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Cultural diplomacy in the contemporary United Kingdom: the case of the British Council

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Introduction

The chapter investigates the theme of the volume, cultural diplomacy, in the contemporary United Kingdom (UK). It approaches the subject matter by way of examining national identity formulated and projected in the arena of contemporary cultural diplomacy. More specifically, the theme of the book, cultural diplomacy, is approached by analysing the discourses on Britishness produced by the British Council, a body which operates at the arm's length from the government, whose activities are nonetheless incorporated in 'public diplomacy' pursued by the UK government (Crown Copyright 2003, 2006). The British Council defines what it does as 'cultural relations' (British Council 2010, 2011) but in literature, it is often labelled as an actor in cultural or public diplomacy (Parsons 1985, Fox 1999).

The preceding paragraph has already demonstrated one of the fundamental problems in discussing cultural diplomacy: the question of definition. Simon Mark in lamenting a relative lack of scholarly attention to cultural diplomacy attributes the cause of the problem to 'the lack of clarity about what precisely the practice entails. There is no one agreed definition of cultural diplomacy', and points out the existence of a range of terms used by scholars as interchangeable with cultural diplomacy: 'public diplomacy, international cultural relations, international cultural policy and a state's foreign cultural mission' (Mark 2010: 62-63). Turning to public diplomacy, the most frequently used synonym for cultural diplomacy, the situation is none the clearer. On the one hand, there is an equivocal view that public diplomacy is part and parcel of international political marketing whose sole purpose is to market nations by projecting national images (Sun 2008). On the other hand, Jan Mellison (2005) paints a much more nuanced picture; while public diplomacy is clearly distinguished from traditional diplomacy in that the latter is about 'relationships between the representatives of states, or other international actors' and the former involves general public and non-official groups (*ibid.*: 5), it shares a lot ground with concepts in adjacent fields such as propaganda, nation-branding and foreign cultural relations (*ibid.*: 16-23). As a concept, both cultural and public diplomacy appear to be swimming in murky water.

However, sorting out the conceptual or definitional confusion surrounding cultural diplomacy is not the purpose of this chapter. Its major interest lies in an investigation of construction and maintenance of national identity in the context of cultural diplomacy. Identity is relevant to any inquiry into cultural diplomacy because of the centrality of 'culture' in cultural diplomacy and what is perceived as an irrefutable, taken-for-granted link between culture and identity. Therefore this

chapter adopts a loose, pragmatic description of cultural diplomacy as a means of delineating its scope: cultural diplomacy has 'the involvement of government, to whatever extent, in the business of projecting the nation's image abroad. ... Cultural, or Public, Diplomacy is an arm of diplomacy itself, the business of winning friends and influencing people' (Fox 1999: 3).

Cultural diplomacy provides a promising context in which to carry out an investigation into national identity for a number of reasons. First of all, diplomacy is about promoting and securing national interests and national identity plays an important role in defining what constitute national interest for a particular nation-state. Secondly, synonyms for cultural diplomacy include nation-branding and the projection of the nation's image, both of which serve as a stage where national identity is constructed, contested and maintained by various parties involved. Thirdly, cultural diplomacy as a sub-unit of public diplomacy presupposes involvement of non-state actors, which suggests that in the context of cultural diplomacy, competing visions of the nations – official and non-official – are presented. What is more, as Mark (2010) suggests cultural diplomacy touches upon cultural sovereignty which opens new possibilities for investigating identity issues in a multi-national state such as the UK, though this problematique lies outside the scope of the current chapter.

Cultural diplomacy in the UK in particular adds further dimensions which make an investigation into national identity more exciting. The UK is said to be a late comer in cultural diplomacy, especially compared to France which is widely seen to have long engaged with it through the Bourbon courts and the post-revolutionary governments. According to a former UK diplomat, this reflects differences in attitudes towards 'culture' itself and the management of colonies (Parsons 1985). The British/English scepticism towards anything intellectual is widely noted while the adoration of public intellectuals is often attributed to continental countries such as France and Germany in the postwar period. The difference in the colonial management style has also widely been acknowledged: the British tended to make the most of the already existing system of rule in managing colonies but the French set out to produce Frenchmen through education. Both suggest that the British are less experienced in the business of projecting themselves to the wider world by means of culture than, for instance, the French. Still cultural diplomacy, or at least public diplomacy, is now one of the cornerstones of British diplomacy, and the UK government is pursuing it in the post-colonial world where multiculturalism is the norm. When British national identity is negotiated in the course of cultural diplomacy, all these factors come into play, which creates a fluid and dynamic environment in which national identity is negotiated.

The chapter draws from the research work carried out for an FP7 project, 'Identities and Modernities in Europe' (IME).[1] In IME, discourses surrounding cultural institutions in relation to the state's externally-oriented attempt at constructing and maintaining national identity were investigated in nine countries, and the current chapter draws from the UK case study (Ichijo 2010). In what follows, official discourses found in relation to the work of the British Council are examined so as to decipher what kind of national identity is being negotiated and projected to the rest of the world. In order to fulfil this objective, discourse analysis of policy documents related to the British Council as well as the British Council's own documents is carried out. The analysis was carried out within the

1 IME is a collaborative research project funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH-CT-2009-215949). Project website: http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/european/ime/.

framework of grounded theory, a theory for qualitative analysis of discourse originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Although grounded theory has now evolved beyond its original framework, it is still seen as providing a useful set of basic strategies for discourse analysis (Pidgeon and Henwood 2004). Following the 'spirit' of the grounded theory approach shared by a number of scholars, the material is analysed to capture the 'emergent', that is, the insights that emerge from the repetition of observation, note-taking and categorising (Glaser 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967). In practice, this means that the collected material was first read with a set of open-coded categories (identity/Britishness/values, etc). These categories were then repeatedly revised during subsequent readings in order to capture emerging concepts that were relevant to the inquiry on hand. This is then supported by critical discourse analysis which 'takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial' because political utterances are part of the political process which is historically and culturally determined (Wodak, 2001: 1). The chapter concludes with a discussion of findings and a reflection on the relationship between cultural diplomacy and national identity in today's world.

The case: the British Council

The British Council was established in 1934 to 'make the life and thought of the British peoples more widely known; and to promote a mutual interchange of knowledge and ideas'.[2] It is now a registered charity. According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office/British Council Management Statement (2007), it is 'an organization that operates at arm's length from Government and is incorporated by Royal Charter. … The British Council does not carry out its functions on behalf of the Crown' (2007: 3). Its status is also defined as an 'executive non-departmental public body' but its status as a registered charity deems to prevail should there be any conflict.

While not a full part of the Government, the British Council receives grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) just as the BBC World Service does (Crown Copyright 2003: 7). It is described in *UK International Priorities: A Strategy for the FCO*, a White Paper published in 2003 and in *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: the UK's International Priorities*, another White Paper published in 2006, as 'firmly incorporated in the current British government's promotion of active/public diplomacy and the workings of the FCO' (Crown Copyright 2003: 8; 2006: 47). The British Council is therefore one of the means through which diplomacy of the UK is conducted and can be legitimately seen as one venue through which the British state tries to establish and maintain British national identity to its advantage.

The British Council's overall aims according to the aforementioned Management Statement are 'to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries and to increase appreciation of the UK's creative ideas and achievements' (FCO/British Council 2007: 3). These aims are pursued by:

- Promoting a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom;
- Developing a wider knowledge of the English language;

[2] Anthony Parsons, a former diplomat, has commented on the establishment of the British Council: 'It is interesting that one of the first British Council offices was set up in Egypt. It is ironical, considering the British attitude up to that date, that we also felt the necessity to create Council centres in British colonies: our continental competitors must have had a good laugh at that.' (Parsons, 1985: 6)

- Encouraging cultural, scientific, technological and other educational co-operation between the United Kingdom and other countries; or
- Promoting the advancement of education (FCO/British Council 2007: 3).

The work of the British Council is scrutinised by the House of Commons Foreign Committee as a part of their scrutiny of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The British Council is described by the UK government as promoting 'British values, ideas and achievements and strengthens relations between the UK and other countries' and as playing a major role in 'maximising the UK's international influence (Crown Copyright 2003: 7, 8). It is also described, together with the BBC World Service, as 'two World-Class institutions with strong brands' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2005: 4). The House of Commons Foreign Committee has also been generally favourable in their assessment of the British Council's work.

An inherent contradiction: the British Council's ambiguous position

In examining policy documents concerning the British Council, the recent emergence of a new framework called public diplomacy has to be taken into account since it appears to have a tangible impact on the way the British Council, described as one of the key public diplomacy institutions, operates.

'Public diplomacy' is defined by the Carter Commission which was tasked to review the effectiveness of current public diplomacy by the government as 'work which aims at influencing in a positive way the perceptions of individuals and organisations overseas about the UK, and their engagement with the UK' (FCO 2005: 8). However, as the report itself acknowledges the ways in which the term 'public diplomacy' is interpreted and acted upon differ considerably among those who are involved in public diplomacy. Below is the Commission's understanding and assessment of the British Council's stance:

> 2.3 The British Council suggested an alternative definition in their submission to the Carter Review, which was "**work aiming to interact and build relationships with individuals and organisations overseas in order to improve perceptions of, and strengthen influence for, the United Kingdom**." This helps to clarify that part of the purpose of public diplomacy is to strengthen influence for the UK, acknowledging it is not simply about being favourably perceived. However, in the context of the Council's Government funded activity at least, it still lacks an essential reference to public diplomacy being in support of Government goals or objectives (*ibid*: 8).

The first observation emerges from this is that there is a tension between what the government considers appropriate for the British Council as an arm of public diplomacy and what the British Council actually carries out on the ground. In the above excerpt, the way in which the British Council perceives public diplomacy, and by extension, its activities in public diplomacy, is assessed by the Commission to be lacking in clear reference to its official function: being part of the UK's public diplomacy. Clearly, there is an inherit tension in situating the work of the British Council in the overall structure of the government's work. The report continues:

> 2.4 At its core, Government funded public diplomacy must be about building support for Government medium and long term goals and objectives. Building relationships, mutuality, and shared understanding all help to create a benevolent (and informed) environment for public diplomacy, but they will not necessarily deliver public diplomacy objectives on their own.
>
> 2.5 The Review Team recommends that a better definition of public diplomacy would be "**work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals**." Government goals are of course wide-ranging, and would need to be clearly articulated, along with key objectives, themes and action plans as part of an overall strategy, but it is clear that public diplomacy should no longer be defined simply in terms of creating positive perceptions. This definition must be understood within the context of the continuing guarantee of editorial independence for the BBC World Service and day-to-day operational independence for the British Council. (*ibid*: 8).

The report indicates there is an underlying contradiction in the environment in which the British Council operates. On the one hand, the British Council promotes arts, science, education and understanding, which are intrinsically universal in its orientation while the British Council which receives funding from the government has to calibrate its operation to be in tune with the promotion of the UK interests. The tension is acknowledged by the report:

> 5.2.14 The British Council receives substantial funding from Government, but believes its ability to operate at one remove from government enhances the range of the UK's public diplomacy, particularly for engendering trust and building relationships with groups less likely to respond to conventional diplomacy. This may be true, but it is also true that the Foreign Secretary is accountable to Parliament for public diplomacy and to foreign governments (especially in countries where British Council employees or operations have diplomatic status). (*ibid*: 25)

The tension sometimes comes to the surface. For instance, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, which is on the whole favourably disposed to the British Council's work and show a large degree of understanding of its precarious position in between the state and the private, once censured it publicly in a 2004 report. The issue was the British Council's new logo which replaced the old one designed on a Union Flag motive.

> 206. We are concerned that the British Council may be making the same mistake as British Airways, in underplaying its 'Britishness'. The Union Flag is the most well-known and widely recognised symbol of Britain and, as British Airways belatedly realised, it can be presented as part of a modern and dynamic corporate image, but we did not see it displayed prominently in the offices of the British Council in Moscow. We would be very surprised if the people of Moscow or elsewhere understood the symbolism of the four dots, which in our view completely fail to reflect the Council's mission, "to increase appreciation of the UK's creative ideas and achievements".

> 207. We conclude that the British Council's new branding fails to project its purpose and its identity. We recommend that the British Council provide us with detailed information on the full cost of its rebranding and that it reconsider its reluctance to use the Union Flag. (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2004: 81)

The British Council, whose declared values are internationalism, professionalism and creativity, is being criticised not taking 'Britishness' seriously because it 'dumped' the Union Flag and adopted a four-dot design. The new logo is judged by one arm of the government as not conducive to the British Council's remit to represent Britain while it is deemed to be in line with the British Council's self image as a leading cultural institution.

While emphasising the necessity of aligning the British Council's activity with that of the UK government, the Carter report also notes the generally observed appreciation of the British Council by various parts of the government:

> 6.1.2 Where such activity may be seen to have greatest impact is in areas where more traditional diplomacy is either difficult or has proven unsuccessful. Visiting Arts, for example, ran a successful project to bring Argentinean artists to the UK immediately after the Falklands, and co-ordinated an exchange of Iranian and British artists during a period when not even the British Council was operating in Iran. In politically sensitive climates, culture, arts and sport can provide invaluable means of reaching people, as seen in Burma where the Government banned all foreign media, but turned a blind eye to international football being shown in public places because of its popularity. (FCO 2005: 31)

From the government's point of view, therefore, the British Council is an asset in influencing the people's view of Britain though it is an institution which needs some supervision to ensure public funding provided to promote the UK's national interests would not be diverted to somewhere else.

This inherent tension is acknowledged and addressed by the British Council as issues of independence and accountability in their annual report (British Council 2006, 2010 and 2011). In its *Annual Report 2009-2010*, it is emphasised that: 'We are operationally independent from the UK government, which enables us to build trust on the ground in places and with people where relationships with our country, society and values are strained' but added that 'We are living within our means' (British Council 2010: 11). The insistence on independence from the UK government is of vital importance for the British Council if it were to carry out its mission in different corners of the world. Despite its emphasises on its independence of the UK government, the British Council is easily seen as an extension of the UK state in foreign countries, and it sometimes suffer from 'collateral damage' resulting from the state of the UK's relationship with some countries. In late 2007, the British Council was ordered to suspend some of its operations in Russia by the Russian government when the tension between the two countries was mounting. In August 2011, on the day that marked Afghan independence from Britain in 1919, the British Council compound in Kabul was attacked by a group of suicide bombers and gunmen, leaving all the assailants and at least 12 people dead. In the context of cultural diplomacy, therefore, the British Council occupies a place which is full with tension and contradictions, which inevitably would have some effects on the type of British identity it projects to the outside world. Though it declares 'We place the UK at the heart

of everything that we do. We are working for the UK where it matters' (British Council 2010: 11), the British Council cannot afford to be seen simply as a yet another arm of the UK state.

The British Council's concern with accountability echoes the government's concern over what the British Council does. The British Council is not entirely private; it receives public funding though it is not entirely publicly funded either. If it receives public funding, it has to show that the money is used for the benefits of tax payers – in this case maintaining and improving the UK's friendly relationship with other countries. Here enters another inherent problem: how to evaluate culture. Measuring economic effects of culture is difficult enough; measuring culture's effects on diplomacy is probably impossible. Still the British Council has devised a number of ways to measure its performance including 'Evaluation of Long-Term Outcomes (ELTO) research', 'Heads of Mission Survey' and indicators such as customer satisfaction, engagement and reach (British Council 2011). All of these, unsurprisingly, tend to present the British Council in a favourable light and no doubt serve as part of ammunition when it is scrutinised by the Parliament for its value-for-money aspect. It is not rocket science to deduce that concern over accountability should an effect on what kind of work the British Council pursues in promoting the UK abroad. The British Council, a partly publicly funded organisation that focuses on culture, has to negotiate various constraints in its endeavour to project Britishness abroad.

Britishness in the discursive space surrounding the British Council

The discursive construction of British identity by the British Council is therefore carried out within an inherent tension between a non-official body and the government, which is often played out as a funding issue. In addition to this rather situational constraint, the British Council appears to be obliged to negotiate two opposing forces: universalism as embodied in the idea of art and creativity and particularism that emphasises Britishness.

The British Council is repeatedly represented as 'one of the leading cultural relations organisations' and as playing 'a crucial role in building overseas influence for the UK by developing mutual understanding between peoples, societies and countries' by both the British Council and the government (British Council 2008: 2). At the same time, the government has also declared:

> At the heart of any foreign policy must lie a set of fundamental values. For this Government, the values that we promote abroad are those that guide our actions at home. We seek a world in which freedom, justice and opportunity thrive, in which governments are accountable to the people, protect their rights and guarantee their security and basic needs. We do so because these are the values we believe to be right. And because such a world is the best guarantee of the security and prosperity of the people of the United Kingdom (Crown Copyright 2006: 4).

Placing the British Council' self-understanding within the view of diplomacy as an expression and realisation of a country's fundamental values, it is reasonable to assume that British identity is presented as related to freedom and justice. Because the British people are fair and love freedom, it is assumed that they are good at building 'mutual understanding', an activity in which the British Council excels. The British is represented as to be so good at doing this that other countries, notably France with its Campus France programme, are described to follow the British way of doing things,

which only enforce the message that the British are good at fostering mutual understanding because of their fundamental values (British Council 2006: 4).

The British commitment to fostering further mutual understanding across the world as a way of stabilising it is pursued through education and language access.[3] Having international students in the UK higher education sector is valued because it brings tangible economic benefits to the UK but also its effects on building 'mutual understanding'. The incoming students will gain 'intimate acquaintance with modern Britain and they also bring knowledge and abilities that enrich courses, campuses and communities' (British Council 2006: 4). The contemporary UK is represented as 'modern' and a place where learning from each other is valued. Since the UK higher education sector is seen as world-leading in attracting overseas students, Britain is represented as occupying a superior position in education, which is automatically assessed as intrinsically good. The British are therefore a promoter of one of the fundamentally good things: education. Furthermore, in the British Council's discursive structure, the British are depicted as good at using education to bring about further good – mutual understanding.

The perceived status of the English language in today's world is also another device through which the idea of the British representing 'the good' is pursued. The British Council's work in providing English language education across the world is repeatedly commended by the government (for instance, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 1999, 2003 and 2006). The strategic advantage the UK has in the situation where the English language is gaining hegemony as the major means of communication in a globalising world is also frequently noted. The British are therefore represented as naturally occupying an advantageous position in today's world because of their mother tongue. This opportunity can be utilised in several ways to the advantage of the UK. First, it represents an infinite source of revenue; the demand for English language teaching only increases and the UK's ability to provide high quality English language teaching represents numerous opportunities for the government and the British Council to gain economic profit. It also represents a unique opportunity to influence elites across the world. The British Council's English language teaching is sometimes criticised as being elitist by the Parliament, but the British Council counters it by reasoning that it would be the most effective way of fostering favourable relationships with many countries across the world. Also by contributing to expand access to English language education by working with various educational authorities across the world, the British Council is widening access to the most influential means of global communication, therefore bringing more opportunity to the people across the world. This is easily linked to the government's declared aim of diplomacy: the British are contributing to the betterment of the world by offering widened access to their mother tongue, English.

In addition to the self-image of the British being the force of good because of their fundamental values, the British are also represented as at the forefront of knowledge economy based on creativity, something that is intrinsically good. Creativity is a universal value, but the way the British have been exploiting it to create knowledge economy is unique, the British Council appears to be

[3] The effectiveness of the British Council in attracting overseas students to the UK universities is confirmed in Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardan (2007), for instance.

arguing. The British are therefore demonstrating to the world how to make the most of universal values and qualities to be unique.

In *Strategy 2010: Our Vision for Future* (2004), the British Council sets out its aim as follows:

> By 2010
> We will be a world authority on cultural relations, English language teaching, and the international dimensions of education and the arts.
> We will understand the needs and aspirations of those we are seeking to reach much better.
> We will be using our expertise and knowledge to help millions of people reach their goals and make a difference.
> We will have built many lasting relationships between people in the UK and other countries and strengthened trust and understanding between our different cultures.
> We will be welcomed as an effective and sensitive partner for societies wanting to bring about a fairer and more prosperous world.
> We will be connecting millions of people with creative ideas from all over the UK and with each other, both face to face and with innovative online and broadcast communications.
> We will be broadening the UK's world view, particularly how young people in the UK understand and value other cultures and traditions.
> And everyone who works for the British Council will feel valued and will enjoy opportunities to be creative and realise their potential. (British Council 2004: 5).

Here, the UK is presented as a decent and modest international actor which is committed to the universal good – mutual understanding, creativity, respect for diversity and whose fundamental values are defined as freedom and justice. As a depiction of national identity, it is markedly short on the particular. Standard markers of national identity such as language, customs, beliefs, specific cultural traits and territory are conspicuous in their absence. The contour of Britishness as presented here is drawn by appropriating the universal – arts, culture, education, mutual understanding - without referring to the particular. This is not a customary way of promoting a nation. The positive images of the nation are forcefully projected but what distinguishes the nation from others is not specified in reference to something concrete and tangible.

This absence of referent to the particular is in fact what the members of the Parliament felt uneasy when they criticised the British Council's new logo as seen earlier. The British Council, whose vision has a strong universal orientation, triggered some uneasiness among the MPs when it dropped a very explicit and tangible British referent – the Union Flag – from its logo. The redesigning of the logo, however, was an expression of the British Council's efforts to project an accurate and modern image of the UK to the outside world:

> 'Our logo is one of the main graphic elements that give the British Council its unique identity. The four dots symbol is an abstract representation of the four countries of the UK and how we bring people together for cultural exchange, always giving equal weight to different values, ideas and experience.' (http://www.britishcouncil.org/ukraine-press-room-logo.htm, accessed on 20 August 2011)

Four dots, which look very abstract, in fact represent four constituent nations of the UK and the whole design embodies the value of equality, equality among the four constituent nations of the UK in the first instance and among ‘different values, ideas and experience’. What emerges here is a strong indication of the influence of multiculturalism as a hegemonic norm in the postcolonial era. Multiculturalism as a set of ideas that no culture is superior or inferior to other cultures and that each culture should be paid equal respect has underpinned the UK’s social policy in the postwar period. In the post- war and colonial era, even the language of diplomacy is encapsulated in the language of multiculturalism in which uncritical assertion of the superiority of the particular is held back and reference to the universal prevails in the promotion of national identity. It appears to suggest that cultural diplomacy in the postcolonial environment is profoundly incluenced by multiculturalism in which the unquestioned assertion of superiority of a particular nation is heavily checked. Cultural diplomacy in the contemporary world may well be serving to weaken the expression of the particular despite the expectation that cultural diplomacy that is associated with nation-branding would enhance the nation’s image and identity.

Conclusion

The foregoing examination has shown that cultural diplomacy in the UK is pursued in the midst of an inherent tension between the state and the non-official bodies because of the very means through which diplomacy is conducted: culture. The separation of politics and culture is often sought, sometimes as a means for the non-official organisation to defend itself. However, given that actors in cultural diplomacy are often in receipt of state funding, the obligation of accountability necessitates a degree of alignment between the government’s objectives and that of the organisation involved as seen in the practice of scrutiny of the British Council’s operation by the UK government. Consequently, national identity projected by the British Council is not exactly what the successive British governments wish to propagate but not entirely formulated and articulated by the British Council whose prime interest lies in cultural relations, either.

Furthermore, the act of projecting the nation’s image through culture in the postcolonial world appears to be significantly conditioned by multiculturalism. In the world where there is no inherent, self-evident and unconditionally justified hierarchy especially in the realm of culture, asserting the superiority of a nation’s particularity has to be carried out carefully. The case study of the British Council has shown that, in projecting images of the UK, it is heavily reliant on universal values – freedom and justice – without, however, reference to something concrete. In the case of the United States, perhaps the same values – freedom and justice – may well be projected together with concrete images of the Statute of Liberty, the Liberty Bell and the Lincoln’s Memorial or images from the Civil Rights movement and perhaps accompanied by reference to President Obama. It can further argued that the US still occupies a place in the world – perhaps only just- in which projection of the nation’s superiority does not cause existential agony amongst policy officials. In the case of the British Council, while reference to English language teaching is abundant, no tangible or visual images are provided in emphasising freedom and justice as core British values. This reflects in part the position the UK occupies in the world: an ex-colonial power still with historical baggage which is one of the middle-ranking countries. It also reflects a strong hold of multiculturalism on the contemporary UK. Taken together, it seems cultural diplomacy of the contemporary UK is creating a condition in which articulation of the particular is increasingly difficult. In other words,

contemporary cultural diplomacy appears to have a flattening effect on national identity rather than enhancing it as expected in the practice of nation-branding.

It would be interesting to see if the same tendency can be observed in cultural diplomacy of other European countries. France, Germany and Italy in the prewar period are often described to have led the way in cultural diplomacy as an enterprise to impress others by exhibiting the nation's superiority in culture (Parsons 1985; Mellison 2005). Germany and Italy were humiliated at World War II and France had to face decolonisation as the UK did; all these countries have gone through similar social change in the postwar period and have adopted multiculturalism as a ways of managing social relations in one way or another. Is cultural diplomacy of France today, for instance, conducted in a similar tension and under similar pressure to those of the British Council? Is the articulation of national identity within the context of cultural diplomacy showing the sign of flattening as in the case of the British Council? Among the post-communist countries, Poland's public diplomacy in the run up to the accession to the European Union is often seen as a success (Mellison 2005). Having achieved its priority of becoming an EU member state, is Poland's cultural diplomacy converging with those pursued by old member states? Further questions keep coming up. Cultural diplomacy continues to provide a fertile ground in which to investigate national identity.

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