

Cultural Diplomacy as a Strategic Instrument of Moroccan Influence in Africa: Dynamics of Identity Construction and Geopolitical Projection

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ABSTRACT: This article is an attempt to explore the role of cultural diplomacy in Morocco's relations with Africa and examines in what manner or way culture has become a strategic instrument of influence, cooperation, and international projection. Within this line of thought, it identifies the ways in which Morocco mobilizes its plural cultural identity, religious heritage, artistic production, and educational cooperation to strengthen its presence as part of the African continent. Furthermore, the study analyzes the impact of globalization as well as digital transformation on cultural diplomacy, at the sametime emphasizing both the opportunities and challenges facing Moroccan cultural presence in Africa. Ultimately, the article argues that cultural diplomacy has become an essential component of Morocco's foreign policy and, therefore, a significant framework for advancing intercultural dialogue and continental solidarity.

KEYWORDS: Cultural diplomacy, Morocco, Africa, intercultural dialogue, cultural identity, foreign policy, soft power, globalization, cultural cooperation, international influence.

While the political and economic dimensions of Morocco's African policy have already been widely addressed in the literature, the cultural dimension, for its part, remains relatively underexplored. The literature related to Morocco's foreign policy and its symbolic (cultural or religious) dimension is relatively scarce. Yet, there does exist a form of cultural diplomacy that provides added value to its general diplomacy. It refers to certain constitutive elements of Morocco's identity in this regard. Cultural diplomacy highlights an identity capital for certainly symbolic stakes, but with inevitably political and economic objectives.

Throughout history, Morocco has made culture one of the main expressions of its African identity and a means of strengthening its relations with its partners across the continent. From this perspective, how has the role occupied by cultural diplomacy evolved within Morocco's African policy? How are its strengths and weaknesses expressed? Several challenges need to be addressed. The cultural world has changed, as the diffusion from a center toward margins has gradually disappeared, while the cultural market has become increasingly globalized. The digital revolution has transformed artistic practices as well as modes of production. Today, the transformation of modes of production, dissemination, and consumption continues to affect cultural diplomacy. The expectations of Morocco's partners have also evolved, while the country now faces growing competition with the rise of other emerging states.

It is now the right moment to take advantage of a favorable context in order to undertake a strategic reflection on the prospects of our cultural diplomacy. Several avenues for reflection are being examined, each deserving discussion and further development.

Morocco in Africa: Culture as an Expression of Identity and Belonging

African Morocco is not defined solely by a geographical position or a historical trajectory. It is rather a human and spiritual attachment, expressed through relations of

cooperation and solidarity. As a natural extension and strategic depth of Morocco on the continent, Africa can only remain at the center of its foreign policy and a key foundation of its cultural policy.

Since its decision to rejoin the African Union (AU), Morocco has strengthened its position on the continental scene in continuity with its longstanding commitment. Its return to the organization represents an achievement of considerable strategic importance on several levels, including that of culture. In his speech delivered before the 28th AU Summit, the King reaffirmed that Africa's cultural heritage should be mobilized for the benefit of its citizens: "Africa can be proud of its human potential, its resources, its cultural heritage, and its spiritual values. The future must strongly uphold this natural pride, envision Africa's future with confidence and serenity, while relying on its own wealth and the 'arms' of its citizens."

By strengthening the links established between the cultural and diplomatic spheres through the deployment of active cultural cooperation, Morocco will be able not only to reinforce its relations with the continent, but also to enhance its image as a nation of culture, rich in historical, material, and immaterial heritage, and, through this channel, ensure greater visibility for its influence. Moreover, Morocco possesses significant assets that may strengthen its cultural influence in Africa and transform it into a lever of attractiveness. Endowed with a considerable cultural heritage, the Kingdom has succeeded in preserving its traditions and ancestral know-how while, at the same time, engaging with modernity. In addition, over the past few years, it has developed genuine expertise in the field of musical and artistic festivals. Finally, its Constitution further reinforces and promotes the ethnocultural pluralism of the nation.

The Construction of an African Cultural Identity

Among Morocco's assets, it is particularly important to underline its plural cultural identity. In the preamble of the 2011 Constitution, "the convergence of its Arab-Islamic, Amazigh, Saharo-Hassani components and its African,

Andalusian, Hebrew, and Mediterranean influences” reflects and articulates a composite and multidimensional identity, thereby legitimizing this strong sense of belonging to the African community. The New Development Model (NDM) has further reiterated Morocco’s attachment to the spaces of historical solidarity and proximity emphasized in the preamble of the Constitution, particularly its commitment to the construction of the Maghreb, the strengthening of its anchorage within the African continent, and the development of cooperation with the Arab-Muslim world.

Africa constitutes the natural space of belonging and international projection for Morocco. A set of shared values instills this sense of belonging and makes the relationship between culture and membership within a community the vehicle of a common engagement in development as well as in dialogue with the rest of the world. In this context, the history of Morocco, together with the centuries-old ties it has established with the nations of the Maghreb and West Africa, should be continuously promoted and systematically valorized.

Africa occupies a central place at the diplomatic level. Although it is not exclusive, culture remains an essential vector in this regard. Because it corresponds to a shared identity-based domain and possesses the potential to be mutually beneficial, culture may constitute a lever for deepening the partnership that Morocco maintains with African countries. Morocco should therefore, affirm a cultural diplomacy grounded in its history, its pluralism, and its openness. The diversification of Morocco’s cultural presence across the continent should enable it to further strengthen its ambition of becoming a regional actor serving the development of Africa.

Culture constitutes a substantial lever for deepening Morocco’s partnerships in Africa, as well as for consolidating the place and role played by the Kingdom at the continental level. The dense network of cooperation agreements linking Morocco to the countries of its continent, together with the potential offered by the AfCFTA, opens promising perspectives for cooperation. Hence, the necessity of giving particular attention to the promotion of cultural ties with Africa, as a source of Morocco’s influence and outreach both across the continent and internationally.

Cultural Diplomacy as a Strategic Instrument of Soft Power, Geopolitical Influence, and International Projection

Indeed, although the economic value of culture is often emphasized, culture in its diversity cannot be reduced solely to its economic dimension. Its importance within diplomacy is too often underestimated, despite the fact that it constitutes a powerful instrument of foreign policy. Culture is, in effect, a tool for resolving conflicts, contributing to efforts aimed at combating climate change, and supporting the rule of law. The protection of cultural heritage may also contribute to the (re)construction of states. Furthermore, it represents a powerful factor of intercultural dialogue. It is equally evident that artistic creativity and cultural production foster understanding and peace, two indispensable conditions for development.

Cultural diplomacy is a concept that remains difficult to define. It is not merely “a simple extension of national cultural policy onto the international stage.” Rather, it encompasses a vast range of actions whose richness, diversity, and potential are often underestimated. Cultural and influence diplomacy serves to influence, attract, educate, persuade, disseminate a model, create a climate of trust and even intimacy, and build

and sustain long-term, durable, and profound relationships. It also seeks to promote a shared vision of the world and to create more than allies: friends.

In line with Joseph Nye’s notion of soft power, cultural diplomacy results from the willingness of a state to exercise a policy of influence through cooptation. Unlike hard power, which relies on coercion, soft power corresponds to the deployment of a policy of attraction, notably through the diffusion of a state’s cultural influence, with the objective of leading others to desire the same outcomes. From this perspective, it becomes important to question the policy of influence that Morocco seeks to exercise in Africa through cultural diplomacy.

Soft power constitutes a strategic issue in international relations, and its cultural dimension is widely recognized. Musicians, visual artists, filmmakers, dancers, fashion designers, photographers, writers, and poets all contribute to creativity, beauty, and aesthetics. Culture therefore represents one of the principal pillars of soft power. In recent years, Morocco has intensified its actions in the field of cultural diplomacy in line with its broader diplomatic strategy. Consequently, Morocco’s soft power now constitutes a lever for deepening its multidimensional relations with the African continent.

Religious and Spiritual Soft Power: The Transnational Projection of Civilizational Influence through Faith, Symbolism, and Cultural Legitimacy

Cultural relations between Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa are deeply rooted in history. The centuries-old spiritual and religious ties linking Morocco and Africa have enabled the Kingdom, over time, to maintain its position as a land of encounters, communication, and intercultural exchange between civilizations and cultures. Morocco is commonly perceived as a religiously open, moderate, and tolerant country. This projected image is the result of sustained efforts in the field of public diplomacy. The mobilization of this symbolic capital in the service of foreign policy is therefore particularly crucial.

Morocco historically maintained close relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, which facilitated the transmission of knowledge and civilizational interaction between the two regions. Africa was significantly influenced by Moroccan culture. Moroccan scholars were among the first to introduce Islam and Arab-Islamic culture into many Sub-Saharan African countries. Morocco contributed considerably to the spread of Islam across African countries, particularly through the Maliki doctrine, which is adopted by the majority of Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sufism in Africa also had a major impact on the spread of Islam, since Moroccans were among the first to disseminate Sufism throughout the continent, particularly the Tijaniyya order, which played an active role in this intellectual and cultural interaction and in the establishment of bridges of communication and cultural cooperation. These religious, spiritual, and intellectual relations, deeply anchored in history, continue to this day through the reception of African students in Morocco to benefit from religious training programs.

During the 2000s, Morocco was confronted with a new reality. In reaction to the rise of radical action taking the form of terrorist attacks, the mobilization of an already existing symbolic capital in the form of “religious branding” became a necessity for the Kingdom. International shocks (September 11, 2001, and developments in Afghanistan) as well as national events (the attacks of May 16, 2003) contributed to

the rise of concerns surrounding the security-religion nexus. In these moments of crisis, the symbolism of tolerance and the rejection of religious extremism were reaffirmed. There emerged a genuine determination to shape the image projected to others, allowing Morocco to position itself as a symbolic leader of a Muslim umma (community) that it seeks to unite in order to strengthen dialogue among religions and civilizations.

Since that period, Morocco has sought to play a central role in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. It has launched several initiatives within debates surrounding interreligious dialogue, involving religious figures from numerous African countries in order to promote tolerance as a response to the growing violence of extremism. Religious cooperation is regarded by Morocco as a safeguard against sectarian and communitarian drifts that threaten the peaceful message of religion.

Moroccan religious diplomacy also carries an artistic dimension. The organization, for more than twenty years, of cultural events such as the Festival of Sacred Music in Fez, international conferences on spirituality, and forums dedicated to interreligious dialogue contributes to the promotion of the intangible heritage of humanity as a factor of rapprochement among African civilizations. All of these activities are part of a broader effort aimed at consolidating spiritual security in order to counter extremist tendencies and the radicalization of faith.

Artistic Soft Power: The Global Circulation of Cultural Production as a Mechanism of Symbolic Influence and Civilizational Visibility

This cultural “soft power” also operates through the dissemination of other forms of Moroccan culture across the continent. In this field, Morocco can draw upon numerous initiatives and achievements bringing together African artists and cultural professionals. These may take the form of exhibitions or participation in festivals. Various events testify to the rootedness of Moroccan culture within Africanity, including the Gnaoua and World Music Festival of Essaouira, the Marrakech Popular Arts Festival, and the African Film Festival of Khouribga. Thus, Morocco’s exceptionally rich cultural heritage is reflected in an impressive cultural agenda ranging from the Marathon des Sables to the Marrakech Popular Arts Festival, as well as the Sacred Music Festival of Fez and the Essaouira Festival. The economic impact of this sector even extends to tourism. However, the stakes are not solely economic.

Morocco also participates in African festivals in Gambia, Senegal, Benin, Mali, and Egypt, notably through book festivals. Furthermore, cultural festivals organized by the Ministry of Culture or by regional authorities have emerged since the beginning of the 2000s. They are emblematic of this multilateral dimension. These events are regularly held in several cities, including Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech. African artistic and cultural groups, African delegations, as well as Moroccan artists, take part in these events.

Beyond artistic performances, festivals provide an opportunity to create genuine intercontinental diplomatic encounters between Morocco and African countries. African artists are systematically present in all of Morocco’s international festivals, which cover the principal domains of the performing arts, including music, jazz, dance, and cinema. This approach is mutually enriching: Morocco establishes supportive frameworks through dynamic and reliable partnerships, infrastructures, funding, active communication, and audiences, while African artists contribute to

strengthening intercultural exchange and continental cultural dialogue, while producers, for their part, benefit from the assurance of high-quality international coverage.

Cooperation Agreements as Instruments of Soft Power

Since Independence, Morocco has progressively built a cultural presence through the signing of a significant number of agreements with African countries. The 2000s marked a turning point that accelerated this process. Dozens of memorandums of understanding, agreements, cooperation protocols, and implementation programs were concluded. This intensification of cultural cooperation was further reinforced by Morocco’s reintegration into the African Union (AU) in 2017, a return that carried important implications not only for economic and political partnerships, but also for cultural relations within this pan-African institution. Through cultural and educational cooperation agreements, Morocco seeks to promote a better understanding of its culture. However, while this diplomacy aims to promote Moroccan identity beyond the Sahara, it also appears to aspire to rethink the practical modalities of Morocco’s continental relations. Cultural cooperation with Africa is first organized on a bilateral basis. The forms taken by cultural cooperation are diverse, including transfers of expertise, collaborations, and development programs intended to respond to the needs and expectations of partner countries.

These agreements have led to numerous achievements: cultural exchanges have improved through the increase in artistic performances across different countries; expertise has been exchanged; scholarships have been granted; participation in festivals has expanded; cultural representations have been opened; and meetings and cultural events have been co-organized.

Nevertheless, cultural cooperation between Morocco and African countries has not always fulfilled the objectives initially assigned to it. Some agreements have remained ineffective with various countries. Cultural events and projects, unevenly implemented across time and space, seem to respond only partially to the numerous commitments contained in these agreements. Although cultural cooperation currently addresses only a limited number of countries and still needs to expand its geographical scope, it nevertheless reflects a clear effort by Moroccan diplomacy to disseminate national culture.

In addition to the deployment of bilateral cooperation, the development of a multilateral cultural diplomacy constitutes another characteristic feature of Morocco’s cultural diplomacy. Bilateral cultural cooperation has formed the basis for the exchange of practices and reciprocal support aimed at promoting common actions for the development and dissemination of the cultures of partner countries. While it suggests that Moroccan diplomacy aspires to rethink relations with the continent within a more “human” dimension, multilateral cultural diplomacy illustrates the integration of the notion of “solidarity” into diplomatic practice. Morocco deploys a multilateral cultural diplomacy intended to contribute to the construction of a multipolar world rooted in a multiethnic and multicultural vision, thereby clearly reflecting its commitment to strengthening the links between cultural diplomacy and solidarity. In this regard, Morocco has adhered to several international cultural conventions encouraging it to speak with a unified voice alongside its African partners within international cultural institutions such as UNESCO and the AU Commission on Culture.

Morocco’s multilateral cultural diplomacy has, moreover, demonstrated a more active presence in international

meetings. In sum, whether bilateral or multilateral, the cultural diplomacy deployed by Morocco establishes itself as a policy of influence. It promotes Moroccan identity through cooperation agreements that provide for the organization of cultural events, while simultaneously disseminating a particular practice of international relations that combines the political with the cultural and uses culture to project its vision of social values.

A Multi-Actor Diplomacy of Influence

This dynamic has been sustained through a network supported by diverse structures, thousands of cultural events, partnerships, regular cross-cultural activities, residential programs and support initiatives for emerging creative professionals, as well as a presence in major continental events. It has also been reinforced through dialogue programs with civil society, support for dissemination and co-production in fields such as cinema, performing arts, books and knowledge production, heritage, contemporary art, as well as design, architecture, and even gastronomy, in addition to an external audiovisual sector whose potential remains considerable.

From Cultural Diplomacy to a Broader Politics of Influence: Gastronomy and External Audiovisual Outreach as Emerging Instruments of Soft Power

Most often discussed in terms of dissemination, outreach, exchange, or cooperation, cultural diplomacy has always carried an implicit objective of influence. The evolution of cultural diplomacy into a diplomacy of influence is not merely a question of semantics; rather, it involves a strategy, specific objectives, and even a different model. Its instruments were accompanied by diplomatic decisions such as the signing of cultural agreements, the specialization of embassy services in cultural relations, and the organization of bilateral cultural events.

Moroccan cultural and artistic action across the continent has been characterized by a remarkable dynamism reflected in its presence within several major cultural and artistic events, including book fairs, biennales, musical and theatrical festivals, as well as participation in countless artistic and cultural activities organized throughout Africa. Moreover, Morocco has hosted numerous cultural and artistic events and encounters within the framework of cultural cooperation with many African countries and continental organizations, thereby creating multiple openings toward African cultures. Can Moroccan cultural diplomacy truly function as a vector of influence? Although cultural diplomacy undeniably contributes to Morocco's "outreach," its impact, which can only be evaluated over the long term, appears increasingly relative due both to the reduction of the resources at its disposal and to the growing influence of globalization, particularly in artistic markets, cultural products, education, and digital technologies such as the Internet and social networks.

Morocco can no longer be satisfied with relying on a reserve of sympathy accumulated over the years: in the international sphere, states possess not so much the place they deserve as the one they are able to establish for themselves. For diplomacy of cultural influence to be effective, two conditions appear essential: it must constitute a genuine priority of the state, supported by substantial financial and human resources, while also being grounded in an efficient and coherent organizational structure.

A Key Actor: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Cultural diplomacy constitutes a component of the state's foreign policy. It is structured around two main priorities: on the one hand, the search for partnerships and the strengthening of the country's attractiveness, and on the other hand, the promotion of Moroccan know-how, ideas, and creativity.

Cultural diplomacy often reflects a dual ambition on the part of states: schematically, it involves promoting and exporting the cultural productions of one's country, while also seeking to influence and reshape the representational systems of others. The instruments employed by Morocco in its cultural diplomacy are similar to those used by several European countries, including foreign academies dedicated to the arts and intellectual exchange, schools, and cultural institutes.

Numerous actors have been involved in the implementation of this strategy. The influence of a country is measured through the capacity of its academic institutions to project themselves internationally, the productivity of its intangible human capital, and the strength of its knowledge production. The use of cultural influence as an instrument of foreign policy therefore becomes an indispensable means of defending national image and establishing a form of Moroccan "label."

Moroccan cultural soft power is also supported by the leadership of the Sovereign, who has devoted particular attention to interculturality by integrating, alongside the religious dimension, the values of creativity and cultural production. Through a series of initiatives, the Sovereign has promoted a Morocco associated with culture and knowledge. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) contributes to the cultural outreach of Morocco in Africa and to openness toward African cultures. The MAE is responsible for developing and

strengthening relations of cultural, scientific, technical, and human cooperation. "In general, bilateral embassies are entrusted with the role of identifying possible and desirable partnerships with host countries through the cultural attaché." Subsequently, the Directorate of Cultural and Scientific Cooperation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may request, when necessary, the participation of the Ministry of Culture.

As part of a broader tendency toward distinguishing between the strategic and the operational dimensions, the MAE decided to delegate implementation functions to a specialized operator. Thus, in 1986, the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI) was established with the purpose of implementing cooperation programs for partner countries, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is through this institution that Moroccan cultural diplomacy reinforces its attractiveness, notably through the support granted to foreign students, especially African students. Since its creation, the AMCI has managed a significant number of African students.

The question of organizing a cultural network in African countries remains a recurring issue. Initiated in 2009, the development of this network consists in creating, in selected countries, institutions directed by cultural advisers, endowed with financial autonomy, and bringing together various cultural activities and services. This structuring of the network responds to a dual concern: providing the system with a unified label and benefiting from greater managerial flexibility.

More generally, cultural diplomacy involves several governmental departments, as demonstrated by the role of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. The international

outreach of Moroccan culture therefore also depends on the Ministries of Tourism, Islamic Affairs, Moroccans Residing Abroad (MRE), and even the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME).

The success of cultural diplomacy results from a complex system in which political and diplomatic voluntarism, if not accompanied by the mobilization of the private and associative sectors — including public enterprises, banks, associations, foundations, and think tanks — cannot alone advance such initiatives. These agreements may increase the visibility of cultural actors and products between countries, facilitate the circulation of cultural goods and people, and encourage the organization of artistic exhibitions, conferences, concerts, theatrical performances, and other artistic activities within the territory of partner states.

The Role of Universities in Cultural and Intellectual Influence

The university also constitutes another instrument of “soft power” within Morocco’s relations with Africa. The creation of the Institute of African Studies, specialized in research on Africa, reflected Morocco’s ambition to establish networks of collaboration and to develop thematic studies on Morocco’s African relations, with the objective of promoting better mutual understanding between Morocco and Africa. Moroccan universities have made cooperation with Africa one of the principal objectives of their mission, and they occupy a significant place within this strategy.

An increase in the mobility of students from African countries can be observed, facilitated by cooperation agreements in the field of scientific research. Private higher education institutions have likewise developed their strategies of internationalization toward Africa. Thus, institutions such as the International University of Rabat and Mohammed VI Polytechnic University promote academic exchanges while also offering the possibility of granting scholarships to African students. Cooperation programs now cover various domains including education, training, capacity building, upgrading initiatives, and knowledge sharing.

Future Challenges and Strategic Perspectives

Culture constitutes a tool through which Morocco is able to sustain deep and long-term relations, as well as emotional — and sometimes even intimate — ties with its African partners, ties that may prove decisive in diplomatic matters. The idea of intertwining culture and diplomacy is not new; however, the present context and future perspectives invite a rediscovery of its richness and potential. Cooperation today no longer concerns only resources and means, but also the capacity to innovate, to promote ideas, and to share a vision of the world, something that also occurs through artistic creation and cultural exchange.

Culture has progressively established a central place within Morocco’s diplomatic action, as illustrated by the abundance of initiatives undertaken in this field. Today, Morocco exists in the perception of many African countries through culture and intellectual production. The cultural image of Morocco remains positive. The Kingdom continues to be perceived as a nation of culture in the broadest sense of the term — whether through cinema, music, literature, gastronomy, fashion, or design. The success of festivals, the African contemporary art fair 1:54 organized annually by Touria El Glaoui in Marrakech, London, and New York, as well as the audience reached by cultural radio channels in Africa devoted to music and religion, all testify to the country’s attractiveness. Some Moroccan artists also enjoy strong

international recognition. Likewise, the growing interest of African consumers in “Made in Morocco” cultural goods and services, as well as in cultural tourism in Morocco, remains undeniable.

Morocco itself is enriched through contact with other African cultures. Rabat, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech, and Essaouira have perhaps never been such important capitals of artistic creation as during periods in which they hosted African and international artistic avant-gardes. Culture therefore represents one medium among others through which dialogue with the continent may take place beyond institutional frameworks. The dynamism of its expansion and the breadth of its influence constitute a form of wealth that deserves to be preserved. At a time when Morocco seeks to strengthen exchanges between civil societies and pursue a more horizontal diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and influence diplomacy emerge as particularly valuable instruments.

There is also an economic dimension that is too often underestimated. Exchanges in cultural goods and services remain limited, and their economic weight is still relatively weak compared to agricultural, industrial, or other service sectors; nevertheless, their potential is considerable. Although Morocco may not possess global leaders in every cultural domain, it nevertheless remains capable of promoting and asserting its creative productions.

Morocco undoubtedly benefits from a positive image of its culture, yet nothing can be taken for granted. It is necessary to remain lucid regarding both strengths and weaknesses in order to better anchor Moroccan cultural diplomacy in the dissemination of the products of national creativity and in the promotion of shared initiatives with African partners for the valorization of the diversity of African arts and culture. The instruments of action in this field must therefore adapt to contemporary realities, and the necessary resources must follow accordingly. It becomes essential to reconsider the framework of Morocco’s external cultural action in order both to inject new momentum into it and to adopt an approach based on the co-construction of projects with partners across the continent.

Shifting Geopolitical and Cultural Contexts

The context is changing, and it is necessary to fully grasp the extent of these transformations. The globalization of cultural supply and demand is producing multiple effects. The gradual disappearance of borders — as the African art market is now situated as much in Dakar and Casablanca as in New York, Berlin, or Paris — together with shifts in mentalities, behaviors, and traditional approaches, has created a new environment that imposes itself upon African countries and increasingly shapes the actions of cultural diplomacy. This situation calls into question the classical approaches that have traditionally governed cooperation between countries in the cultural field.

Traditional exchanges and cultural events remain useful; however, they are no longer sufficient either to exploit the existing potential or to stimulate creativity, sources of inspiration, and responses to the expectations of younger generations. The simple promotion of heritage, or the organization of festivals and cultural encounters across various artistic genres, can no longer alone ensure the valorization of cultural diplomacy. It is no longer enough merely to highlight respective heritages; rather, attention must also be given to the new perspectives generated by cultural and creative industries. At this level, heritage itself — even when renewed — requires reinterpretation, as well as new technical supports and new modes of dissemination.

Africa is currently engaged in a global competition that extends beyond economic performance, with culture occupying an increasingly central place within it. This dimension of global competition concerns the capacity to promote creative strength through ideas, the arts, and cultural productions. It also concerns the ability to share and project values.

The African cultural market is undergoing continuous expansion. A genuine African middle class is emerging across countries from all regions of the continent. The increase in literacy rates, combined with the growing concentration of a young and dynamic population within urban centers, positively affects cultural consumption. The increasingly important position occupied by Africa within the global market of cultural and creative industries further reveals the multipolar character of culture.

Culture is profoundly affected by the digital revolution. This revolution has generated major transformations in the modes of production, dissemination, and consumption of cultural goods, as well as in the sharing of knowledge. It also calls for new legal frameworks concerning copyright, taxation, and emerging modes of communication. More than a merely technical revolution, it represents a genuine paradigm shift from which all consequences must be drawn in terms of working methods and the governance of cultural diplomacy.

The presence of Moroccan culture in Africa will increasingly face broader competition in the field of cultural products and services. It will likewise be exposed to more intense rivalry from competing countries. Morocco's image therefore requires renewed valorization, particularly among younger generations, some of whom perceive Moroccan cultural diplomacy as “conservative or absent from the digital sphere.” African youth expect Morocco to remain open to new forms of creativity, to act as a mediator and innovator, to defend freedom of expression, gender equality, artistic mobility, and fair remuneration for creators, while also investing in digital technologies and involving diasporic communities.

The growing influence of other countries in the cultural field is changing the landscape and challenging Morocco's resources and capacities. Morocco must simultaneously preserve and develop its heritage while also embodying change. The vision governing relations with African partners must therefore take into account the transformations affecting the broader environment. The objective is to build upon existing achievements in order to construct, together with African partners, cultural projects through structuring forms of cooperation. Actions that achieve lasting success are generally those founded on partnerships, reciprocity, and co-construction. Morocco must understand itself as part of a continent and should therefore initiate, alongside other African countries, common actions and shared objectives. There is also a broader issue concerning the transformation of Morocco itself, based on the conviction that the country can only become enriched through contact with other cultures.

Strategic Pathways for Action

There is currently both a momentum and a strong political will to grant culture and research the place they deserve within Morocco's foreign policy. The Sovereign has repeatedly sent clear signals regarding the importance of culture in Morocco's relations with others and in the valorization of its African identity. He frequently reaffirms his commitment to cultural and educational development. These discourses, however, must be translated more concretely into practice. Moroccan diplomacy has understood the geopolitical

importance of the African space. Its influence depends largely on its ability to respond to the expectations that the continent places upon Morocco. It therefore becomes necessary to imagine what Moroccan cultural diplomacy should look like in the next decade, beginning first with the formulation of the appropriate questions. How can a logic of simple dissemination evolve into one based on durable partnerships and less vertical collaborative projects? How can Morocco promote its expertise in cultural public policies and in the remuneration of artistic creation? How can priorities of foreign policy — such as development, education, and women's rights — be articulated with cultural diplomacy? How can the expectations of younger audiences be better addressed? What digital strategy should be adopted in the coming years? Which geographical priorities should be established? How can Morocco better support its cultural and creative industries in their African and international expansion? And how can a balance be achieved between public intervention and market dynamics?

The challenge does not consist in immediately providing definitive answers to all of these questions. Rather, the first objective is to valorize the action of Moroccan cultural diplomacy, mobilize the actors who sustain it daily at the closest level to the field, and support them. The New Development Model (NDM) has called for greater convergence among the actors of Moroccan culture in order to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of Morocco's cultural actions at the continental scale, while also guaranteeing synergy with professional operators and the other concerned departments through regular consultation mechanisms.

Furthermore, as emphasized in the NDM Report, it is necessary to strengthen cultural intelligence within diplomacy in order to consolidate the cultural contribution as an instrument of influence. Such a perspective requires the involvement of former ambassadors and advisers through the political, economic, and cultural knowledge they have acquired abroad, as well as through the networks of relations they have succeeded in building. It also encourages the reinforcement of the cultural vocation of the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI) and the development of a stronger prospective dimension, notably by equipping the Kingdom's Diplomatic Academy with the tools necessary to anticipate major international geopolitical transformations. Finally, it requires the involvement of Moroccans living abroad as carriers and vectors of cultural influence.

It is equally necessary to deepen reflection on future perspectives and to encourage all actors

— government institutions, associations, private sector actors, elected representatives, and artists — to engage in strategic thinking concerning cultural diplomacy. Several objectives should therefore be identified and clearly defined. Here again, the challenge is not limited to exporting cultural goods within a purely economic logic, but also to promoting the Moroccan brand, its cultural diversity, its expertise, and its cultural ecosystem.

Lastly, Morocco must participate, alongside its African partners, in the broader dynamics of cultural creativity through its contribution across different cultural genres and by assuming an active role in the production and circulation of African cultural creation.

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