

Uncovering Political Subjecthoods of the Non-Eurocentric through Other Diplomacies

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### **Abstract**

The field of Diplomatic Studies, reflecting the broader discipline of International Relations, has a largely Western-centric focus. Non-Western diplomacies, in the few instances that they are mentioned, are discussed as practices that existed in the past. Current diplomatic practices, in contrast, are those that are dominated by modern states and their accredited agents. The concept of the modern state is inherently a Western-centric ideal that was imposed on much of the non-Western world through colonisation. Therefore, merely shifting the geographic focus of diplomatic studies from Western states to non-Western states is insufficient to escape its state and Western centrism. This paper argues that for non-Western diplomacies to be taken seriously as legitimate knowledges that can construct political subjecthood and agency, it requires decentring the state and focusing on how non-state actors, forming actual living communities in the non-West interact across differences of identities. I argue that representative and rule-making aspects of interactions between different living communities can be recognised as performances in other diplomacies which allows non-state actors in the non-West to be recognised as acting subjects in international politics. The concept of other diplomacies is well positioned to examine how living communities engage in international politics since it focuses on functional aspects of diplomacies performed by non-state actors through their interactions across political, legal and normative boundaries. The implications of the research suggest that other diplomacies allow political subjecthood to be constructed through non-Western thought, broadening the field of Diplomatic Studies and International Relations to better encompass global diversity.

### **Introduction**

The basis that forms the argument of this paper is that Diplomatic Studies is Eurocentric in character, much like mainstream International Relations. The implication of this position is that it results in the discipline seeing the world as a place of differences only as far as its able to be interpreted through the worldview of a particular locality, namely European. Therefore, Diplomatic Studies does not take into account the non-Eurocentric, except as objects that are acted upon by the West and its agents. A part of the reason this has been enabled and naturalised in the discipline is because of the centrality assigned to the concept of the state. Another way of presenting this proposition is to say that a feature of the Eurocentric nature of Diplomatic Studies has been the overwhelming focus on states, and their accredited agents as legitimate actors in international politics. The field does take into account the role of non-state actors, but it does so in relation to states or the state system. Attempts at recognising and analysing the non-West within Diplomatic Studies has therefore often resulted in using state centric standards of measure to analyse states or non-state actors that are geographically located outside the West. While geography is an important component in determining the non-West, it is not a sufficient condition. Therefore, it has seldom revealed anything different to the concepts that are already familiar to scholars of Diplomatic Studies and the wider discipline of International Relations.

The state and Eurocentric concepts that define the discipline of International Relations and its subdisciplines are inadequate tools with which to recognise non-Western subjecthood. Therefore, in order to recognise the different non-western worlds that exist, it is necessary to decentre the state in International Relations and Diplomatic Studies. Decentring the state allows non-state actors, such as actual living communities, to be seen as legitimate subjects that engage in international politics in their own right and not as representatives or appendages of states. It is by seeing and recognising living communities and how they interact across differences that Diplomatic Studies can truly become a global discipline.

A pertinent question to ask at this point is, why is it important to understand non-Western diplomacies, decentre the state and recognise non-state actors as engaging in international politics? This is important given that Diplomatic Studies and the broader discipline of International Relations has discursive power over knowledge production and it influences policy makers, world leaders and even sometimes an attentive public (Beier 2009b). Currently the discipline's mainstream focuses on the state, an abstract concept, rather than on actual living communities (de Costa 2009). This has for example resulted in the pursuit of policies and discourses that seek to defend the abstract concept of 'state', using concepts such as deterrence and balance of power rather than addressing issues faced by living communities. This makes it important to decentre the state in International Relations and consider non-state actors, in the form of living communities, to be legitimate actors in international politics.

The first section of this paper will discuss the Eurocentrism of International Relations and the subdiscipline of Diplomatic Studies. This section will discuss how Realist, Liberal and even Critical International Relations scholarships remain Eurocentric in nature. It will also show how the sub-discipline of Diplomatic Studies follows in the same footsteps as that of International Relations despite some engagement with the global south. Diplomatic Studies scholarship that engages with the global south tends to mimic Eurocentric categorisations.

The second section of the paper will discuss the idea of the non-West. The non-West is a complicated concept that cannot be compartmentalised as being separate from the West. It is not a static artefact that can be held up and analysed. Instead, it is a complex and layered concept that has been and is being modified by centuries of Western colonialism and capitalism. Therefore, this paper does not seek to reveal a pristine Eastern philosophy but one that is complicated and intricately related to the West. However, having said that, it is yet necessary to differentiate and show that there exists ontologies and cosmologies that are different to those articulated in Eurocentric International Relations. I use the term non-Western in order to place these worldviews as being located differently to the Eurocentric.

I show the attraction that Diplomatic Studies holds as a site to introduce International Relations to non-Western thought and how the concept of Other Diplomacies is especially well placed for this function. Firstly, Diplomatic Studies, though focusing on Eurocentric state-based diplomacies of the present, has recognised the existence of non-Western forms of diplomacies in the past. Secondly, openings have been made by critical scholars working in Diplomatic Studies that recognise the necessity of moving beyond a state centric understanding of diplomacy. This has led to the development of concepts such as Other Diplomacies which recognise the interactions between non-state actors across boundaries of differences as the performance of

International politics. Additionally, there is work outside the Diplomatic Studies field, such as that in Anthropology, that supports the idea of everyday diplomacies being conducted by ordinary people. The implications of this critical turn in the study of diplomacies is that it allows alternate worldviews to be taken into account, on their own terms, thereby recognising non-Western subjecthoods as legitimate actors in international politics.

### **Eurocentrism of Diplomatic Studies**

Diplomatic studies, like the broader field of International Relations, is Eurocentric. The Eurocentrism of International Relations has been well established in the field. The discipline of International Relations, as we identify it today, had its origins during the height of European colonialism (Schmidt 1998). As International Relations hardened into a discipline, its foundations remained colonial and racist. The Realist, Hans Morgenthau (1985), originally writing in 1948, saw no problems in describing Asia and Africa as empty spaces whose populations should be grateful for the civilising influence of European colonisation (Henderson 2013). Therefore, Morgenthau's book, *Politics Among Nations* (1985) actually did not deal with politics among nations but with politics amongst Western nations. Similarly, Kenneth Waltz's (1979) theory of Structural Realism posits that what matters in international politics are the relations between great powers, while lesser powers are considered significant only so far as they are impacted by greater powers (Hobson, John M. 2014).

The Liberal school of International Relations carries the same characteristics. Though often not highlighted, Robert Keohane's (1984) seminal work on international institutions, *After Hegemony*, is explicitly written with rich countries in mind. In the conclusion to the book, Keohane has no issues spelling out how the maintenance of international regimes will benefit rich countries (252-5). However, when it comes to making a case for how international regimes benefit poorer countries, the section is replete with language on how international regimes *need* to be modelled on moral principles that benefit the most underprivileged of society (255-7). The work of David Held (1995) is especially revealing of its Eurocentrism in its insistence that the liberal order be expanded, if necessary by war. Held's (1995) defence of liberalism lies not in any logically argued out argument but simply because, it is the tradition that one is born into (185-8). Obviously, he is addressing those of the liberal world order which is undeniably Eurocentric.

The field of Critical International Relations Theory, while opening up spaces for non-Western International Relations has nonetheless continued the Eurocentric trajectory of mainstream International Relations. Critical scholars, starting with Ashley (1981), Cox (1981) and Linklater (Linklater 1982, 1998) who were critiquing mainstream IR theory from the inside were nonetheless relying on a historicist framework that kept Europe and the West at the centre of International Relations Theory (Shani 2008). The focus on agency in International Relations has also contributed to the Eurocentrism of Critical International Relations Theory (J. M. Hobson and Sajed 2017). The persistence of Eurocentrism runs across theoretical paradigms as well as the various subfields that go to make up in International Relations.

The sub-field of Diplomatic Studies is no exception. Starting with diplomatic historians, diplomacy has been defined as an European heritage (Berridge, Keens-Soper, and Otte 2001).

Most authors writing on diplomatic history identify diplomacy as having originated during the fifteenth century in the city states of Italy (Berridge, Keens-Soper, and Otte 2001, 2001; Anderson 1993), culminating in the tradition of the resident ambassador (Hamilton and Langhorne 2011). However, it is interesting to note that the literature on diplomacy includes that of non-western diplomacies and contain references such as diplomacies of ancient South Asia (Hamilton and Langhorne 2011; Boesche 2003; Watson 1982; Roy 1981; Mendis 1983), Northern Africa and the Middle East (Cohen and Westbrook 2000; Hamilton and Langhorne 2011; Liverani 2001; Watson 1982; Mynarova 2007; Cohen 1996) and Ancient China (Sen 2006, 2015). However, non-Western diplomacies are considered historical practices rather than current. They all depict non-Western diplomacies as having existed in a past that is no more. This has in effect meant that modern day diplomacies are viewed as inherently a western tradition.

Additionally, Diplomatic Studies attributes a significant importance to a category of individuals identified as practitioners of diplomacy. For instance, the *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, which welcomes research on traditional as well as non-traditional understanding of diplomacy, nonetheless sets aside space in each of its issues to feature an article by a practitioner.<sup>1</sup> Though not explicitly defined, practitioners of diplomacy are understood to mean diplomats accredited or recognised within the system of states. It is worth noting that writings by prominent diplomats usually feature a clear bias towards the state that they represented. For example, Henry Kissinger (1994) asserts that diplomacy is a tool to further U.S. foreign policy for the good of the world; Harold Nicholson (1964; 1961) discusses his unease with granting equal voting rights to newly independent states in the United Nations General Assembly since they are not 'up to' exercising their responsibility; and George Kennan (X. 1947, 1987), writing under the pseudonym X, advocated for containment of the Soviet Union. It is clear from these examples how influential official diplomats can be in directing the policies of their governments. It is also evident that they have a particular view of the world, one in which the states that they represent are the most important. The significance of this being that their allegiance is to the abstract concept of the state as sovereign.

The ontological privileging of the state has meant that research in diplomatic studies is framed within the context of inter-state relations. The follow-on impact of which is that the literature privileges an analysis of diplomacy based on state power. The impact is evident when examining the literature on non-Western diplomacy such as those that focus on Caribbean states (J. A. Braveboy-Wagner 2008, 1989), the Middle East and North Africa (Hinnebusch 2015), Africa (Adar 2015) and India (Ganguly 2003; Ganguly and Pardesi 2009; Ganguly and Pardesi 2015). A case in point is the new edited volume on *Diplomatic Strategies of Nations in the Global South* (J. Braveboy-Wagner 2016) that contains an analysis of several states in the Global South, categorised into three tiers according to their level of influence. The first tier includes states that have global influence, the second tier is restricted to those with regional influence and the third tier of states are the smallest of the states that yet 'punch above their weight' (16). The categorizations here clearly betray a privileging of power and influence over others. Therefore, the framing of the Global South has been restrictive, with only the states which are capable of exerting power and influence over others being taken into consideration. Additionally, most of

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<sup>1</sup> The overview section of the journal's website states that, "[E]ach issue aims at a balance between theoretical and empirical studies and usually it features one practitioner's essay." (<https://brill.com/view/journals/hjd/hjd-overview.xml>)

the chapters rely on Western notions of soft power (Nye 2008) as a concept to explain foreign policies. It is worth noting that the notion of soft power deals with dominating the other without the use of physical force (ibid). Therefore, its concern remains power over the other. The volume, rather than providing fresh perspectives to diplomatic studies, is guilty of packaging old wine in new bottles.

The Eurocentric approach to diplomatic studies has resulted in foreclosing many aspects of the non-western world from consideration. Essentially, it has led to the framing of the non-West through Western categorisations and understandings. Therefore, the non-West is not understood as legitimate subjects in their own right but as objectified categories that can only be comprehended through Western categorisations. It is necessary at this point to have a discussion about what is meant by the non-West, before proceeding further.

### **The Non-West**

The term non-Western thought in International Relations is prone to exoticize the non-West and compartmentalize knowledges (Shilliam 2010b). As both Shilliam (2010a) and Krishna (2018) point out the non-West has been influenced by colonialism to such a degree that it is not possible to discover pristine non-Western thought. Therefore, the term as it is used in this paper, does not aim to uncover a separate category of thought that excludes Western influence in total. However, I would like to acknowledge the fact that there are living communities whose cosmologies have a different history and place that does not lie in the West. There is a difference in the way the world is understood by someone from the Global South as opposed to an individual or community of the Global North. To further clarify matters, it is important to note that there are differences not only between the two worlds but within the two worlds as well. To be sure, there can be no compartmentalisation of the two. However, what I wish to highlight by the use of the term non-Western thought is the existence of thought that is different to modernity. Following the thoughts of Robbie Shilliam (2010a), the objective is not to add non-Western thought to the expanding knowledge base of the Western archive but to invite the Western centre to travel to the non-West and recognise its knowledges as legitimate for the construction of subjecthoods (13).

Therefore, the non-Western thought that I envision is not a puritanical version of Eastern philosophies, but a term used in opposition to the narrative of endogenous enlightenment of Western thought. Western thought is framed as one that arose in the West through the application of science, when in reality there was significant borrowing of technologies from outside Christendom (J. Hobson 2004). The rise of the West was never one of self-contained endogenous development but one which either exploited or borrowed from the East (ibid). This paper wishes to avoid making the same error, and therefore does not lay claim to a narrative of puritanical Eastern thought. Hence the use of the term non-Western, to describe thinking that does not privilege the West but at the same time does not exclude its influences.

Non-Western subjects engage in international politics based on a hybridity of Eastern and Western thought. For example, a South Asian would have been influenced by centuries of migration from the East, which includes Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic influences and more recently by the West, in the form of four and a half centuries of direct colonial rule by Europeans

such as the Portuguese, Dutch and the British (De Silva 2008). While colonialism certainly did not end with the demise of direct rule and continues to influence the world today (Seth 2013), capitalism has changed any facet of life that may have remained untouched by direct colonialism (Tsing 2004). Therefore, a more nuanced understanding of the non-West is required. The ultimate objective being that International Relations becomes cognisant of a truly global understanding of legitimate subjecthoods.

### **Diplomacies and Other Diplomacies**

So far, the paper has claimed that the field of International Relations and its subfield of Diplomatic Studies are Eurocentric in nature. Their Eurocentrism is not limited to the geographic focus on Europe and North America but also extends to conceptualising the world in terms of abstract conceptualisations such as the state. Additionally, the paper has pointed out that non-Western thought does not exist as a self-contained category but as a fluid hybrid which is nonetheless different to that of Eurocentric concepts. At this point it becomes important to discuss how and why the state needs to be decentred in order to reveal the non-West.

Decentring the state is not an attempt to ignore or remove it from analysis. Instead, the objective is to make room for the inclusion of non-state actors who perform international politics. As discussed earlier, the mainstream literature has been able to define and frame certain types of international politics, such as indigenous diplomacies, out of existence (Beier 2009b; de Costa 2009). This is not surprising, given the fact that modernity has defined the discipline of International Relations, and its subdisciplines, as one in which categorization and separation are privileged over connections and relations (de Costa 2009; Beier 2009b; Shilliam 2010a). The implication of which is that problems and solutions that the mainstream offered up have all been framed and defined in terms of the abstract notion of the state. Jim George (1995), in his article on the Bosnian conflict, provided an example of how a perspective that takes a Realist understanding of the world limited the range of solutions to that conflict. Therefore, as Ravi de Costa (2009) argues, to which I agree, the discipline should focus on the “material and environmental needs of living communities, rather than those of abstract sovereign entities” (77). It is for this purpose that decentring the state becomes important.

However, along with the need to focus on living communities instead of abstract sovereign entities (de Costa 2009), it is important that to speak to the centre of the discipline. This is because International Relations, and by extension Diplomatic Studies, is considered an influential site of authority by students, policy makers and sometimes an attentive public (Beier 2009a). It therefore holds discursive power over knowledge production (ibid). This makes it important to engage critically with the discipline in a manner that disturbs its foundations. A different way to put it would be that it is important that the sovereignty of sovereignty should be unsettled (Franke 2009). Franke (2009) makes the case that the sovereign remains sovereign by categorising unsettling issues as the marginal other. An example is how the diplomacies of indigenous peoples are categorised as ‘indigenous’ and thereby helps preserve the inside of the sovereign to what it determines to be of relevance (ibid). Therefore, to achieve an unsettling of sovereignty, given the current state centrality of the field, requires an honest attempt to engage the centre of the discipline.

The concept of other diplomacies fits well with the requirement of troubling the singular identity of the state while simultaneously being recognisable to the centre of International Relations. It troubles the dominant understanding of diplomacy as one that is entirely state driven to one that is multi layered, fluid and conducted by non-state actors (Young and Henders 2012). The concept of Other Diplomacies was first articulated in a section of an edited volume titled *Canadian Foreign Policy in Critical Perspective* (Beier and Wylie 2010). The concept was further developed by Susan Henders and Mary Young (2012) to capture a “range of things that non-state actors do as they interact with each other” (378). Their definition of the concept is one that is based upon the functions of diplomacy, derived from Der Derian’s (1987) understanding of diplomacy to be “a mediation between estranged individuals, groups or entities” (6). Henders and Young (2012) have pointed out that living communities have everyday interactions across boundaries of differences where they identify shared goals, establish and manage relationships, make and renew rules and norms of relationships and perform representative practices that establish difference and identity. For example, Henders and Young (2012) point out that Canadian teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) who work in classrooms across countries such as China, Japan and South Korea are sites of Other Diplomacies in action. The ESL classrooms constitute a space where understandings of Canada and China, Japan or South Korea are formed by both the teachers and the students as they negotiate estrangement (381). Similarly, international students, multi-national companies and non-governmental organisations with foreign employees, foreign labourers in local factories and households constitute sites of Other Diplomacies (ibid).

While the flow of power must be taken into account in these interactions, mentioned above, it is worth noting that the power relationships may not be very clear cut as upon first glance. For example, Philippine Au-pairs that work in Canada are clearly vulnerable and live and work at the pleasure of their employers. However, the Au-pairs are the ones that take care of their, mostly middle-class, employers’ school children, in some instances being responsible for helping the children learn English (ibid). Another example would be how some Sri Lankan domestic workers in the Middle East disturb the power relationship between the husband and the wife of the household by assisting one of the parties to break rules imposed by the other (Gamburd 2000). These interactions not only perform a representative function but also a rule making function.

While Other Diplomacies includes interactions by individuals identifying themselves with a particular state or nation, they are not concerned with furthering the objectives of that state or nation. The individuals themselves may not necessarily see themselves as performing diplomacies or for that matter international politics. This is different to the various types of public diplomacies where non-state actors actively engage in international politics with the express intent of influencing state behaviour or at least contributing towards the furtherance of a state’s foreign policies. Examples of such practices are the United States Peace Corps (Bellamy and Weinberg 2008; Bhandari and Belyavina 2011), the United Kingdom’s British Council (Leonard, Small, and Rose 2005) and the work on the Ottawa Treaty on the ban of anti-personnel landmines (Williams and Goose 2008).

The work on Other Diplomacies is relatively new, in addition to the work that has been already mentioned, there has been the publication of a special issue of *The Hague Journal of*



*Diplomacy*. It includes an article examining the role that Other Diplomacies played from the 1800s to the Second World War (Young and Henders 2016) and an article about how British Columbia's First Nations' are challenging Canada's monopoly on the representation of Indigenous peoples abroad (Montsion 2016). Another recent intervention on Other Diplomacies comes from an edited volume, *Other Diplomacies, Other Ties*, which looks at the Post 1959 Canada – Cuba relations in the context of Other Diplomacies and Other Ties (Tabio, Wright, and Wylie 2018). It contains a chapter that deals with how ordinary citizens of the two countries have built trust between them, in the process shaping ties between the two states (McNeil 2018). Additionally, a special issue of *Cambridge Anthropology* was published to discuss how ethnography may be used in the study of, what is referred to as 'Everyday Diplomacy', a concept very similar to Other Diplomacies (Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado, and Henig 2016). The articles contain a diverse literature that deals with different types of diplomacies. For example, one article discusses how Indian traders, unawares to themselves, perform diplomacies in a Chinese textile market (Cheuk 2016) while another article deals with how Afghan traders intentionally perform diplomacies across the former Soviet Union (Marsden 2016). The above examples demonstrate that Other Diplomacies can be used to interpret the aspects of international politics present in various different interactions.

An important point to bear in mind as these interactions are analysed, is that they be recognised as being performed by those actors in their own right. Any attempt to attempt to comprehend the motivations that drive the interactions in terms other than how the interlocutors themselves understand it will obliterate their subjecthood (Critchley 1992). It is important to note therefore that while Other Diplomacies is understood in terms of the functional aspects of diplomacy, it does not mean that the actions recognised as Other Diplomacies have to be approximated to those that are performed by accredited diplomats of various states. To be sure, attempting to look for functions that are approximate to those performed by accredited diplomats will result in pigeonholing living communities into categories that are already recognised in International Relations. Therefore, the key to avoiding such pigeonholing is to recognise that all forms of interactions that take place, no matter how trivial, constitute Other Diplomacies. It is only by recognising actions and their motivations based upon how they are understood and interpreted by those performing them that the non-West will be revealed to International Relations.

### **Conclusion**

The Eurocentricity of International Relations and its sub-field of Diplomatic Studies has been normalised partly by the state-centric focus of the discipline. Recognising this is a first step to understanding the that the non-West has been reduced to objects who are acted upon. However, Other Diplomacies allows us to transport International Relations away from its state-centric centre to reveal the non-Western subjecthoods that exist in their own right as actors in international politics.

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