

PRE-COLONIAL DIPLOMACY AND RELEVANCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF "NATIVE SENSE" IN THE PRACTICE OF CONTEMPORARY DIPLOMACY AMONG NIGERIAN DIPLOMATS

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ABSTRACT

This paper was aimed at highlighting the importance of native sense in practice of modern diplomacy. This was done by first examining various diplomatic displays and alliances secured by Nigerian Precolonial Sovereigns, in pursuit of economic, military, territorial, political and socio-cultural interests. Native sense emanates from various customary dictates and oral traditions of distinctive communities. From the paper, precolonial Nigerian rulers or their associates displayed native ingenuities in both internal political relationship and external affairs. Since the inception of consistent democracy in Nigeria in 1999, diplomats of both career and non-career professional backgrounds have contributed immensely in advancement of Nigeria's interest abroad, most of which involved application of native sense strategies against doctrinal diplomatic bureaucracy. In conclusion, the paper noted that most contemporary diplomats that conducted external affairs with absolute native sense principles often achieve better results, in spite of the backlash that such move may attract.

Key words: diplomacy; native sense; diplomats

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy is an old practice that has existed among entities of different era, irrespective of their levels of geopolitical configurations. With divergences in material, natural, mineral and even human resources, states have continued to interact outside their borders, with the sole aim of making up for their domestic inadequacies and/or, to enthrone dominance. This, concisely, is what diplomacy, in its elementary sense, implies. Suffice to assert that, diplomacy as represented in international relations is nothing but politics at the inter-states level. As such, it follows the same principles of "who gets what, how, when, where and why? By extension, diplomats are mere international "politicians" that had to determine how their various states transverse on the pools of interests and how to achieve them among others, who have their own wants. One important personal toolkit that has helped most diplomats to thrive in this competitive order is "native sense". Native sense as a term in diplomacy here has no precise western connotation. Most literatures on modern diplomatic skills tend to be channeled toward western ideas and experiences, making the history of diplomacy look solely like western origination and affairs. Thus, in induction, training and other capacity building for most diplomats, western models are used as basic guide. This development overtime had obliged most Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) of many climes, to function in predictable manners, in piloting diplomatic affairs at the international level. It is indeed not disputable that western diplomatic models, were developed by inherit traditional principles, largely displayed by individual scholars and practitioners, that championed them at different times of history.

Naturally, therefore, contemporary diplomats of western extraction can comfortably maneuver modern diplomatic waves, in such a manner, non-western diplomats will be left to toy behind consciously. Largely, application of the idea of "native sense", is a paradigm shift on how an individual diplomat perceive every diplomatic situation, or condition through an inherit knowledge base. Employment of native sense in this light is partly an aggregate of diplomatic knowledge, displayed by traditional or indigenous peoples in the pursuit of soft landings in everyday negotiations and mediations for treaties and other diplomatic benefits.

Historical antecedents show that many centralized and non-centralized states, flourished in the landscape that is known as Nigeria today. Evidently, each one of these ancient societies vigorously practiced diplomacy in every branch of it that is exercise nowadays. Apparently, those indigenous diplomats were not schooled or trained in western models of modern diplomacy, yet they entered into admirable treaties with other states, for geopolitical, military and economic reasons. This does not in any way suggests that they did not pass through some sort of educational processes. Culture and traditions provided them with veritable knowledge to pursue diplomacy, in a manner that was quite distinguished. Most treaties secured by these pre-colonial states of Nigeria, were substantiation of the ingenuity of native sense in diplomacy.

However, several questions could be raised now. For instance, what are the correlations between treaties entered by these pre-colonial Nigerian sovereigns and the practices of modern diplomacy, since large number of such diplomatic outings were not documented? What is the relevance of indigenous or traditional knowledge, to the practice of contemporary diplomacy? Can Nigerian diplomats juxtapose between native sense and western model in the conduct of diplomatic affairs abroad today? Against this backdrop, this paper examined various diplomatic displays and alliances secured by Nigerian Precolonial Sovereigns, in pursuit of economic, military, territorial, political and socio-cultural interests. This is aimed at highlighting the relevance of native sense in the practice of modern diplomacy among Nigerian diplomats.

Concept of Native Sense (the African Model)

Native sense in African diplomacy in more like a virtue, every presupposed diplomat carried along. Since there was no formal training for pre-colonial Africa diplomats, native sense served more like resounding piece of learning experiences these statesmen had to employ in the service of their sovereign's diplomatic quests. It is therefore a domesticated knowledge impulse, which surrounds an individual thought, actions and inactions in matters of socio-political relations. The concept of native sense actually has not really been expository in literature as it concerns modern diplomacy. It is believed to have been mentioned in literature by Ambassador Jolaoso Olujimi, on his description of qualities of a good diplomat. However, there was no clear-cut definition of this concept in respect to modern diplomacy, either from the supposed "originator" nor any other scholar in literature¹. This nevertheless, does not imply that the concept of native sense in diplomacy is void or nebulous.

Native sense in its rudimentary stance has both ethnological and sociological characteristics. Therefore, native sense as conceptualized in Foreign Relations is just a reminder of the individualism that exist among state-actors, in spite of the overwhelming internationalism at the beginning of the 21st century. As such, it exposit the natural wisdom or traditional knowledge-set that every individual is profoundly endeavored with. Bearing this in mind, native sense could be defined as "the application of traditional knowledge whims in pursuing national gains among other competitors in the international arena, no matter how primitive, unfashionable or even exacting such knowledge practice would appear to an onlooker"².

It is a common knowledge that most often Foreign Service actors tend to be compelled to think and act in some "unconventionally" agreed pattern, which constantly rob certain states of diplomatic gains. Worthy of note, the individualism that exist among actors in the international system, is the byproduct of distinctive cultural or traditional environments. Irrespective of the audacious globalized knowledge sharing, culture and traditions still defines the character and instinct of every individual actor within the international system. This is what native sense obliquely supposed to plunge in the mind stream of diplomats; as it serves as a consciousness of self-knowledge, awareness of traditional intuitions and regular awakening of nativism in matters of international relations.

Literally, native sense emanates from various customary dictates and oral traditions of distinctive communities. This could be found in tales, folklores, myths, adage, proverbs, and other traditional intellectual properties. Such knowledge is largely gained through sociological processes beginning

from the family to the larger society. Importantly, this knowledge is not solely domiciled in a particular community enclave, but it is defined by traditional worldviews, rather than formal universal acquisitions. Little wonder the ardent diplomatic skills of personalities like Otto von Bismarck (the renowned German Chancellor) have been attributed to some family virtues and other early social interactions he had, including his religious faith.

Today modern diplomacy is mainly anchored on the principles made manifest by early European diplomats like Bismarck. Clearly, surrounding diplomatic ideas, thoughts, principles and practices around these early western statesmen's inventiveness, justified the usefulness of native sense concept in modern diplomacy, since these renowned diplomats were good students of their native acquaintance. However, replicating the same native sense models in modern diplomacy, by amplifying and integrating early African diplomats' resourcefulness has become a serious problem, partly due to poor documentation of such statesmanship, as well as overburdening western notions, found in the embers of colonialism. Nevertheless, of a truth, many precolonial African rulers, proved their diplomatic prowess, through homegrown knowledge.

Pre-Colonial Sovereigns of Nigeria and Diplomacy

Practice of international relations in pre-colonial African societies was largely guided by customary laws³. These laws were not in any way deliberated upon or written down, but they were product of long traditions and cultural practices, that synchronized external relations among vast of African entities. It is therefore a matter of mutual cultural understanding that such laws overtime became a domiciled African version of what is termed "international law" today⁴. Pre-colonial African diplomatic practitioners were overtly aware of these customary laws and its sanctity to the smooth conduct of diplomatic relationships at the time.

Like every other precolonial African community, various sovereigns that constituted what is today Nigeria, pursued diplomatic relations within their immediate geographical neighbors and other states of interest beyond the regions. In as much as vast of the Nigerian states (whether centralized or non-centralized), had systemic ways of attaining to diplomatic needs as they arose in the course of their daily and monumental activities, cultural and traditional awareness formed the basis of diplomatic practice. Even though most of the external relationship that existed among precolonial Nigerian entities most especially the centralized states were largely, military in nature, the place of diplomatic intrigues was quite noticeable. In both internal political relationship and external affairs, native ingenuities were displaced by rulers or their associates who acted in different capacities. To a large extent, every situation or development, provided opportunity for prove of diplomatic intelligence.

In Benin Kingdom, the unfortunate demise of Oba Ehengbuda who drowned in the lagoon while on an expedition changed the status of the subsequent Obas, which also influenced Benin diplomatic thrive. Following the Ebengbuda experience, the person occupying the position of Oba became "divinified"⁵ which also made messages from him "sacred" and hallowed by all entities around and beyond. The preeminence of the Oba gave Benin sustained centuries of diplomatic relations with the Dutch, the English and the French merchants, who hardly see the Oba because of his seclusion⁶. Apparently, Oba Akenzua took advantage of European merchants' engrossment in Benin goods, such as ivory, cloth and slaves, to reach diplomatic entities, which involved the supply of firearms to his forces and the collection of tolls, for shipment of goods in the 17th century⁷. By secluding the Oba personality, a persuasive force was placed on the Benin diplomacy, as his message had to be largely conceived as "close-end mandate" making it difficult for unnecessary bargaining by all and sundry. Putting this side by side with the diplomatic experiences of other pre-colonial Nigeria sovereigns like King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Iskeri, Kosoko of Lagos etc, and such native sense could be more appreciated.

Similarly, divinity played an important role in the diplomatic plots among the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria. The Arochukwu people of the region harnessed the purported prowess of their domiciled deity known as "Ibinu-Ukpabi" to penetrate vast of the region and beyond. The

Arochukwu deity was largely believed to be potent and “veracious” in sanction of judicial adjudications, which caused great amount of awe to people of the region and beyond. As such, most Arochukwu natives cashed into this awful reverence of their deity, in diplomatic missions that negotiated trade and territorial occupation. No sovereign completely rejected the diplomatic request of Arochukwu emissaries cum merchants, because they presented themselves as “children of the gods”. Thus, they were exceptionally given unconditional trade passage and territorial settlements in vast areas of the region and beyond. The efficacy of this diplomatic maneuver, explained the influence of the Arochukwu people, and why the British massively attacked them in 1901 as part of the conquest effort in Igbo hinterland⁸.

Meanwhile, in other climes of the pre-colonial Nigerian area where diplomacy was blunt, random peaceful and military diplomatic strategies were employed. For instance, in Borno where Islamic tradition was entrenched via contact with the Arab world, diplomacy was pursued with tenets of Islam. This is why the Saifawa Mais, had series of distinctive treaties, with sovereigns outside the region⁹. Mai Idris Alooma in this light entered into diplomatic treaties with the Sultan of Murzuk and the Ottoman kings in the 17th century. Such agreement enabled the Mai to acquire mercenaries and Turkish machetes used against external aggression from the Tuaregs and Bargirimi. In the same vein, the Turkish musketeers were deployed against internal insurrections of the Ngizim and Mandara people¹⁰. Besides the instrumentality of Islamic diplomatic jurisprudence, Mai Idris Alooma’s diplomatic thrives outside his shores, were principally acknowledged to be also enhanced by his vast ideas on native sense. This apparently placed him as one of the most successful rulers of the old Kanuri kingdom, both in domestic and external affairs. According to John E. Lavers, during the reign of Mai Idris;

the interest of the Borno government extended beyond the lands of the Sudan.

Missions were dispatched to renew ties with northern Africa and to seek */es merchandise d’Europe*¹¹

Furthermore, in the 19th century, El-Kanemi was another personality that demonstrated erudite diplomatic skills in the external affairs around the Sudanic region and beyond. In the course of his military quest, he secured a treaty with the Fiez in North Africa, for the supply of military hardware to Borno. This deal largely contributed in the military supremacy Borno enjoyed at the time in the Central Sudan balance of power. The acquisition of military equipment mostly aided El-Kanemi’s timely suppression of the recalcitrant Fulani Jihadist elements and their black Shuwa counterpart¹². Above all, the later diplomatic intrigues that played out in the internal political affairs under El-Kanemi’s watch, showed his good knowledge of native sense, that never pinched him against the ruling Mais, even when it was obvious, he was a de-facto hegemony of the kingdom at the time. Through pragmatic traditional knowledge, El-kanemi maintained balance of power within the region- in spite of the fact that he deposed and re-enthronement Mai Dunoma ibn Ahmed in 1814. This was a feat that could not be sustained after his demise, as internal and external wars continued in Borno kingdom, until the invasion of the Sudanic Warlord-Rabi in 1893¹³.

Instances of Application of Native Sense in Contemporary Nigerian Foreign Mission 1999-2015

Since the inception of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, foreign relationships have been strengthened as well. In this light, diplomats of both career and non-career professional backgrounds have contributed immensely in advancement of Nigeria’s interest abroad, most of which involved application of native sense strategies against doctrinal diplomatic bureaucracy. Ambassador Eddy Onuoha, a non-career diplomat who served as Nigeria’s Ambassador to Hungary between 2012 and 2015, compelled the Nigerian government to adopt the principles of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 on Hungary. Article 2 of Convention clearly stated that “the establishment of diplomatic relations between States, and of permanent diplomatic missions, takes place by mutual consent”¹⁴. In other words, countries were supposed to operate embassies mutually.

However, upon his posting to Hungary, Ambassador Eddy Onuoha was directed to go to Cairo (Egypt), Nairobi (Kenya) or London (United Kingdom), to obtain Hungarian visa, because they do not have embassy in Nigeria¹⁵. After obtaining his Hungarian visa from London and subsequently went to his post, he expressed his displeasure on the absence of any Hungarian mission in Nigeria, therefore advocated for an opening of such mission in Nigeria or Nigeria will close down her own mission there, notwithstanding the fact he was posted there¹⁶. In the light of this, career diplomatic staff under him observed that this would involve many inter-governmental memos between Nigeria and Hungary¹⁷. However, on his own, he decided to adopt "unconventional" means to achieve his objectives. Through diplomatic events, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister became his friend and he informed him of his plan to suggest to the Nigerian government to shut down Nigerian Embassy in Hungary if they do not open theirs in Nigeria. On this note, the Special Assistant informed the Prime Minister on the development, who summoned the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the matter and directed the reopening of Hungarian mission in Nigeria. As expected, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary felt the Ambassador bridged protocol by not writing to them first. Thus, as a matter of protocol, Ambassador Onuoha directed his staff to write official memo to the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to communicate to their Hungarian counterpart on the matter¹⁸.

It is important to note that by this time, many Nigerian students were studying in Hungary. Davison University alone had over five hundred Nigerian students. Therefore, it was a lot of financial and travelling burden to Nigerian students and parents to go to Cairo before obtaining Hungarian visa. This largely informed the decision of the Ambassador to sue for the reopening of the Hungarian Embassy in Nigeria¹⁹.

Ambassador Jerry Ugokwe a non-career diplomat also contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria's diplomacy within the period under review. Ambassador Ugokwe who served as Nigeria's ambassador to Austria from 2007 to 2010 worked hard to achieve the goals of citizen's diplomacy as mandated by the President Yar Adua's government. With the adoption of native sense strategy, he vigorously created a database for Nigerians living in Austria, by going from church to church and mosque to mosques where Nigerians worship. Almost all Nigerians in Austria were registered in the data base of the mission through the effort of the ambassador, and birthday wishes were sent to Nigerians from the embassy, to remind them how they are cherished by their home country. In the same vein, based on the native principles of "communalism" Ambassador Ugokwe attended events organized by Nigerians, individually and collectively. He also visited shops, business places and homes of most of the Nigerian indigenous community leaders in Austria, in order to give them that required sense of belonging as it is the practice in Nigerian communities²⁰.

In the bid to fulfill his Station Charter as instructed in the President Goodluck Jonathan's foreign policy thrusts, Ambassador Okafor reorganized the Unions/Associations of Nigerians living in Vietnam and attended their meetings, where he advised, encouraged and admonished them positively, especially in relation to crime using local adage. Many Nigerians in Vietnam according to Ambassador Okafor were lured into crime under circumstances beyond their explanation. Thus, the Ambassador personally visited all the Vietnam prisons where Nigerians were held²¹. Moreover, while visiting the Nigerian prisoners, Ambassador Mathias Ojih Okafor using native concept of "be your brother's keeper" provided them with some token amount of money, which partly came from donations by other Nigerian nationals²². Nevertheless, through relevant diplomatic channels based on native knowledge of how prisoners are often treated, Ambassador Mathias Ojih Okafor ensured that Nigerian prisoners were not mal-treated or denied any basic need, while they were in prison. To the extent, that whenever the Vietnamese prison officers received the news of his coming, they checked around to ensure that all complains from Nigerian prisoners were met²³.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is eminent that diplomacy is more of creative act, done in astonishing manner. Although western whims appear to be predominant in defining modern diplomacy among

practitioners, precolonial diplomatic experiences also show the nitty-gritty of domesticated knowledge-base in Africa. However, fashioning diplomacy to suit times and period is a common phenomenon that has distinct diplomats in the course of history. Unfortunately, in trying to adjust to the emerging realities of diplomacy, most modern diplomats often neglected or relegated some of the core-centers of knowledge found in native sense, thereby making it more or less a routine order instead of a tact.

In other words, most contemporary diplomats that conducted affairs with absolute native sense principles often achieve better results, in spite of the backlash that such move may attract. Importantly, good number of renowned diplomats of all times, displayed high level of native sense that apparently distinguished them.

Above all, native sense create coloration in practice of modern diplomacy. This is against the backdrop that native sense brings the human dynamics in peace process and conflict resolution. As such, it is a good instrument that give room for complete expression of notions and the attainment of suitable diplomatic atmosphere devoid of uneven persuasion, copycat attitude and stringent "traditionalized" practice.

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