
Culture and Bilateral Diplomacy: A Study of Nigeria-Saudi Relations

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Abstract

Culture has always been a central component of international relations. From the reciprocal exchange of gifts and goodwill by ancient rulers to modern-day cultural exchanges, culture has been used as a way for leaders and countries to build lasting relationships. It influences how people within a country interact with each other; it guides decision making, values, thinking patterns and behaviour. This is true of Nigeria-Saudi bilateral relation as culture occupies a central position in their relations. This paper relied on diplomatic and bureaucratic correspondences, Newspaper publications and existing literature on Nigeria-Saudi relations, to examine from a historical perspective, the role of culture in the relations between Nigeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It evaluated the changing nature, character and escalating dynamics of these relations. The study identified issues and areas of cooperation that can provide the basis for sustained Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. The paper concluded that cultural events involving two or more states can draw them closer diplomatically; a further proof of the relevance of the cultural factor to the understanding of the foreign policies of states. Hence it showed the inadequacies of International Relations theories to capture the realities of third world international relations.

Keywords: *Culture, Bilateral Relations, Education, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia*

Introduction

Multilateral diplomacy characterizes the contemporary international relations, yet bilateral relation is continuously relevant to the international system. Every state seeks to establish diplomatic relations through contacts with other governments. Since states depend on one another for survival and security, the games that the states play must be guided by prudence. According to Deutsch (1989: ix); 'International Relations are that area of human action where inescapable interdependence meets with inadequate control'. Therefore, bilateral relations create a forum for closer synergy and provide opportunities for possible control while culture plays a vital role in strengthening bilateral relations. The role of culture in bilateral relation builds strength from the ability to connect human values and provides the chance to appreciate points of commonality. Culture also provides the means to understand others and where there are conflicts of interest, it gives the chance to appreciate and understand motivations that underlie them. This could be seen in the United States/United Kingdom bilateral relation. Shared values of culture keep their relationship special.

The peoples of today's Nigeria, especially the tribes of Northern Nigeria had engaged in various aspects of cultural and economic interactions with the Arabs of Saudi Arabia long before both countries emerged as sovereign nations. Theological tracts and colonial memoirs such as the Jordan report on Mecca Conference of 1926 show that these interactions ranged from trade, pilgrimage, intellectual and other cultural exchanges (AHKA/15373 Vol.II 1926:14). These precolonial interactions formed the foundations of Colonial and Post-Colonial Nigeria -Saudi Arabia relations. During the Colonial era, elite northern Nigerian Muslims studied at Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, while hundreds of thousands of ordinary Nigerians completed the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Saudi regimes reached out to Nigerian Muslims through radio and print media while Muslim leaders, missionaries, and teachers visited Nigeria. Saudi-based organizations courted Nigerian religious leaders and gave funds to religious movements for the construction of mosques and Islamic schools, thereby playing a significant role in the spread of Islamic education in Nigeria.

With these pre-colonial and colonial cultural interactions, it was therefore very easy for Nigeria to quickly establish official diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after independence. Oluwatoki (2016:17) posits that within six months of independence, Nigeria had eleven diplomatic missions abroad among which were in Khartoum (Sudan) and Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). Since then, Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations swing like pendulum with Hajj constituting one side of the orbit while the other side is shared by issues bordering on illegal aliens, undocumented trade, Saudi investments in Nigeria, education, Oil, cooperation in peace and security and mutual involvement in multilateral relations. It is against this background that this paper examines the place of culture in Nigeria-Saudi relations. It clears major conceptual issues such as bilateralism and culture used in the paper as a framework for analysis. The paper stresses the importance and central role of Hajj, education, Muslim World League, Nigeria Arab Association and other cultural issues in Nigeria-Saudi relations.

Theoretical Framework

Bilateral relations and Foreign Policy can be studied from different perspectives. The three major paradigms (perspectives) are the Realist, the Behavioural and the Marxist political economy (Asobie, 1990:8). The decision-making analysis spans the three paradigms. The realist perspective is premised on the concept of power in relation to national interest (Morgenthau, 1978:5). According to this perspective, in all considerations, bilateral relations are premised on the concern for closer ties and increasing state power to ensure national security and maintain peace and order in the world. To the realists, the international system is an anarchical society (Bull, 1988) in which neither law nor multilateral agreements (international organizations) can effectively ensure peace and order (Asobie, 1990:9). Hence, only through balance of power mechanism can state behaviour, with conflicting national objectives be curtailed. In other words, the mechanism of balance of power is the most effective regulatory device for the management of power in the international society. Balance of power, the realist perspective argues, is a stabilizer, a general social principle that helps to preserve the autonomy of units (states) of the international society (Morgenthau, 1978:143).

It is apparent that the realist paradigm and the models deriving from them (balance of power, national role, rational actor model) in their preoccupation with power are more suited for power-related studies, on war, arms race and other conflict situations. Therefore, the realist perspective is not relevant to the inquiry involved in this paper. Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations do not involve any power rivalry or mutual suspicion. The two states are not contiguous and they do not have any mutually exclusive interests. As important actors in their respective regions, the two states exert influence in their respective regional politics but not in any way that the interests of each other can be affected by the actions of the other. People to people relations based on cultural interactions forms the foundations of Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations, therefore, the realist approach cannot adequately serve to illuminate the concerns raised by this paper.

The behavioural perspective focuses on individual human beings as a unit of analysis. It conceives political actors as individuals with emotions, biases and other human attributes. His attachment to the national system, whether sentimental or instrumental or a combination of the two, as Kelman (1969) explains, depends on his personal and social characteristics – such as his place in society, his education, his residence, his religious and ethnic identification, his personal history, his personality dispositions (Kelman:283).

The research adopts the behavioural perspective for this study. It affords an inquiry into the behaviour of the decision makers whose actions and reactions actually symbolize the state (Snyder et al., 1969:200). This study uses a model that focuses attention on the behaviour of the decision makers, in this case the heads of state and the foreign ministers in the two states. King Abdul Aziz ibn abd al-Rahman al-Saud, a muslim, shaped Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in the beginning. What the Kings after him have done is building on and modifying the policies where necessary. Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa also a Muslim who grew

up in a society with long cultural ties with the Arabs, also shaped Nigeria's foreign policy in the first instance. The predispositions of the two heads of state who share a lot of affinity in terms of religious belief and cultural practices, largely affect the two states' foreign policies towards each other. Just as in Nehru's India, Nkrumah's Ghana, Ben Bella's Algeria, Nassir's Egypt and Bourguiba's Tunisia, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia display the stamp of the personalities of their leaders on their foreign policy making process.

One would ordinarily expect to see changes in the behaviour of states with the constant change of leadership. So, why do we have consistency in the behaviour of states with changes in the decision-makers? The hajj is the basis of Nigeria's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia; it serves as the cultural interests of a part of the civil society whose private interests have been raised into collective objectives of the state. The behaviour of the state therefore can be understood at the group level. In this particular instance it is religious group dynamic that explains Nigeria's behaviour as far as hajj is concerned. Whether it is a Shagari, an Obasanjo, a Yar'Adua or a Jonathan and a Buhari, as President, Nigeria's policy towards Saudi Arabia will remain the same because of the large Muslim population in Nigeria who engage in various religious and cultural activities in Saudi Arabia annually. Hajj is a group thing and a very important annual event for the large Muslim population in Nigeria. Therefore, every government in Nigeria will support hajj.

The Concept of Culture

Much of the difficulty of understanding the concept of culture stems from the different usages of the term. Broadly speaking, and as exemplified in Matthew Arnolds' *Culture and Anarchy* (1867:4), culture refers to the symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are part of any society. As this definition suggests, there are two basic components of culture: ideas and symbols on the one hand, and artifacts (material objects) on the other. The first type, called nonmaterial culture also known as symbolic culture, includes the values, beliefs, symbols, and language that define a society. The second type, called material culture, includes all the society's physical objects, such as its tools and technology, clothing, eating utensils, and means of transportation. In other words, Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Spencer & Franklin, 2012: 22). In analyzing the culture of a particular group and its role in enhancing transnational relations between two countries, it is desirable to distinguish two fundamental levels at which culture manifests itself: the observable artifacts and the values which encompass belief, morals, law, customs, language and habits. When two societies share the same value system, they tend to relate more closely which inadvertently leads to exchanges in aspects of material culture which also encompass clothing, dress code, eating utensils, building designs and means of transportation. Concerning Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, Islam, which came to the area now known as Northern Nigeria, through Borno, mediated by Muslim clerics and traders in the 11th Century, enhanced the spread of Arab cultures in Nigeria such that today there are a lot of cultural similarities between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (Oluwatoki, 2010: 40), from dress code (the thobe for men and the use of hijab by women) to language (Arabic language) and transportation system (the use of horses and donkeys).

Culture and Bilateral Relations

Though neglected by many third world countries, culture, if well managed and harnessed plays a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations. If substantial parts of the populations of two states with restricted relations share cultural templates, then relations between the states, revolving around religio-cultural issues will increase. If two states are involved in the operations of basically individual cultural/religious rituals, then the prospect of inter-governmental contacts enhances relations between the two states (Adefuye, 1992: 37).

Cultural Relations

The multidimensional nature of culture makes it possible to be analyzed from different perspectives. There is still a growing debate on the real, full and comprehensive meaning of culture. Hence, scholars from different

disciplines in the humanities like history, philosophy, anthropology, religious studies and others approach the term from different perspectives. This paper adopts a diplomatic and international relations approach. According to Eulau (1963: 45), Cultural relations are reciprocal, non-coercive transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities that are conducted both by state and non-state actors within the space of cultural and civil society. The overall outcome of cultural relations is greater connectivity, better mutual understanding more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between states, peoples and non-state actors and cultures. From this analysis, it can be deduced that cultural relations strengthen the bonds of bilateral relations because these interactions go beyond state actors to non-state actors and individuals.

Bilateral Relations

Bilateralism is the conduct of political, economic, or cultural relations between two sovereign states. It is in contrast to unilateralism or multilateralism, which is activity by a single state or jointly by multiple states, respectively. When states recognize one another as sovereign states and agree to establish diplomatic relations, they create a bilateral relationship. States with bilateral ties will exchange diplomatic agents such as ambassadors to facilitate dialogues and co-operations. Economic agreements, such as Free Trade Agreements (FTA) or Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), signed by two states, are a common example of bilateralism. Since most economic agreements are signed according to the specific characteristics of the contracting countries to give preferential treatment to each other, not a generalized principle but a situational differentiation is needed. Thus, through bilateralism, states can obtain more tailored agreements and obligations that only apply to particular contracting states (Deutsch, 1989).

There has been a long debate on the merits of bilateralism versus multilateralism. The first rejection of bilateralism came after the First World War when many politicians concluded that the complex pre-war system of bilateral treaties had made war inevitable. This led to the creation of the multilateral League of Nations (which was disbanded in failure after 26 years). A similar reaction against bilateral trade agreements occurred after the Great Depression when it was argued that such agreements helped produce a cycle of rising tariffs that deepened the economic downturn. Thus, after the Second World War, the West turned to multilateral agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which has been replaced by the World Trade Organization (Deutsch, 1989). Despite the high profile of modern multilateral systems such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization most diplomacy is still conducted at the bilateral level. Bilateralism has flexibility and ease which is lacking in most compromise-dependent multilateral systems. In addition, disparities in power, resources, money, armament, or technology are more easily benefitable by the weaker side in bilateral diplomacy, which weaker states might consider as a positive aspect of it, compared to the more consensus-driven multilateral form of diplomacy, where the one state-one vote rule applies.

Cultural Issues in Nigeria-Saudi Relations

Although Hajj occupies the front seat in Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations, there are myriads of cultural interaction, education, trade and strategic issues that should incite further studies and necessitate constant and improved interaction between the two regional leaders.

Hajj

As the spiritual centre of Islam, Saudi-Arabia automatically becomes the epicenter of bilateral relations with any African state that has a sizable number of Muslims. Since every Muslim is expected to perform the Hajj (holy pilgrimage) at least once in his lifetime. Hajj, being an important annual ritual in Nigeria with large Muslim populations, became the fulcrum upon which Nigeria-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations revolve. Hajj remains the most crucial issue in Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. It was the basis of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in 1961 far ahead of many Muslim countries like Egypt and Iran. Hajj

is an important annual ritual which Muslims in Nigeria have been engaged in prior to the creation of the Nigerian state (1900 - 1914) and before the establishment of the incumbent ruling dynasty in Arabia, Saudi Arabia, in 1932. Ancient Bornu, the Hausa states and the colonial administration, all were involved and engaged in hajj operations, more or less, to cater for the pilgrims who were intent on going on the annual pilgrimage (Oluwatoki, 2010:41, Bugaje, 1999:3, Jordan, 1934:30).

The Nigerian government has been involved in the organization of hajj, even prior to its independence in October 1960. Since hajj operations and management involve consular and aviation activities, they require bilateral cooperation on the part of the two states. Since Nigerians have to stay in Saudi Arabia for a few weeks which the rituals last, Nigeria is concerned about the welfare of its nationals and Saudi Arabia as host has a duty to ensure the pilgrims' wellbeing. Saudi Arabia is also concerned about the safe passage of pilgrims back to their states. The Kingdom does not expect any pilgrim to stay back after hajj. Hajj is a big annual event in Nigeria (Yusuf, 1994:223). Government's involvement and the increasing number of pilgrims from Nigeria (Highest in Africa) make it a serious issue in Nigeria Saudi Arabia relations. Three institutional structures are already put in place: the Directorate of Pilgrims Affairs, States Pilgrims Boards and the Immigration Department, which essentially handles cross-border movements of its citizens. Consequent to the perennial problems with the hajj operations, the Nigerian Government established the National Hajj Commission (National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) in 2007 to ensure a smooth yearly hajj operation. There is no doubt therefore, that the annual movement of thousands of pilgrims from Nigeria to and from Saudi Arabia necessitate closer ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Education

Education is one of the avenues of cementing strong cultural relations between nation states. Educational ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are as old as the advent of Islam in Nigeria; the spread of Islam went concurrently with education. During the colonial period, Nigeria already boasted of a crop of Islamic scholars who studied in Saudi Arabia. In the late 1950s, through the 60s and 70s, madrasahs around the country often dispensed Saudi scholarships to their students to study in Saudi Arabia. On return to Nigeria, they went largely into teaching; a few in primary/secondary schools, a fewer still after years of lower-level teaching and with additional qualifications, went into tertiary teaching while the majority of them opened their own madrasahs and sometimes led prayers in mosques. Like Nigerians who studied in the United States and Western European countries and also those who studied in Russia (the former Soviet Union) and other East European countries, Nigerian graduates from Saudi Arabia are considerably large in the mainstream Nigerian Civil Service. They influence policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria and thus promote closer ties in Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations.

The King Fahd University of Petroleum and Mineral Resources has a postgraduate scholarship scheme in the natural / physical sciences, geo-sciences, different areas of engineering and management sciences. Posters announcing the Scholarship can be found on the University website and in public places in Nigeria especially in mosques). This generous scholarship offer is apparently not routed through the Nigerian Government. This is however an avenue that can open a new vista in Nigeria-Saudi Arabia cultural relations. After all, processing the application, especially the necessary consular matters will eventually involve the government. A class of career bureaucrats and technocrats trained in Saudi Arabia can impact positively on the relations between the two states and also influence not only Nigeria's foreign policy elite, but they can also serve as channels of improving relations between the two states.

World Assembly of Muslim Youths and the Promotion of Education in Nigeria

The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) is a Saudi based NGO that has considerably fostered strong cultural and educational relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. The organization is an Islamic institution which is primarily concerned with the propagation of the religion of Islam globally. However, their

activities are not only restricted to the preaching of the tenets of Islam, but the organization also engages in numerous programmes across the country in areas such as: education, humanitarian support, scholarship, media, project and social activities. The World Assembly of Muslim Youths has greatly contributed to the development of education in Nigeria. WAMY built schools from nursery, secondary to even University level some of which include; Al-amana International School, Lagos, WAMY International School, Kano, Al-Faruk International School, Maiduguri, Al- Falah International School, Edo State, Al- Amir Abdul Karim School, Zaria. Apart from primary and secondary schools, WAMY also initiated the Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, which was established in 2005 (Jabo, 2012:191). WAMY's enormous support to the growth of education in Nigeria lends credence to the impact of culture in bilateral relations. Their activities have further strengthened Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations as thousands of Nigerian youths have benefitted from their educational and cultural programmes. Consequently, these gestures further cement the relations between the two countries.

Health Relations

Statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that Saudi Arabia has recruited thousands of Nigerian professionals to work in its hospitals and companies (Musa, 2003:4, Mustapha, 2007:6). Some of the medical professionals are doctors, nurses, laboratory scientists, including professors and medical directors. Today, there are many Nigerian doctors in Saudi Arabia some of whom have lived there for upward of twelve or fifteen years. These doctors and paramedics leave for Saudi Arabia because of the offer of better remuneration. A State Commissioner for Health was among other medical doctors interviewed for job in Saudi Arabia. Salaries offered ranged between \$60,000 (N298, 800) and \$80,000 (N398, 800). At a time, a massive number of doctors, nurses, laboratory scientists, including professors, medical directors, interviewed to work in Saudi Arabia (Musa, 2003, 4; Seun, 2010:3, Adeniran, 2016:5). Opportunities in Saudi Arabia could be made available to willing Nigerian students. This is one of the areas that the governments of both countries need to look into for possible improvement. Nigerian politicians and Government officials also frequent Saudi Arabia for medical tourism. A good example is former Nigeria's President Yar'Adua who died in a Saudi hospital. However, in all these interactions, Nigeria has not signed any bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia, be it on education or trade. Cultural exchanges in matters of education are one sure way Nigeria can achieve manpower development for its citizenry.

Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Relations and the World Muslim League (WML)

The World Muslim League is the largest international non-governmental Islamic Organization in the world (World Muslim League, n.d.:7). It came into existence during the 1962 hajj as an initiative of King Faysal of Saudi Arabia to combat Abdel Nassir's Arab nationalist threat (Piskatori, 1983:40). Leading Muslim figures from forty-three states agreed to its establishment in 1962. The fundamental objective of the organization is unity and peace among the Muslim ummah. Nigeria has a long history of involvement with the League with the presence of the Sardauna of Sokoto and the Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello at its establishment. Ahmadu Bello did not hide his pro-Arab, pan Islamic convictions. He openly called for unity of Muslim states (Akinyemi, 1974:101) and as a flamboyant politician, he carried the air of a sovereign in his tour of Muslim countries (Paden, 1986:535). According to Akinyemi (1974:102), the Sardauna's Islamic propagation earned him the Vice Presidency of the World Muslim Congress. No Nigerian may have reached such influential political height in the League since the death of Sir Ahmadu Bello, but there has always been a leader of the Nigerian delegation to the league. Bello's legacy, especially through his frequent official hajj pilgrimages and hajj diplomacy, has afforded Nigeria permanent representation in the League, thus engendering mutual respect and closer ties between the two states.

It is worthy to point out that the WLM has discernable impact on Nigeria's educational development. The organization established schools in different locations in Nigeria. The schools included: Islamic Centre,

Afikpo, Anofia Local Government Area, Ebonyi state. Although the school was established by an indigene of the area in 1956, in 1982 WML took over the school. The school had primary, junior and senior secondary school. It is a model art and science school and the language of instruction are Arabic and English only (Jabo, 2012:180).

Nigeria-Arab Association

Relations between states have often been enhanced by inter-governmental diplomacy, which promotes inter-governmental collaboration, contacts and transactions between corporate bodies across frontiers and increases inter-personal relationship among citizens of particular states. According to Deng Xiaoping, if “there is only cooperation between two governments without people-to-people contacts, there won't be a solid basis for the relations between the two countries” (quoted in Chibwe, 1977:57). This statement is particularly true about Nigeria's relations with Saudi Arabia. The Nigeria-Arab Association which is championed by the Arabs of Saudi Arabia, amongst other things, creates, promotes and sustain broad exchanges and interaction as well as discussions in cultural, political and economic fields between Nigeria and the Arab world, especially Saudi Arabia. The role of the Association in promoting cultural exchanges between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia deserves scholarly attention. The Association has tried to improve the perception of Nigerians, especially non-Muslims, about Saudi Arabia through enlightenment programmes on radio and television and the sponsorship of cultural events in Northern Nigeria like the Eid Al Kabir and Eid Al Fitri (the main two Muslim celebrations) as well as Durbar festival (Adefuye, 1992:35).

Arabic Language

Arabic and its different dialects are spoken by around 522 million speakers (native and non-native speakers) around the world, making it one of the five most spoken languages in the world (Ochsenwald, 2019:6). The importance of the language is further underscored by the fact that it is one of the five official languages of the United Nations also spoken by Nigeria and six other members of the African Union (Akinsanya, 1976:34). In Nigeria, it is well known that an entire ethnic group; the Shuwa Arabs, speak Arabic while Arabic words have crept into local languages like Fulani, Hausa and Yoruba. As the first foreign language spoken in Nigeria, overtime, the language has greatly influenced the perception and behaviour of Nigerians towards the Arab world especially Saudi Arabia. The Nigerian currency and the Nigerian Army emblem also bear Arabic inscriptions. The Arabic language has no doubt over the years engendered closer ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia as relations between both countries are sometimes conducted in the Arabic Language (Bukarambe, 2018:45).

Material Culture and Nigeria-Saudi Relations

Although Islam, the religion which originated from Saudi Arabia, is more widespread in Northern Nigeria than in the South, cultural impact is still palpably felt among the Yorubas who constitute a great chunk of ethnic groupings in Southern Nigeria. It is, therefore, very common to see Nigerians in Saudi dresses (particularly the long gown called jalabiyyah or turbans) in the streets of Kano, Sokoto or Zaria in the North or in Lagos, Ibadan or Abeokuta in the South. Food bowls and plates used in Saudi Arabia are also common among the Nigerian Muslim North Jewelry too have been an essential part of Arabian dress for thousands of years. More than just personal decoration, jewelry symbolized social and economic status. For the migrant Bedouins, it was also an easily transportable form of wealth and security (Finster, 2017:56). Saudi Arabian Jewelry are loved by Nigerians. The importation of Saudi Jewelry has become big business in Nigeria, as wearing Saudi Jewelry symbolizes social and economic status among the wealthy Northern Nigerians. Like in Saudi Arabia, today, Nigerian women still receive gifts of jewelry from their husbands when they marry or have children (Oluwatoki, 2010:58).

Saudi Arabia has a unique architectural heritage that has developed over the centuries. Saudi houses and housing compounds are often noted for the high walls (3 or 4 metres high) surrounding them, explained as

useful in keeping out sandstorms and/or reflective of the families' self-contained outlook. (Finster, 2017:58). Though Northern Nigeria's geography and climate, to a great extent are near similar to those of Saudi Arabia, there is a noticeable cultural fusion between Saudi and Nigerian cultures in architectural designs of buildings in Northern Nigeria. All these cultural interactions and prevalence of aspects of Saudi material culture in Nigeria have no doubt heightened Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations in all other phases ranging from diplomatic to economic and cooperation on global issues of mutual interest as most Nigerian people see themselves as spiritually and culturally linked to Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that culture plays a critical role in strengthening and consolidating bilateral relations. It has also demonstrated that cultural issues such as Hajj, language, education, dressing, architecture, eating utensils, mode of transportation, jewelry and other aspects of material culture have to a great extent enhanced Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations in all fronts. Though, Hajj predominates Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations, it is also linked one way or the other with the other issues involved in the relations. Thus, this paper has enhanced our understanding of the cultural factor in Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations and has opened yet another vista in Bilateral relations. Cultural events that involve two states draw them closer diplomatically, a further proof of the relevance of the cultural factor to the understanding of the foreign policies of states. When substantial parts of the populations of two states with restricted relations share cultural template, then relations between the states will heighten, revolving around religio-cultural issues.

The most immediate practical application of this paper is for Nigeria's policy makers to re-envision Nigeria's cultural relations and tap from its great potentials to strengthen Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. Strengthening Nigeria's relations with the desert Kingdom is in Nigeria's strategic interest considering the fact that The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a country that has enormous wealth having the largest crude oil reserve in the world. Islam has an overwhelming influence on Saudi Arabian polity and society. It is the basic cultural template that defines the homogeneity of the population. The homogeneity itself is defined in a common Arabic language and adherence to Sunni Wahhabi Islam. On the other hand, Nigeria is a leader in Africa with the largest population and great wealth in solid mineral resources, petroleum, natural gas and great potential in agricultural economy, Nigeria is no doubt a regional giant. The cultural relations between Nigerians and the people of Saudi Arabia as shown in this paper, if fully explored and promoted, have the potentials of engendering closer ties between the two regional giants and this will certainly open doors of opportunities for economic growth.

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