

ROUTLEDGE NEW DIPLOMACY STUDIES

Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics

Translations, Spaces and Alternatives

Edited by
Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell



Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics

This volume offers an inter-disciplinary and critical analysis of the role of culture in diplomatic practice.

If diplomacy is understood as the practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of distinct communities or causes, then questions of culture and the spaces of cultural exchange are at its core. But what of the culture of diplomacy itself? When and how did this culture emerge, and what alternative cultures of diplomacy run parallel to it, both historically and today? How do particular spaces and places inform and shape the articulation of diplomatic culture(s)? This volume addresses these questions by bringing together a collection of theoretically rich and empirically detailed contributions from leading scholars in history, international relations, geography and literary theory. Chapters attend to cross-cutting issues of the translation of diplomatic cultures, the role of space in diplomatic exchange and the diversity of diplomatic cultures beyond the formal state system. Drawing on a range of methodological approaches the contributors discuss empirical cases ranging from indigenous diplomacies of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, to the European External Action Service, the 1955 Bandung Conference, the spatial imaginaries of mid twentieth-century Balkan writer diplomats, celebrity and missionary diplomacy, and paradiplomatic narratives of The Hague. The volume demonstrates that, when approached from multiple disciplinary perspectives and understood as expansive and plural, diplomatic cultures offer an important lens onto issues as diverse as global governance, sovereignty regimes and geographical imaginations.

This book will be of much interest to students of public diplomacy, foreign policy, international organisations, media and communications studies, and IR in general.

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Introduction: Conceptualising diplomatic cultures

Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell

JASON: If the Governor-General went to another country, and they said ‘only 20 guns [in the salute] because times are tough’, you would be quite upset?

ALLISON, CANADIAN PROTOCOL OFFICER: All countries have their own [protocol] package but I would say in all the [state] visits I’ve done they include military honours, 21 gun salute, an official dinner or lunch, a meeting of some sort. That’s sort of a standard package. Now countries do it in different ways, they use different numbers, they do different times, you may have your welcome ceremony not exactly at the time of arrival but a couple of hours later downtown. So, there’s flexibility in how states receive guests, but there is a standard protocol that’s in place.¹

The city of Geneva may house some of the primary institutions of modern international diplomacy but the venue for this gathering of diplomats is far from opulent or imposing. It is a cold November day and the basement of a rundown NGO conference centre in Les Savoises area of Geneva is filling up with delegations – some in national dress, some in dark suits – greeting each other, attaching their national flags to the walls, picking up briefing papers and taking their seats. The occasion is the 11th General Assembly of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), a coalition of almost 50 stateless nations, indigenous communities and national minorities who are currently denied a place at international diplomatic forums. The communities represented may have no official presence in conventional spaces of international diplomacy, but the assembly proceeds with protocols and procedures which emulate those enacted up the road at the United Nations Office: presidency reports are delivered, motions are proposed, seconded and voted on, delegations report on their current situations and resolutions are adopted.²

If diplomacy is understood as the practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of distinct communities or causes, then questions of culture and the spaces of cultural exchange are at its core. But what of the culture – or cultures – of diplomacy itself? As the sketches above from our ongoing research with foreign ministries and the UNPO start to indicate, defining what is meant by diplomatic culture is far from straightforward. To what extent is there a universal diplomatic culture, practised by recognised foreign ministries and mimicked by aspirant states? When and how did this culture emerge, and what alternative

cultures of diplomacy run in parallel to it, both historically and today? How do particular spaces and places inform and shape the articulation of diplomatic culture(s)? This volume seeks to address these questions by bringing together a collection of theoretically rich and empirically detailed contributions from scholars working in a range of disciplines. The chapters that follow attend to cross-cutting issues of the translation of diplomatic cultures, the role of space in diplomatic exchange and the diversity of diplomatic cultures beyond the formal state system.

The relationship between culture and diplomacy is one which has received increasing levels of attention in recent years by scholars and practitioners in light of both the perceived importance of common cultural frameworks in international negotiation and the reality of how diverse cultural mores impact on the diplomatic process. Central to this has been the expansion of the broad, interdisciplinary fields of cultural and public diplomacy which have focused on ideas of soft power (Nye 2004; Melissen 2005), the role of the media communication with foreign publics (Gilboa 2008; Pamment 2013) and nation-branding and the diplomatic role of culture in the 'war on terror' (Finn 2003; Kennedy 2003). This volume draws inspiration from such scholarship, but orientates discussion in a new direction. Rather than examining the use of culture in diplomatic engagements with foreign publics, the chapters that follow focus on the cultures of diplomacy itself. As such, this volume initiates and develops new discussions that widen the vocabularies and conceptual frameworks currently employed within diplomatic scholarship and starts to map out new priorities and possibilities for the study and practice of diplomacy. This project of broadening, diversifying and nuancing the understanding and interpretation of diplomatic cultures emerged from a research network organised by the co-editors in 2013.³ The chapters included in this volume are based on keynote presentations made at three workshops held that year in Cambridge, London and The Hague which each brought together interdisciplinary scholars and a number of diplomacy stakeholders and practitioners. Each chapter, including this introduction, is informed by broader discussions during these workshops around the modes and spaces through which diplomatic culture is translated. After setting out the history and context of the notion of diplomatic culture, this chapter proceeds by outlining the relational and interdisciplinary approach to the topic for which this volume advocates. This is followed by an overview of the chapters that follow, which are grouped around three intersecting themes: (i) the strategies and modes of translation between and across diplomatic cultures; (ii) the role of space and spatiality in diplomatic exchange; and (iii) the articulation of diplomatic cultures and practices beyond traditional spaces of state-focused diplomacy.

Tracing the idea of diplomatic culture

Diplomatic studies has only recently engaged with the notion of diplomatic culture, in parallel to the wider cultural turn through the social sciences in

the 1990s. This absence can be traced both to a perceived cultural disconnect between polities (hence the need for diplomacy in the first place), and the tendency of more positivist strands of North American International Relations (IR) to discount the importance of culture. Critics coming from this perspective considered ‘diplomatic culture too vague, ambiguous or unverifiable to warrant serious intellectual attention’ (Der Derian 1996: 87; Sharp 2004). Indeed, the inclusion of culture within IR remains uneven and contested. Wiseman (2005) traces four ‘camps’ within IR: the English School (Diplomatic culture exists and its importance is underestimated), negotiation theorists (Diplomatic culture exists but is not important), constructivists (The existence of diplomatic culture is either ignored or taken for granted by neo-realists) and neo-conservative policy analysts (Diplomatic culture exists but harms the national interest).

Given these camps, it should not be surprising that it is Hedley Bull and the English School that has most informed the literature on the subject. Bull (1977) argued that diplomatic culture is crucial to the emergence and operation of the international state system and James Der Derian (1996: 85) goes as far as to assert that diplomatic culture plays a ‘meta-theoretical’ role in Bull’s ‘international society’. He argues that we can conceptually map Bull’s use of ‘diplomatic culture’ via three concentric circles. ‘World’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ culture is the outermost circle, and it is this which ‘all historical international societies have had as one of their foundations a common culture’ (Bull 1977: 304). Sharp (2004: 364) describes this outermost circle as ‘an underlying, cosmopolitan set of values which human beings have been claimed to share whether or not they are aware of the existence of each other’. This definition clearly includes the common culture of pre-Westphalian city-states and empires, but the second concentric circle, which lies inside the first, is the specific ‘international political culture’ of the modern interstate system. The smallest circle, and thus a subset of the second, is ‘diplomatic culture’: ‘the common stock of ideas and values possessed by the official representatives of states’ (Bull 1977: 304).

This singular notion of diplomatic culture is therefore understood as that which unifies those acting in the diplomatic field; the common stock of rhetoric and manners that enables diplomacy to emerge. Bull’s conceptualisation of diplomatic culture, when laid alongside Wiseman’s more detailed definition – ‘the accumulated communicative and representational norms, rules, and institutions devised to improve relations and avoid war between interacting and mutually recognizing political entities’ (2005: 409–410) – renders visible that held in common by both. These are common values (religious, or at least a preference for peace), intellectualism, common habits, a starting assumption of the equality of states and a diplomatic heritage of wisdom and prudence that is the legacy of past generations.

In tracing when and from where these underpinning attributes of diplomatic culture emerge Der Derian (1987) begins his European genealogy of diplomacy well prior to the foundation of the modern state, locating its origins in Christian medieval thought. Given that Christ united humanity through His sacrifice, so too were Christendom’s polities united. Yet at the same time, the fall from grace

in the Garden of Eden estranged humans from God and from each other. In this theological approach, the general condition of humanity requires the development of diplomacy as a means of overcoming estrangement. The subsequent fracturing of Christendom via the Great Schism and the development of Ottoman power in south-eastern Europe changed the conditions in which diplomacy was conducted, necessitating its fusion to the rising power of the modern state.

Of course, the rise of the modern state was not just about the development of institutions, but also of new political subjects. Der Derian sees Nicolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) as a sign of an emergent political rationality that was able to abstract the interests of the state from the interests of the community. This new rationality was not, however, entirely devoid of traces of the Christianity with which it used to be associated. As Iver Neumann notes:

As late as 1815, although Tsar Alexander of Russia did not succeed in making his 'holy alliance' the framework for a new European diplomatic order, he still managed to recruit his 'brothers in Christ', the Habsburg emperor and the king of Prussia, with a treaty text that bore the explicit religious and kinship markers of the diplomacy of Christendom.

(Neumann 2012: 304)

Indeed, traces of those Christian origins can be found in diplomatic practice today, from diplomatic immunity and permanent embassies, to the hierarchy of the diplomatic corps (*ibid*).

Locating diplomatic culture within the larger history of Christendom, and only then linking it to the modern state to be replicated around the world as the state model was replicated around the world through colonialism, indicates the centrality of Europe in this genealogy (Watson 1984). Whilst this tendency towards universality can be seen as far back as the writings of François de Callières (1717) who argued for a continuous and universal culture of negotiation, Hedley Bull (1977) and the English School of IR highlight the role of this (post) colonial dissemination in ensconcing diplomatic culture as a universal norm. The fusion of this culture of negotiation with international law and its associated institutions after the Second World War codified diplomatic culture in ways that have overcome vast ideological divides: 'the structures and decision-making procedures of the British, French and US service have been replicated, with greater or lesser efficiency, by developing and even communist countries' (Riordan 2003: 30). Diplomacy, over the span of several centuries, went from being a relatively parochial set of practices to underpinning the entire international system.

If diplomacy is formerly a European construct, but is now commonly understood as more than that – as the necessary overcoming of estrangement in the international system – then translation comes to the fore as a way of understanding diplomacy. Diplomatic culture enables the mediation of difference, the process of connection 'across alien boundaries' (Der Derian 1996: 85). Of course in translating across that estrangement diplomacy reproduces the rupture it seeks to overcome: diplomacy 'not only manages the consequences of

separateness, but, in so doing, it reproduces the conditions out of which those consequences arise' (Sharp 2004: 370). This fundamental alienation is central to the English School's treatment of diplomatic culture (Bull 1977; Wight 1979; Watson 1984), and, in general, reinforces the ontology of states-as-actors that has stuck with the field for so long. Equally it shows why diplomacy has, as a set of practices, received relatively little attention within the field of IR. The process of overcoming that alienation, even for a little while, threatens many of the field's assumptions. However, as Der Derian (1996) notes, this alienation is multi-faceted and irreducible to an ontology of states: it also applies to the relationship between people and their own polity. As discussed below this volume seeks to provide empirical grounding and theoretical nuance to this broader and more inclusive approach to diplomatic culture.

Given the role of diplomatic culture in providing a space of translation, or a middle ground between estranged polities, it must be a common *intellectual* culture. Bull argues for the importance of a common language (Latin until the mid-nineteenth century, then French and finally English), indicating that translation may be understood at a minimum in the linguistic sense. But he also argues for 'a common scientific understanding of the world, [and] certain common notions and techniques that derive from the universal espousal by governments ... of economic development and their universal involvement in modern technology' (1977: 305). Therefore, we can start to see the role of materials, practices, visual representations, spaces and knowledges in cultures of translation, and it is this diversity of modes of cultural articulation that this volume both reflects and begins to analyse.

Diplomatic culture is frequently held up as the hope of humanity, an ideal we ignore at our own peril. And of course diplomatic culture cannot totally and completely overcome the estrangement of humanity; there will always be excess, discontinuity and confusion. A critical perspective might, however, productively focus on the divide between diplomatic culture and the societies it seeks to mediate between. For instance, while a shared set of norms brought together Western donors, African neighbours, the European Commission and UN aid agencies to work towards peace in early 1990s Rwanda, Leader notes that it was that shared set of norms that blinded diplomats to the workings of power on the ground:

Diplomacy failed in Rwanda at least in part because the Kigali diplomatic corps was a victim of its own diplomatic culture. The Kigali diplomatic community ... were so committed to the success of the Arusha process ... that they failed to see or to comprehend the warning signs that the process was not leading to peace. (2007: 192)

Therefore, the gap between diplomatic views of politics and those of others, who may be committed to violence or other non-negotiated outcomes, can occasionally pose its own problems for international relations. Diplomatic culture is a balm, not a cure, for humanity's estrangement from itself.

Rethinking diplomatic culture(s)

In their recent introduction to a special issue dedicated to changing diplomatic practices, Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot and Iver Neumann (2011) identify two distinctions within the diplomatic field that are increasingly blurred: that of practices of representation and governing, and that of territorial and non-territorial actors. They thus not only identify the widening of both what diplomats do, but also the widening of the constituencies being represented through those practices. These two shifts are not unrelated, as they point out: ‘Expertise, which is in fast-increasing demand in contemporary diplomacy [for the purpose of governing], is shifting the principle of representation away from territoriality toward virtual forms of authority grounded in symbolic systems’ (Sending et al. 2011: 537). Of particular importance to Sending and colleagues is that diplomatic studies should respond to this expansion of its remit – both in terms of practices and actors – through the adoption of a relational approach: ‘taking stock of contemporary shifts in diplomatic practices thanks to a focus on the *relations* among actors and practices’ (535).

This volume follows in the critical and reflective intellectual trajectory set out by Sending and colleagues, amongst many others, which is attuned to the multiplicities and pluralities of diplomatic practices, actors and spaces, both in the past and the contemporary period (see also Constantinou and Der Derian 2010; Cornago 2010; Pamment 2013). In particular, the chapters that follow conceive of diplomacy as a translocal network of practices through which diplomacy can be seen to proliferate into many unexpected times and spaces. This relational understanding of diplomacy de-centres the practices of state diplomats and highlights the vast cultural and political infrastructure that makes state-based diplomacies meaningful. However, the approach adopted here also strikes new paths within critical perspectives on diplomacy.

First, underpinning the approach to diplomatic cultures here is an embrace of multi-disciplinarity. The bringing together of a range of disciplinary perspectives, and particularly those interested in questions of culture and space, is motivated both by an acknowledgement that diplomacy itself is a profoundly interdisciplinary subject, and the disciplinary perspective of the co-editors. Human geography, in its contemporary guise, is in many ways an outward-looking discipline and our approach to theory and methodology is therefore an integrative one. As such, this book is not positioned within the somewhat rigid sets of debates around diplomacy in IR: it is neither in the school of thought that posits diplomacy as the management of eternal separateness (Sharp 2009), nor the school of thought that diplomats are transformationalist agents of global civil society (Watson 1984). Rather this volume seeks to draw on, bring into dialogue and speak back to a series of theoretical debates and approaches which have preoccupied scholars in the humanities and social sciences. To that end we have brought together leading scholars from history, international relations, geography and literary theory to consider diplomacy using their various theoretical frameworks and methodological toolkits. The latter include visual analysis, in-depth interviews, literary critique, ethnography and archival research.

Second, emerging from this multidisciplinary approach to diplomacy is the embrace of a broad understanding of diplomatic culture. In contrast to minimalist approaches to diplomatic culture as ‘thin’ and ‘weak’, constituted by the procedural values of the diplomatic corps that reflect the interests of territorial states (Sending 2011: 644), this volume acknowledges and celebrates a maximalist, inclusive and open notion of diplomatic culture (see Bjola and Kornprobst 2013; Constantinou this volume). This is reflected in a geographical approach that attends to human experience as well as the institutional, and on the spaces, places and scales generated through diplomatic practice rather than assumed geopolitical boundaries. It is also reflected in the diversity of empirical case studies discussed in the chapters that follow which disrupt the traditional boundaries of diplomacy, and in the attention paid to the quotidian as well as the ritualised, the micro-scale as well as the international, and the dual and contradictory duties of diplomats to the polities that they represent and to idealistic cosmopolitan commitments to peace and justice. In bringing coherence to such an approach to diplomatic cultures this book is structured around three themes, each of which speaks directly – and differently – to the need for a relational perspective: the interaction and translation of diplomatic cultures; the spatialities of diplomacy; and the alternative diplomatic cultures that continue to co-exist alongside so-called traditional diplomatic culture.

Translating diplomatic cultures

As noted above, the concept of translation – the transmission, sharing and transformation of values, beliefs and narratives – speaks to diplomatic culture in multiple ways, depending on how one conceptualises diplomatic culture. If the term is singular, then it is diplomatic culture that serves as the translator between fundamentally alienated polities. If the term is plural, as in different iterations of diplomatic culture, then translation is what occurs when normative practices of diplomacy are echoed, rearticulated and re-worked in other cultural contexts. While this understanding of translation has seen traction in the cultural and public diplomacy literature, the chapters in this section of the book rely instead on a conceptualisation of translation that is resolutely embodied, everyday and performed. Translation is therefore understood here in two ways. First, it is inherent to moments of encounter, when for a time two distinct entities enter into relation, from the scale of the individual to the scale of the polity. All encounters are marked by the estrangement noted by Der Derian (1996), and there can be moments of untranslatability as well as intercultural exchange. Second, the embodied performance of that encounter is crucial to the translation of diplomatic cultures; hence the frequent recourse to the metaphor of theatre to make sense of diplomatic moments.

Taking a theoretically rich and nuanced approach to diplomatic culture(s), Costas Constantinou’s chapter *Everyday Diplomacy: Mission, Spectacle and the Remaking of Diplomatic Culture* poses and addresses the question ‘to what extent does a common diplomatic culture exist and facilitate international

understanding?’ At the core of Constantinou’s argument is a call for a broader and more inclusive interpretation of diplomatic culture which would adequately account for and do justice to the diversity of diplomatic practices across times and spaces. In extending significantly beyond Hedley Bull’s proposition that diplomatic culture is, in essence, a mode of elite culture articulated by professional diplomatic corps, Constantinou instead defines diplomatic culture as collectively emerging out of social encounters. Diplomacy is therefore understood not as a professional skill enacted only within the realm of statecraft, but rather as a wide range of social activities which can include ‘a means of getting one’s way, presenting the case for something or promoting the interests of someone, influencing or forcing others to do what they would not otherwise do’ (page 24). Not only does this broader definition of diplomacy include more normatively ambiguous practices of self-promotion, deceit and coercion, but it is also firmly rooted in the everyday. In broadening this definition Constantinou extends our gaze to explore the range of cultural forms and practices that are encompassed by such a reading of diplomacy. In particular, he attends to visual and affective dimensions of diplomatic cultures, highlighting the prominence of theatrical culture and public performance in contemporary diplomacy and the emergence of the notion of everyday ambassadorship. Through examples such as UNHCR Goodwill ambassadors and the Kony2012 and ‘Bring back our girls!’ campaigns Constantinou makes a persuasive case for rethinking diplomatic culture as enmeshed within, rather than standing independently from, world culture and cultural diplomacy.

Like Constantinou, political geographer Merje Kuus also uses the dominance of state-focused accounts of diplomatic culture as a starting point for her chapter, *Transnational Diplomacy in Europe: What Is Transcended and How?* However, rather than critiquing this state-centrism per se she is ‘sceptical of the more celebratory claims about a new diplomacy that somehow bypasses the state’ (page 43) and instead turns critical attention precisely to ‘the workings of nationalism and state power in contemporary diplomatic practice’ (page 43). She does so by tracing the tension between diplomacy enacted in the service of national interests and the increasing importance of transnational diplomacy which not only mediates but also transcends such national interests. The empirical focus of Kuus’ chapter is the European Union’s diplomatic service, the ‘European External Action Service’ or ‘EEAS’. Operational since 2011, the EEAS is an innovative experiment in transnational diplomacy as its officials – transferred to it from other EU bodies as well as the diplomatic services of the member states – represent not nation states but the EU as a transnational legal person.

Based on over 100 in-depth interviews with 73 EU policy professionals, this chapter traces the emergence and the ambiguity of the new organisational and diplomatic culture within the EEAS. To understand the skills and resources required from the newly minted EU diplomats, Kuus argues that there is a need to grasp the translation and transformation that occur when nationally based competencies ‘hit the ground’ in Brussels. With the making of European diplomacy requiring the making of European diplomats, this transnational involves a

politically tense, and revealingly visible, process of socialisation. And, as Kuus argues, this translation is also geographical as well as political and social: what are negotiated are not only national interests but also different conceptions of what is a genuinely European diplomatic culture, where it is produced and what its relationship is to different national cultures. Underpinning these questions is the challenge of disrupting the binary between national and European (supra-national) diplomatic cultures. As Kuus (page 49) notes,

In Brussels, there is no ‘them’ of the traditional bilateral contexts; there are rather multiple versions of ‘us’. EU diplomats must be able to read, to some degree, the political agendas and cultural codes of other member states as symbols of ‘our’ interest and identity.

What is revealing, therefore, is the potential of the practices enacted by EEAS diplomats to blur the taken-for-granted analytical categories of the national and the supranational, member states and Europe. As such, the case of the EEAS and its workings in the European Quarter of Brussels more specifically offers a valuable insight into the wider transformations of diplomacy, highlighting both emerging transnational configurations and problematising the category of nation state diplomacy.

While Kuus examines a new era in contemporary European diplomacy, cultural historian Naoko Shimazu turns attention in her chapter to a period of similarly rapid change in diplomacy – that of the emergence of newly independent states in Africa and Asia in the mid-twentieth century and the articulation of postcolonial diplomatic culture(s). In *Performing ‘Freedom’: The Bandung Conference as Symbolic Postcolonial Diplomacy* Shimazu asks how the emergence of new international actors and new forms of regionalism across Asia and Africa in the 1950s influenced the way in which international diplomacy came to be conducted and perceived. This chapter focuses on a particularly significant diplomatic event which symbolised the emerging unity of ‘Afro-Asia’ – the Bandung Conference (officially known as the ‘Asia-Africa Conference’) held in Indonesia in April 1955 and attended by delegations from 29 newly created Asian and African states. Shimazu argues that, with the conference acting as an inauguration and crowning ceremony of postcolonial Afro-Asia, and being associated with a series of normative legacies – from socialism and anti-colonialism to the women’s movement and peace activism – this event is a prime example of the role of the symbolic in international diplomacy. At the same time, the Bandung Conference is also emblematic of the shift towards increasing public participation in domestic politics during this period. As such, this effectively made international diplomacy an extension of national politics, and thus diplomatic culture an extension of national culture.

In order to explore both the symbolism of international diplomacy and the importance of popular accountability, Shimazu embraces the framework of ‘diplomacy as theatre’ and turns attention to the performers (actors), stage and audiences of the Bandung Conference. The chapter therefore traces how