conventional weapons, it needs to construct knowledge equivalent to that of the Western world order. It also needs to build media parallel to the West's media authority. Indeed, African countries must focus if they are willing to truly emancipate because confronting significantly developed weapons with rudimentary and ancient weapons will resolve the battle from the outset before it begins.
- It is important to recognize that we are dealing with a phenomenon that is not only informative but also deeply rooted in history and culture. This phenomenon has played a significant role in shaping its industry and establishment. However, without African countries beginning to dismantle the elements that have contributed to its development, based on their religious, historical, and civilizational requisites, as well as psychological and informational needs, it will be challenging to address and resolve it.

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