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How Indigenous Names and Languages Are Reshaping Global Diplomacy ^[1]

In recent years, the reclaiming of indigenous names and languages by nations that were once colonized has gained significant momentum. This movement is more than just a return to cultural roots; it is a strategic tool in soft power diplomacy that allows nations to redefine their global identity and assert their cultural sovereignty. Countries like India (Bharat), Turkey (Türkiye), and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) are at the forefront of this shift, using their pre-colonial identities to transform how they are viewed globally.

Language as a Soft Power Strategy

Language has always been central to soft power diplomacy—the ability of nations to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. During the colonial period, European powers imposed languages like English and French to enforce cultural dominance and diminish indigenous identities. Today, nations are reclaiming their linguistic heritage to promote authentic narratives and reconnect with their pre-colonial histories, reshaping their global perception.

For instance, India's growing emphasis on using the name Bharat ties its identity to ancient roots, portraying the nation as rich in history and culture. This strategy of promoting cultural authenticity appeals to global audiences who value connection to historical depth and uniqueness. It is a diplomatic statement that elevates the country's stature while fostering a sense of cultural pride.

Public Diplomacy Through Cultural Reclamation

Reclaiming indigenous names and reviving lost languages represents an assertive form of public diplomacy. This act not only rejects colonial legacies but also asserts cultural autonomy. For example, Turkey's official transition from "Turkey" to Türkiye is a powerful statement, shedding its Western-imposed identity in favor of a culturally authentic one. This renaming aligns with Türkiye's ambitions to position itself as a self-determined and influential player in global affairs.

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Similarly, Zimbabwe's renaming from Rhodesia was a potent act of cultural defiance. The switch symbolized a strong rejection of the colonial past and a re-embrace of African identity, positioning the country as a sovereign state rooted in its own history. Both examples

showcase how these name changes act as diplomatic tools that help nations reframe their global identity.

The Revival of Indigenous Languages

Beyond name changes, the revival of indigenous languages is another avenue through which nations are strengthening their cultural identities and international standing. Nations like New Zealand, with its promotion of the Māori language, and South Africa, with its recognition of 11 official languages, emphasize cultural inclusivity and resilience. By promoting indigenous languages in schools, media, and governance, these countries project an image of diversity and strength, enhancing their appeal and influence on the global stage.

The United Nations' International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) further highlights the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous languages. It reinforces the idea that language is not only a medium of communication but also a critical diplomatic tool that fosters cross-cultural understanding and helps build stronger diplomatic relations.

Post-Colonial Soft Power: A Rising Force

This ongoing movement of reclaiming indigenous names and languages is reshaping the landscape of modern diplomacy. Countries like India, Türkiye, Zimbabwe, and New Zealand are using cultural revival to project authenticity, sovereignty, and cultural pride. These efforts resonate deeply with global audiences who value authenticity, positioning these nations as leaders in post-colonial soft power.

This trend underscores the interplay between language, culture, and history as powerful tools in diplomacy. By embracing and promoting these elements, countries are not only enhancing their soft power but are also leading a global movement that challenges historical legacies and reshapes the future of global diplomacy.

In today's interconnected world, nations that emphasize cultural authenticity and linguistic revival are setting the stage for how post-colonial identity and global influence will evolve in the coming decades. By blending indigenous wisdom with modern diplomacy, they are not just reshaping their own futures but offering new paths for global engagement.
