

## What is (New in) New Diplomatic History?\*

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This essay seeks to frame some of the recent developments in what has come to be labeled as 'new diplomatic history' (henceforth NDH). In the last two decades there has been a remarkable increase in historical attention for the elite worlds inhabited by diplomats and their various associates and antagonists, as well as a noticeable shift away from the traditional preoccupation with 'the' state, in the sense of a monolithic institution. In what follows we attempt to distinguish some of the achievements and challenges of this scholarship. Our focus is the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has received less metahistorical attention than the literature on early modern and 20<sup>th</sup>-century diplomacy. We suggest that late modern diplomatic historians would do well to reckon with the tangled relations of their protagonists with early modern forms of diplomacy, while also taking full account of the changing nature of private-public interests in the diplomatic realm in a period of capitalist globalization. While our historiographical focus lies deliberately beyond Belgium, we selectively engage with Belgian diplomatic history as well; the perspective of a small or middling Western power, depending on the parameters one employs, can offer fruitful and unexpected venues for doing comparative international history.<sup>3</sup> Before proceeding, we provide both an explanatory word on terminology and a swift sketch of the major shifts and turns within the field.<sup>4</sup>

## What is (New) Diplomatic History ?

In December 1982, at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, its president Gordon A. Craig tackled the problems of 'diplomatic history', a label traditionally reserved to the study of how states conducted their foreign relations with one another. For several decades before – and after – Craig's address, the sub-discipline had wrestled to shed its repute as a conservative, white, male-dominated, academic bastion characterized by meticulous positivistic reconstruction of events in often-chauvinistic and empiricist narratives.<sup>5</sup> But according to Craig, the criticism was unjustified. He argued that diplomatic history "has grown in scope and sophistication", as it had "embraced more general questions, like the moral and intellectual roots and assumptions of national policy, domestic factors as determinants of policy, interagency competition in decision-making, public opinion and the way in which it is influenced by the media". However, Craig ironically did not fully embrace these new perspectives himself: they "tended to lead to a kind of reductionism in which the State as an independent actor has disappeared and diplomatic history has been subsumed under social history." He particularly disliked "structural explanations", such as those that regarded the behavior of states as mere "functions of the process of modern industrialism."<sup>6</sup>

Although Craig, as a specialist of Wilhelmine Germany, primarily targeted historians of German foreign policy before the First World War, he implicitly criticized new approaches adopted by French, British and American diplomatic historians as

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3. See in this respect Pierre-Yves Saunier, "The Next Big Thing... Historians, Let Us All Be Belgians! A Few Comments About Belgium's Heuristic Power," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 43, no. 4, 2013, p. 150-4.

4. For a lucid overview, see PATRICK FINNEY, "Introduction: What Is International History?," in *Palgrave Advances in International History*, ed. Patrick Finney, London, 2005, p. 1-35.

5. An older, but still stimulating review article on some of the strengths, as well as unexamined presuppositions then present in much U.S. diplomatic history (and to an extent still useful to diplomatic historians working on other polities and geographies) is BRUCE CUMINGS, "Revising Postrevisionism, or, the Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 4, 1993, p. 539-569.

6. GORDON A. CRAIG, "The Historian and the Study of International Relations", *The American Historical Review*, 88, no. 1, 1983, p. 1-11.

well. In the UK and the US, scholars had, from the 1960s onwards, effectively responded to the challenges coming from their colleagues in social and economic history and from Marxian-inspired social analysis by adopting ever-broader analytical perspectives in attempts to understand some of the 'domestic realities' behind diplomacy (e.g. high finance, class relations or the mass media).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, French scholars, influenced by the *Annales* school, investigated economic transformations and other '*forces profondes*' that drove international relations, looking for structural long-term explanations. They also took to analyzing the complexities of foreign-policy formulation in relation to the psychologies of diplomatic decision-makers.<sup>8</sup>

Along with the conceptual and thematic broadening of the field came terminological confusion. Many adherents of diplomatic history's renewal stopped referring to the discipline as such, preferring the use of the term 'international history' (or '*histoire des relations internationales*', '*internationale Geschichte*', etc.),<sup>9</sup> which could encompass historical themes traditionally not associated with diplomatic history.<sup>10</sup> However, as illustrated by Craig's address, the paradigm shift of the 1960s to 1980s was regarded with a certain suspicion by an older generation of diplomatic historians, many of whom preferred the traditional naming of the sub-discipline.<sup>11</sup> While in the UK the use of 'diplomatic

history' seems to have fallen into disuse, the term endures in the US, where it fills the title page of the official journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and is embedded in the name of one of the field's main online networks.<sup>12</sup> Since the 1990s, however, a large number of scholars who consider themselves US international historians have moved away from the traditional interest for decision-making and government policy in order to illuminate how various groups of people in the US operated on the world stage and influenced, or were influenced by global developments. Exploring new themes such as political activism, tourism, music and sport they began to refer to their work as falling under the heading of 'The US in the World' instead of diplomatic history.<sup>13</sup>

In any event, in the last two decades these and other historians have continued to question the validity of focusing on states as the sole movers of international relations. They have moved ever closer into the orbit of cultural and social history to investigate the main participants and divergent practices of diplomacy as a social-cultural space, that is, rituals, networking, perceptions, as well as the day-to-day realities behind the conduct of international relations. In addition, scholars no longer focus only on career diplomats, foreign ministry clerks, military men or major statesmen, but gauge the roles of a multiplicity of non-offi-

7. Of particular relevance here is the work of ARNO J. MAYER, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918*, New Haven, 1959; ZARA STEINER, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, London, 1977; PAUL M. KENNEDY, *The Realities behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980*, London, 1981; and AKIRA IRIYE, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945*, Cambridge, MA, 1981.

8. Groundbreaking in this regard was the work of PIERRE RENOUVIN and JEAN-BAPTISTE DUROSELLE, especially their *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales*, Paris, 1964.

9. FINNEY, "What is International History"; REAUD MELTZ and ISABELLE DASQUE, "Pour une histoire culturelle de la diplomatie. Pratiques et normes diplomatiques au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Histoire, économie & société*, 2014, no. 2, p. 3-16; WILFRIED LOTH and JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (eds.), *Internationale Geschichte. Themen, Ergebnisse, Aussichten*, Munich, 2000.

10. These can include such broad subjects as humanitarianism, internationalism, intergovernmental organizations, music, missionaries, the mass media, human trafficking, political activism, migration flows, the regulation of sex, and the circulation of ideas. Reviewing the literature on these and other related subthemes within international history evidently lies beyond the scope of this essay.

11. See ZARA STEINER, "Beyond the Foreign Office Papers: The Making of an International Historian", *The International History Review*, 39, no. 3, 2017, p. 566-568.

12. H-Diplo is one of the most active and sizeable networks on H-Net.

13. With some exceptions, however, this work is mostly focused on the Cold War period. E.g. CHRISTOPHER ENDY, *Cold War Holidays. American Tourism in France*, Chapel Hill, 2005; JESSICA C. E. GIENOW-HECHT, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920*, Chicago, 2009; and JONATHAN ROSENBERG, *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*, Princeton, N.J., 2006.

cial male and female mediators operating on and around some of the diplomatic world's many fault lines. Although historians of Belgian foreign relations and diplomacy are few and have traditionally focused on the issue of neutrality and/or the kingdom's relations with its traditional 'allies' or 'foes' (Britain, France and Germany),<sup>14</sup> similar efforts to rekindle the field are observable in Belgium since the late 1990s.<sup>15</sup>

This new scholarship has been variously labeled 'cultural history of international relations', 'cultural history of diplomacy' or even 'history of diplomatic culture', depending on whether 'culture' or 'diplomats' constitute the main focus of attention.<sup>16</sup> More recently, the new élan has also found its expression in novel scholarly collaborations like the foundation in 2011 of the Network for New Diplomatic History (today housed at Leiden University), which aims at furthering the actor-oriented approach through "the study of individuals and groups who perform diplomatic roles, rather than at international relations as a whole." Methodologically, this international network promotes perspectives including "prosopography, the sociology of knowledge, gender studies, and network analysis into historical, political, and economic narratives."<sup>17</sup>

As the Network's name suggests, the cultural turn in diplomatic/international history has only added to the terminological muddle. What indeed is

New Diplomatic History? Was international history not the *new* diplomatic history? Or has the regular appearance since the late 1980s of references to 'new international history' heightened the need for another novel concept?<sup>18</sup> As Kenneth Weisbrode explains, the term was originally intended to bridge the boundaries between more traditional practitioners of U.S. 'diplomatic history' on the one hand and American 'international historians' on the other hand. NDH, then, is "a subset" of international history and studies "the people who perform diplomatic roles", that is "anyone who imparts to himself or herself the role of intermediary for reasons beyond his or her own individual interests" and whose activities "in some way involve[s] the crossing of borders and the inter-relationship of political entities."<sup>19</sup> This definition, which substantially broadens the field, captures well how new diplomatic historians have come to terms with the challenges of the transnational and global turns in the historical discipline. In effect, NDH is, as Giles Scott-Smith put it, "more transnational than international" in the sense that non-governmental and semi-governmental actors are allowed to compete with traditional state representatives on the global scene. As such, there are at least two epistemological strands to NDH. One broadens the field socially, as it devotes more attention to those individuals often bypassed in more orthodox surveys of diplomatic interactions. The other revises and re-visualizes the classical diplomat and interstate

14. Classic examples in this genre are: JONATHAN E. HELMREICH, *Belgium and Europe: A Study in Small Power Diplomacy*, The Hague, 1976; DANIEL H. THOMAS, *The Guarantee of Belgian Independence and Neutrality in European Diplomacy, 1830's-1930's*, Kingston, 1983; MARIE-THÉRÈSE BRISCH, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne, 1905-1914*, Paris, 1994.

15. Of particular significance has been the pioneering work of VINCENT VAENE, *Belgium and the Holy See from Gregory XVI to Pius IX, 1831-1859: Catholic Revival, Society, and Politics in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe*, Leuven, 2001; and, more recently, DANIEL LAQUA, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880-1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige*, Manchester, 2013. For a recent example of the social-cultural approach, see MICHELE DUMOULIN and CATHERINE LANNEAU (eds.), *La biographie individuelle et collective dans le champ des relations internationales*, Brussels, 2016.

16. See on the one hand JESSICA C.E. GIENOW-HECHT and FRANK SCHUMACHER (eds.), *Culture and International History*, New York, 2003; and, on the other, MARKUS MÖSSLANG and TORSTEN RIOTTE (eds.), *The Diplomats' World: The Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914*, Oxford, 2008.

17. To this end it recently launched a new journal, *Diplomatica: A Journal of Diplomacy and Society*, and organizes international conferences, the third of which is scheduled for October 2018. For more information, see <http://newdiplomatichistory.org/>.

18. See for instance D.C. WATT, "Foreword: The New International History", *The International History Review* 9, no. 4, 1987, p. 518-520 and ODD ARNE WESTAD, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms", *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4, 2000, p. 551-565.

19. See "The Task Ahead", <https://newdiplomatichistory.org/the-task-ahead/>, accessed September 20, 2017.

diplomacy on the behavioral plain, exploring how diplomatic practices as well as the diplomat's disparate roles and social milieus were transformed in an increasingly global context.<sup>20</sup> In the following section, we will have a closer look at both of these strands.

### New Actors, New Themes

To begin with, historians have rediscovered consular agents, the number of which increased nearly everywhere in the world during the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas diplomatic historians have long ignored consulates and the people managing them, in the last decade several studies, especially in Francophone academia, have commendably addressed this lacuna, investigating long-term institutional change,<sup>21</sup> as well as 'intercultural' mediation.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, legal historians have produced exciting new work on the various new legal regimes imposed by would-be colonial powers in peripheral non-Western polities such as Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, China, and Siam and the extraordinary judicial authority consular representatives could (theoretically) wield there.<sup>23</sup> The appearance of these new legal (and economic and cultural) infrastructures created opportunities for new corporate classes of engineers, lawyers, artists, architects, and other Western 'experts',

some of whom were also contracted by local governments to act as 'advisors' in their unequal dialogues with Western frames of 'modernization'. While some valuable research has been published in this domain, the roles of these mediators in the larger Western imperial process are in need of further exploration.<sup>24</sup>

Historians working on 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century diplomacy have long been aware of the activities of journalists and publicists in the realm of international relations. However, their political agency has only seriously been taken into account in the last few decades. That is remarkable, for since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century domestic political concerns and power relations had increasingly come to influence foreign policy decision-makers. Many in the rapidly expanding news industry believed that matters of diplomacy could no longer be left to the judgment of diplomats, whom they considered as an anachronistic elite. Recent essay collections and biographies of famous newspaper men and women shed light on the exceptional social positions that some of them acquired and how they often successfully influenced both the opinions of domestic and international reading publics, as well as of foreign policy-makers.<sup>25</sup> Other work has covered official efforts to influence the mass

20. "Introduction: Private Diplomacy, Making the Citizen Visible", *New Global Studies* 8, no. 1, 2014, p. 1–7.

21. For a recent example, see ARNAUD BARTOLOMBI, GUILLAUME CALAFAT, MATHIEU GRENET, and JÖRG UIBERT (eds.), *De l'utilité commerciale des consuls. L'institution consulaire et les marchands dans le monde méditerranéen (xvi<sup>e</sup>-xx<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, s.l., Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2017.

22. SILVIA MARZAGALLI, MARIA GHAZALI, and CHRISTIAN WINDLER, *Les consuls en Méditerranée. Agents d'information, xvi<sup>e</sup>-xx<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 2015. See also NICOLE M. PHELPS, *U.S.-Habsburg Relations from 1815 to the Paris Peace Conference: Sovereignty Transformed* Cambridge/New York, 2013, which devotes two chapters on American and Austrian consuls.

23. See for instance MARIYA TAIT SLYS, *Exporting Legality: The Rise and Fall of Extraterritorial Jurisdiction in the Ottoman Empire and China*, Geneva, 2014; MARY DEWHURST LEWIS, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*, Berkeley, Calif., 2013; and PÄR KRISTOFFER CASSEL, *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan*, Oxford/New York, 2012.

24. See ZIAD FAHMY, "Jurisdictional Borderlands: Extraterritoriality and 'Legal Chameleons' in Precolonial Alexandria, 1840-1870," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2, 2013, p. 305-29; and MAURIZIO PLEGGI, "Purveyors of Modernity: European Artists and Architects in Turn-of-the-Century Siam", *Asia Europe Journal*, no. 1, 2003, p. 1-11. For the Belgian case, much is to be expected from ADRIEN CARBONNET's study of the nomination of a Belgian counsellor to the Korean Chosŏn Court, see his "Belgium-Korea Relations in the Age of Imperialism, 1900-1910", in HARALD FUESS (ed.), *Korea in the Global Nineteenth Century*, Honolulu, [forthcoming].

25. See FRANK BÖSCH and DOMINIK GIPPERT (eds.), *Journalists as Political Actors: Transfers and Interactions between Britain and Germany since the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Wiesner, 2008; and SYDNEY W. ROBINSON, *Muckraker: The Scandalous Life and Times of W. T. Stead, Britain's First Investigative Journalist*, London, 2013.

press and opinion making.<sup>26</sup> As to prewar Belgium, several authors have laid important groundwork, but much remains to be done.<sup>27</sup>

The same goes for the roles of female actors in Belgian foreign relations. In the 1990s, feminist scholars shook at the foundations of much traditional diplomatic history, revealing not only the gendered nature of the discipline's subject, but of the discipline itself.<sup>28</sup> Recent scholarship has shown that female historical agents clearly played important roles in 19<sup>th</sup>-century diplomacy, notwithstanding their exclusion from the heavily gendered and male-dominated worlds of 'high politics' and big business.<sup>29</sup> Diplomatic wives and daughters wielded considerable social capital despite suppressive gender configurations and patriarchal ideas of femininity seeking to confine women to the household. On the whole, however, gender remains little explored. What would happen to NDH if one would truly gender diplomatic spaces? Some intriguing work has been done in political science, beginning with Cynthia H. Enloe's seminal study *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.<sup>30</sup> Similar large-scale efforts to rethink the field are still lacking in NDH, notwithstanding the important work that has already been done.<sup>31</sup>

As the history of gender and femininities is particularly strong in Belgium, synergies between diplomatic and gender historians could well take up the challenge.

In addition to shifting the focus to previously understudied groups of diplomatic actors, diplomatic/international historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have also offered fresh insights into the worlds of the traditional protagonists on the international scene. As such, the changing roles of kings and their official representatives, as well as the ritual and material settings in which they operated have come under closer scrutiny. With regards to heads of state, recent research has amply demonstrated that 19<sup>th</sup>-century intra-monarchical visits were not only occasions for pompous display of royalty, but held great political value to the actors involved. Although their ability to influence foreign policy clearly decreased as the century progressed and the institution of monarchy became further integrated in the state, monarchs still played crucial roles as figures of national dynasties representing their states on the international stage. These often highly publicized visits legitimated dynasties' enduring existence in an age of social revolution and republican nationalism.<sup>32</sup>

26. Recent investigations include HOUSSINE ALLOUL and ROEL MARKEY, "Please Deny These Manifestly False Reports': Ottoman Diplomats and the Press in Belgium (1850-1914)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 2, 2016, p. 267-92; DOMINIK GEPPERT, *Pressekriege. Öffentlichkeit Und Diplomatie in Den Deutsch-Britischen Beziehungen (1896-1912)*, Munich, 2007.

27. See notably PIERRE VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieux de presse et journalistes en Belgique (1828-1914)*, Brussels, 2005. Although little attention is devoted to how Belgian journalists and press magnates related to the country's foreign policy, Van den Dungen's detailed analysis of their ideas and practices provides a useful steppingstone for further studies of their agency in 19<sup>th</sup>-century international politics.

28. See in particular KRISTIN L. HOGANSON, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*, New Haven, Conn., 1998; and EMILY S. ROSENBERG, "Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy: Narratives of Money and Manliness," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2, 1998, p. 155-76.

29. The roles and long-neglected experiences of 'diplomatic wives' have attracted renewed attention in the last years. See, for instance, JENNIFER MORI, "How Women Make Diplomacy: The British Embassy in Paris, 1815-1841," *Journal of Women's History* 27, no. 4, 2015, p. 137-59; and MOLLY M. WOOD, "Diplomatic Wives: The Politics of Domesticity and the 'Social Game' in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1905-1941," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 2, 2005, p. 142-65.

30. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd rev. ed., Berkeley, Calif., 2014 [first published in 1990]. See also the more recent work by LAURA SØBERG, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*, New York, 2013.

31. See in particular HELEN MCCARTHY, *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat*, London, 2014; and GIENDA SJIJGA and CAROLINE JAMES (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, London, 2015.

32. See especially JOHANNES PAULMANN, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg*, Munich, 2000; and MARIA GREVIER, "Staging Modern Monarchs: Royalty at the World Exhibitions of 1851 and 1867," in *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power, and History*, ed. JEROEN DEPLOIGE and GITA DIENECKERE, Amsterdam, 2006, p. 161-79.

Surely, ceremonial encounters like those between kings continued to occur on a more frequent level between one head of state (or his domestic representative) and the 'embodiment' of another (in the person of the accredited diplomat). Perhaps less susceptible to diplomatic incidents than in the early modern period, ceremony continued to function as an essential component of diplomacy. Ceremonies are symbolic enactments that reproduce commonly accepted rules, ideas or agreements (for instance on state authority or royal privilege) and facilitate communication in settings in which miscommunication could easily arise between different parties.<sup>33</sup> Especially in cases of 'intercultural' diplomacy, analyses of ritual can help us better understand the conduct and nature of diplomacy.<sup>34</sup> Historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have therefore studied Western diplomats' encounters with Middle Eastern and East Asian court ceremonial and protocol (and vice versa), linking questions of ceremony with new racist ideologies and broader processes, such as colonialism, the new imperialism and the globalization of the Europe-centered diplomatic 'system'.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of official diplomacy's material settings, historians have started to enquire into the architecture of diplomacy, studying the symbolic politics of ambassadorial residences as a way of understanding how foreign-policy makers coped with the challenges of national representation.<sup>36</sup>

Others have called for more attention to the material culture(s) of diplomacy, or, the various artifacts that were part of or were generated by diplomatic interactions. The 2016 volume of the *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* has stressed the importance of studying the issue "from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>37</sup>

### The Lingerings of the Ancien Regime

Such initiatives show that a number of diplomatic/international historians try to transcend the traditional chronological dividing lines between 'early modern' and 'modern' diplomacy. In recent years, a large number of international conferences have therefore been devoted to the social, cultural and political dimensions of diplomatic practices from the late Middle Ages up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This reveals a growing awareness that, despite the rise of the nation-state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "persistence of the Old Regime" was particularly strong in the realm of diplomacy.<sup>38</sup> In terms of diplomatic practices and self-fashioning, in several Western European countries it certainly lasted until after the First World War and probably until well after the Second World War.

Admittedly, in 19<sup>th</sup>-century international politics, 'new' societal tensions did give rise to a constant balancing – and cross-fertilization – between the conservative norms and values associated with the monarchical Vienna system and the liberal prin-

33. WILLIAM ROOSEN, "Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 3, 1980, p. 452-76. For an IR theoretical perspective on the historical place of ceremony in diplomacy: CHRISTER JONSSON and MARTIN HALL, *Essence of Diplomacy*, Basingstoke/New York, 2005, p. 43-50.

34. For an outstanding example, see CHRISTIAN WINDLER, "Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700-1840," *Historical Journal*, 44, no. 1, 2001, p. 79-106.

35. See for instance ANTONY BEST, "The Role of Diplomatic Practice and Court Protocol in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1867-1900", in *The Diplomats' World...*, ed. Mosslang and Riotte, p. 231-252; and SUSANNE SCHATTENBERG, "Die Macht des Protokolls und die Onmacht der Osmanen. Zum Berliner Kongress 1878," in *Akteure der Aussenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, ed. HILARD VON THIESSEN and CHRISTIAN WINDLER, Cologne, 2010, p. 373-90.

36. See JANE C. LOEFFLER, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*, Princeton, N.J., 2011, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.; and PAOLO GIRARDELLI, "Power or Leisure? Remarks on the Architecture of the European Summer Embassies on the Bosphorus Shore," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 50, March issue, 2014, p. 29-58. See also the essays in *Architecture et Diplomatie*, special issue of *Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture*, no. 4, 2002.

37. HARRIET RUDOLPH, "Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices? Material Culture as a New Approach to the History of Diplomacy," *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte/European History Yearbook 17: Material Culture in Modern Diplomacy from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2016, p. 29-58. In a similar vein, but with a focus on the post-1945-period, see FRÉDÉ FLORE and CAMMIE MCATEE (eds.), *The Politics of Furniture: Identity, Diplomacy and Persuasion in Post-War Interiors*, London, 2017.

38. See ARNO J. MAYER, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, New York, 1981.

ciples of national sovereignty and democracy.<sup>39</sup> With regards to the day-to-day level of concrete diplomatic interaction, these tensions were surely reflected in the ideas and attitudes of diplomats. However, many of the same diplomatic actors continued to inscribe themselves within the same practices and to hold very similar sensitivities.

That is why a more structural dialogue is needed between scholars studying diplomacy in the centuries before and after the French Revolution.<sup>40</sup> Since the publication of Lucien Bély's *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* in 1990,<sup>41</sup> much of the abovementioned actors and themes have indeed been very well studied by early modernists, who have (re)conceptualized diplomatic practice as a social-political discourse and have tried to establish the boundaries of diplomatic agency by examining the extent to which various actors possessed such agency and the manner in which they executed it.<sup>42</sup> This undoubtedly applies to modes of non-verbal communication through ritual practices (e.g. ceremony, material cultures of gift-giving) within and beyond 'Europe'.<sup>43</sup>

To illustrate how these insights could benefit the study of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century diplomacy, one could again recur to the Belgian case, where we have a series of sovereigns who, like their

early modern counterparts, stood at the center of foreign-policy making and resorted to a wide network of semi-official and informal agents to further the domestic and foreign interests of dynasty and state. The activities of these agents are fairly well-known when it comes to the (later) Congo Free State,<sup>44</sup> but less so with regard to semi-colonial East-Asia, where several among them served as diplomatic advisors to political leaders. At the same time, at least until the Second World War, the centrality of the king in foreign-policy making made many Belgian official diplomats – often to their dismay – well aware that to succeed professionally required being well-versed in court politics.<sup>45</sup> Insights from studies of early modern ambassadors and the ways they managed personal relations with the monarch they represented (and the one to whom they were sent) could stimulate our efforts to understand the courtier-diplomat in the period after 1815.

Perhaps more importantly, early modern diplomatic studies' preoccupation with challenging the modernization paradigm established by Garrett Mattingly in the 1950s, might help late modern historians to decenter their own diplomatic narratives. Mattingly described the 'modernization' of diplomacy as a process of secularization and professionalization starting with the gradual spread of

39. See MELTZ and DASQUE, "Pour une histoire culturelle de la diplomatie...", p. 7-8.

40. The Network for NDH's new journal *Diplomatica* has already taken up this challenge by encouraging the study of diplomacy across historical eras in order to assess the applicability of models of analysis regardless of time.

41. BÉLY, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1990. Already in the early 1990s, this work has rightly been called an example of the NDH in that it constituted "an intricate and sensitive blending of social and international history with the history of ideas." See JOHN C. RULE, "Review Article : Gathering Intelligence in the Age of Louis XIV", *The International History Review* 14, no. 4, 1992, p. 732. Remarkably enough, Bély's pioneering work has been overlooked in otherwise compelling discussions of the origins of NDH in studies of early modern diplomacy. See most notably JOHN WATKINS, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 1, 2008, p. 1-14; and GIACOMO GIUDICI, "From New Diplomatic History to New Political History : The Rise of the Holistic Approach", *European History Quarterly* 48, no. 2, 2018, p. 314-324.

42. For an insightful discussion of this literature, see TRACEY A. SOWERBY, "Early Modern Diplomatic History", *History Compass* 14, no. 9, 2016, p. 444-447.

43. To mention but recently published work, see, for instance, MICHAEL TALBOT, "A Treaty of Narratives : Friendship, Gifts, and Diplomatic History in the British Capitulations of 1641," *The Journal of Ottoman Studies (Osmanlı Araştırmaları)* 48, 2016, p. 357-398; and MICHAEL AUWERS, "The Gift of Rubens: Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy," *European History Quarterly* 43, no. 3, 2013, p. 421-41.

44. VINCENT VIAENE, "King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860-1905," *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4, 2008, p. 741-90.

45. See MICHAEL AUWERS, *The Island and the Storm : A Social-Cultural History of the Belgian Diplomatic Corps in Times of Democratization, 1885-1935*, PhD thesis, University of Antwerp, 2014, Chap. 7.

resident diplomacy after the Peace of Lodi in mid-15<sup>th</sup>-century northern Italy to the rest of Europe, and culminating into a fully-fledged system following the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>46</sup> Early modern diplomatic historians have convincingly argued that neither Lodi nor Westphalia were breaking points, as medieval practices continued to pervade Italian diplomacy in the sixteenth century and as negotiators in Münster and Osnabrück primarily reproduced existing conceptual frameworks.<sup>47</sup> In addition, these revisionist narratives of diplomatic action have undermined the conventional determination of diplomacy as purely the domain of professionals. This critique applies well to the late modern era. The 19<sup>th</sup> century did not witness the consolidation of the state as a single actor through diplomacy, relegating other actors to irrelevance. Business of state might have taken over, but was certainly far messier than often assumed. Indeed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries too, habitus, or the quality to incorporate and reproduce a certain social and cultural rationality, was more crucial to gain access to the diplomatic realm than integration in institutional structures or mastery of competences that – from today’s perspective – would be regarded as objective or rational.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, early modern historians have challenged the Eurocentric aspect of Mattingly’s modernization paradigm by demonstrating that the key notion of resident diplomacy was heavily influenced by contacts with non-European political entities.<sup>49</sup> Or, as Iver B. Neumann

recently noted in a critique of traditional historical accounts of the emergence of diplomacy, we should pay attention to “how Europe’s diplomatic practices have been marked by the practices of its interlocutors, whether [Ottoman], Chinese, Indian, or Iroquois.”<sup>50</sup> Such insights about this earlier period should advise us against reproducing narratives that see the West as a model for the development of diplomacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which contend that at the Congress of Vienna representatives of the conservative powers agreed to codify diplomatic behavior and that some non-European polities managed to ‘adapt’ to this particular ‘Western’ diplomatic style fairly ‘quick’, while others were ‘slower’.<sup>51</sup> As if ‘the West’ constituted the single source of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century diplomatic model. In effect, Western Europe was never the *only* reference point available to non-Western statesmen, and neither was a putative aspiration to *imitate* ‘the West’, and/or *become* ‘Western’ the prime driving force of political and cultural permutation.<sup>52</sup> To put it bluntly, in an age of Western global military hegemony, full participation in European-style diplomacy and strengthening official ties with as many foreign states as possible was an invaluable asset for non-Western ruling elites to emphasize and safeguard their independence vis-à-vis non-Western polities.<sup>53</sup>

NDH would therefore surely benefit from a more sustained interchange with postcolonial theory,<sup>54</sup> which would mean not simply ‘including’ non-Western perspectives, but starting from

46. WATKINS, “Toward a New Diplomatic History...”, p. 2-4.

47. GIUDICI, “From New Diplomatic History to New Political History...”, p. 315-316.

48. See the introduction in INDRAVATI FÉLICITÉ (ed.), *L’identité du diplomate. Métier ou noble loisir ? (Moyen Âge tardif–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, forthcoming in 2019.

49. SOWERBY, “Early Modern Diplomatic History...”, p. 442.

50. *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*, Ithaca, N.Y./London, 2012, p. 31.

51. An example of this kind of literature is J. C. HUREWITZ, “Ottoman Diplomacy and the European State System,” *Middle East Journal* 15, no. 2, 1961, p. 141-52.

52. See for instance RENÉE WÖRRINGER, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, New York, 2014.

53. JEREMY BLACK makes a similar point in a more general analysis of non-European states’ adoption of Western-style diplomacy. See *A History of Diplomacy*, London, 2011, p. 163.

54. See in this regard ANDREW J. ROTTER, “Saidism without Said: Orientalism and US Diplomatic History,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 4, 2000, p. 1205–17.



them.<sup>55</sup> It will allow for a thorough rethinking of some of the main tenets associated with the 'modern' development of diplomacy and international relations. For instance, the enormous body of work on the histories of African-Americans and slavery, which has pioneered global historical approaches and long deconstructed triumphalist narratives of the 'West', could prompt diplomatic/international historians to imagine the international space as less 'white' and elitist, yet populated by a whole spectrum of non-white and/or subaltern agents.<sup>56</sup> In Belgian diplomatic history this endeavor and effort to challenge Eurocentric accounts has only just begun.

#### Understanding Private-Public Tensions

So far, we have focused mainly on how the cultural turn impacted the development of diplomatic/international history and NDH in particular. We do believe, however, that much of the NDH has tended to attach more attention to 'culture' (rather 'softly' defined) than to power dynamics, economic interests and the capital relation. In other words, to some of those forces that might ultimately have driven diplomacy and its practitioners. Private-public relations remain one of the thorniest issues for historians trying to disentangle how states conducted their foreign relations. Yet what diplomats (in the broadest sense of the word) did and thought, and *could* do and think, can be read only against the socioeconomic structures typical for the particular capitalist societies

in which they were socialized. Perhaps an attempt should be made to redress this situation and to construct a more integrated narrative, taking into account 'older' structuralist critiques, yet also move beyond them through emphasis on discursive formations and on the 'lived experiences' of those historical actors and collectivities that have long remained silenced in state-centric accounts of diplomacy.

Following the lead of sociologists, economists and political scientists, and geographers, world historians (and some international historians) have since some time now investigated how the development and extension of modern capitalism is related to how states devise foreign policies and interact with one another.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, social and cultural historians of diplomacy tend to stay away from questions about Western-centered capitalist globalization. Nonetheless, thinking about the mandates of modern capitalism (relations of production, capital accumulation, labor exploitation, class domination) brings us to further question the central role of the state, paramount in traditional diplomatic historical narratives, but already contested in the actor-oriented, social and cultural histories of diplomacy. As many Marxian theorists have long demonstrated, in modern capitalist societies, the 'public' interest that states pursue (and the related need for capitalist imperialist expansion) tends to reflect the private interest of capital. It is imperative therefore to distinguish the

55. While there are quite some stimulating studies focusing on Japan and the Ottoman Empire, these pale in comparison to the vast literature available on Western diplomacy. Recent examples (for Japan) include K. KUME, C. TSUZUKI, and R.J. YOUNG, *Japan Rising: The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871-1873*, Cambridge, 2009; and (for the Ottomans) OLIVIER BOUQUET, "Un Rum aux pays des Hellènes. Constantin Musurus, premier représentant permanent de la Sublime Porte à Athènes (1840-1848)," in *Society, Politics and State Formation in Southeastern Europe During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. T. Anastasiadis and N. Clayer, Athens, 2011, p. 151-81.

56. The voluminous scholarship by GERALD HORNE seems especially relevant here; in particular his account of the interactions between the two major slave powers of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – the U.S. and Brazil –, through the lives of various American politicians, diplomats, slave owners and traffickers: *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade*, New York, 2007. See also, more generally, BRENDA GAYLE PLUMMER, "African Americans in the International Imaginary: Gerald Horne's Progressive Vision." *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 2, 2011, p. 221-230. The seminal 1996 *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* by BRENDA GAYLE PLUMMER, (published in Chapel Hill, N.C.) has had a powerful impact on the field as well.

57. Classic IR critiques in this context include KEES VAN DER PUIJ, *Transnational Classes and International Relations*, London, 1998; and BENNO TESCHKE, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* London, 2003. See also BARRY BUZAN and GEORGE LAWSON, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*, Cambridge, 2015.

distinct social groups, both at home and abroad, who benefit from, and in turn influence, (foreign) decision-making processes.<sup>58</sup> In the field of late modern diplomatic/international history the nature of public-private relations have remained at the forefront of historical debates.<sup>59</sup> An important subtheme in the scholarship has been how firms or holdings, individually or collectively, conducted their own diplomacy vis-à-vis foreign national organs, with or without support from official channels.<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding the novelty of these kinds of works, they miss the opportunity to engage with critical work done in international political economy on capital expansion and class formation.

Historians of Belgian diplomacy have (save some exceptions) so far shown little interest in the economic superstructures of international relations and hardly problematized how public-private relations shaped and determined both foreign relations and private financial strategies.<sup>61</sup> Historians of Belgian colonialism and overseas economic activities (mostly trained as economic historians) have, commendably, drawn attention to the close collaboration between the state (in its many manifestations) and the private sector. But they have rarely questioned and indeed took as natural this relationship. Royalist and/or nationalist historians, whose apologetic narratives by and large disregard the oppressive undercurrents of state power,

class domination, and the capital-relation, have long dominated this field. These studies uncritically reproduce the categories of reference of the capitalists they study, quoting stock ratings, price fluctuations, and profit margins, but ignoring the economic foundations of, and motives for, capitalist enterprise and thus legitimizing the logic of the investors and (would-be) colonizers they purportedly intend to study objectively.<sup>62</sup> Even some of the best works in the field do not entirely escape these sorts of biases.<sup>63</sup> An important exception is Rik Coolsaet's classic *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek, 1830-1990*. Coolsaet demonstrates how state support for big business, or what he calls the "economic priority", was amongst the most important "determinants" in the country's foreign policymaking and a structural attribute of the new "bourgeois state", whose political elites had, since its very inception, tied its fate to the (in)famous holding company *La Société Générale* and hence also to the country's nascent industrial elite as the latter owed its existence, in great part, to this holding company. The result was the formation of a strong and intimate "triangular relationship between the state, industry and the world of banking." Belgium's "commercial-economic diplomacy" therefore reflected the interests of the industrial and financial elites and consolidated their political power in Belgian society.<sup>64</sup> In sum, we believe there is a need to combine analyses

58. In his latest book PETER GRAN sees diplomacy primarily as the expression of "interests shared among dominant elements" in different states, rather than only "intergovernmental activity". *The Rise of the Rich: A New View of Modern World History*, Syracuse, N.Y., 2009, p. 85.

59. The connections between sovereign debt and diplomacy have been the subject of much scholarly interest where the modern era is concerned. See, among many, JAY SEXTON, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873*, Oxford, 2014 [2005]; and JENNIFER SIEGEL, *For Peace and Money: French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars*, Oxford, 2014.

60. See, for instance, EDWARD PETER FITZGERALD, "Business Diplomacy: Walter Teagle, Jersey Standard, and the Anglo-French Pipeline Conflict in the Middle East, 1930-1931", *The Business History Review* 67, no. 2, p. 207-45.

61. This is true for the classic studies of Belgian foreign policy listed in footnote 14.

62. This applies to many of the 'pioneering' studies on Belgian overseas economic activity: ALBERT DUCHESNE, *Léopold II et le Maroc (1885-1906)*, Bruxelles, 1965; MICHEL DUMOULIN, ed. *Présences belges dans le monde à l'aube du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1989; GINETTE KURGAN-VAN HENTENRYK, *Léopold II et les groupes financiers belges en Chine. La politique royale et ses prolongements (1895-1914)*, Bruxelles, 1972.

63. FRANS BUELENS and STEFAAN MARYSSE, "Returns on Investments during the Colonial Era: The Case of the Belgian Congo," *The Economic History Review* 62, no. 1, 2009, 135-166. This study engages the so-called 'cost of empire' debate, asking if the Belgian Congo was either 'profitable' or 'loss-making' for business in the Metropole. This apparent 'technical' question inevitably elides the obvious historical and ethical problems underpinning this decidedly Belgo-centric debate.

64. COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, Leuven, 1998 (reprinted many times since its first publication), p. 473-7.

of macroeconomic transformations with investigations into social processes and cultural formations. Especially since the wealth of many diplomats was intimately connected to the global economy and global capital. The best example is perhaps that of British diplomats whose family fortune derived from the trade in, and/or labor of enslaved humans from Africa.<sup>65</sup> While the diplomats' immediate habitus in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was still largely detached from industrial and financial capitalist configurations, these connections became fairly straightforward by the end of the century. They manifested themselves not only in active participation in capitalist ventures, but also in a new sensitivity to and *connaissance* of

high finance and speculative operations. Indeed, diplomats often functioned as informal liaisons between their 'nation's' major capitalists and ruling elites abroad, profiting themselves.<sup>66</sup>

Engaging with debates about the relation between diplomacy and private interests can also help new diplomatic historians to disentangle some of the complex transnational dimensions of their subjects (class formation, rise of multinationals). This endeavor neatly dovetails with NDH's intent to challenge accounts that see the state/'nation' as omnipotent and a unitary actor with a defined 'national' interest and can therefore further pollinate the field.

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<sup>65</sup>. A quick search on 'diplomat' in the UCL database *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* returns 20 individuals, among whom John Lyons (d. 1816), father of the 'famous' navy admiral and longtime British representative to the Greek court in Athens, Edmund Lyons (d. 1858) – the latter's own son was the no less famous career diplomat Richard Lyons (d. 1887). Lyons sr. possessed large sugar plantations in Antigua and, until 1833, owned no less than 274 enslaved Africans. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/787>, accessed May 10, 2018.

<sup>66</sup>. For Belgium, see HOUSSINE ALLOUL, *Belgium and the Ottoman Empire : Diplomacy, Capital, and Transnational Loyalties, 1865–1914*, PhD thesis, University of Antwerp, 2017, p. 222.

