TRANSLATION, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

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The scholarly discipline of International Relations [IR] has often characterised diplomacy from the viewpoint of the 'state' as an abstract entity, and correspondingly as a description of the ways states manage their interactions with each other.[1] But 'diplomacy' can also be understood fundamentally as a social practice dependent on people who operate not as empty shells, but as distinctive individuals with personalities and identities. While scholars have certainly described states metaphorically as 'individuals', or as 'actors', a socially constructed view of diplomacy that takes its practitioners seriously, by definition, entails looking at interactions between individual people, with their personal identities and characteristics, acting as representatives of others, including (though not necessarily exclusively) 'states'. As a practice that is essentially about human interactions and personalities, it is entirely understandable that diplomacy has always entailed complex cultural negotiations and the translations of different languages and codes. These 'languages' are the focus of this essay. In some senses, diplomatic negotiations encompass literal translation, of how people communicate across linguistic divides, and of how the very acts of linguistic translation involve compromises of various sorts (e.g. Federici and Tessicini 2014).[2] Following this, 'translation' might also reflect how professionalised diplomatic corps acquire shared languages and terminologies that they recognise amongst themselves, almost as a private language, as Harold Nicolson argued in his classic account of diplomacy (Nicolson 1965: Chapter X).[3] But this essay also encompasses translation metaphorically: of the symbolic acts of translation, that is, of interpreting different cultural codes and of the search for shared understandings of such fundamental issues as diplomatic protocols or material gifts as foundational for building stable grounds for negotiating.

These issues have been a key element of diplomatic practice throughout history, though this essay examines them by focusing on European diplomacy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It examines first the normative view of early modern diplomacy at the level of formal practice and the challenges posed to peaceful interactions by the changing political and cultural landscapes of Europe and the world, and in the second half of the essay of how Europeans grappled in practice with these challenges. The early modern period is especially interesting and significant for historians of diplomacy since has often been taken to represent the most dynamic and paradigmatic period in the evolution of diplomatic practice, when the structures of 'modern' diplomacy came into being, and when European 'diplomacy' became increasingly globalised.[4] The period, it is customarily argued, witnessed the evolution of resident ambassadors, that is to say, of ambassadors who lived abroad for long periods of time, in turn changing how rulers and states interacted precisely because of sustained contact with one another (even though in reality the spread of ‘permanent diplomacy’ was neither even nor linear across Europe). Powers had to articulate codes of behaviour for ambassadors, and also recognise, and broadly accept, practices of immunity, in part out of mutual respect and self-interest, for establishing orderly and peaceful conduct. This in turn was connected with a second important theme of early modern diplomacy. It has been argued that the period saw the increasingly defined connection between diplomacy and sovereignty, where ‘diplomacy’ as a formal practice itself became the monopolistic preserve of rulers or states and that, at least by the later seventeenth century, these sovereign powers were recognised as legitimate.[5]

1. The breakdown of shared languages of diplomacy in the early modern world

Most importantly for this essay, though, normative diplomatic practice, from its European standpoint at the level of ‘high politics’, had to account for a series of profound, and contrary, cultural changes during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which potentially threatened the basis on which powers could interact peacefully (in the very period, as mentioned above, when diplomatic practice was nevertheless becoming more widely normalised). According to historians of international law, the idea of a single diplomatic community—the *respublica christiana*, as it has been termed—with shared cultural languages and which supposedly defined Europe in clear terms during the middle ages, was badly damaged by the Reformation that followed Martin Luther’s protest against the Roman Church from 1517.[6] Whatever changes were taking place in terms of the spread of permanent diplomacy and ideas of immunity, religious hatred and confessional violence became hallmarks of the period, as the effective breakdown of Christendom's unity in the sixteenth century severely damaged the basis on which Europeans could trust each other on the international stage.

Catholics, as the inheritors of the *respublica christiana*, viewed Protestants—heretics, from the Catholic perspective—as fundamentally untrustworthy. The capacity of Protestants to operate according to the norms of Christian behaviour, as defined by Catholics, was felt to have been deeply compromised by their rejection of ‘true’ religion. According to the principles by tradition accepted by the Catholic Church, Protestants had forfeited their rights to membership of civilised society, including, we might assume by extension, the international society of rulers and states. What is more, since Protestants were ‘heretics’, it was often argued that they were almost pathologically incapable of being trustworthy. Their words and actions simply could not be taken as reliable for any sustained period.[7] If diplomacy within Europe had, in effect, been a shared language prior to the Reformation, held together by a common religion and by commonly respected supranational authorities (principally the Roman Church), then Europeans, in theory at least, could no longer meaningfully or peacefully talk to each other in formal diplomatic frameworks. It is telling, in particular, that there were virtually no direct diplomatic contacts at an official level between Protestants and the papacy from the sixteenth century until at least the eighteenth century.[8] The papacy remained ostensibly intransigent in its refusal to engage through official diplomacy with Protestants after the Reformation, something which arguably resulted in a decline in its international authority as a recognised diplomatic actor and mediator. Conversely, the British government, for instance, only considered sending a representative specifically to the pope at the outbreak of the First World War, and the first full British ambassador to the papacy dated only to 1982.

For an example of how serious the challenge to formal diplomacy and peace-making might be in the post-Reformation world, we can look to one of the key practices of international relations throughout history, the signing of treaties. Treaties, most importantly peace treaties, between rulers or states entailed the mutual recognition of sovereignty, that is to say they required the acceptance that the other side was authorised to engage in formal diplomacy.[9] International peace treaties in Europe also, by tradition, at least until the seventeenth century, entailed recognised protocols of ratification, alongside oath-swearing invoking God, which correspondingly implied that treaty partners shared a common understanding of religion as a cultural glue and, equally, that they could notionally accept each other's words as credible and trustworthy. Did the Reformation thus necessitate novel forms of diplomatic practice? More particularly, could Catholic sovereign powers trust Protestants, as a new presence in international politics, when it came to the formalities of concluding wars and ratifying settlements with oaths, assuming that Protestants were even accepted as legitimate in the first place?

These kinds of questions faced by Europeans were not entirely novel, not least as Christian Europeans and Islamic powers had long grappled with how they might conclude treaties. The bilingual treaties between Muslim lords and conquering Aragonese kings in the thirteenth century illustrate some of the cultural, and political, gaps that seemingly existed. In effect, the Al-Azraq Treaty of 1245, (the manuscript of which uniquely survives and is possibly representative of other, now-lost, treaties) reveals very different understandings of what a settlement actually meant for the negotiating parties. Its interlineal text, combining Arabic and Aragonese-influenced Castillian, shows that the two sides actually approached peace with markedly different mentalities (Burns and Chevedden 2000). In a parallel example, James Muldoon has claimed in discussing the peace offered by the Muslim Tatars to the Christian king, Bela IV of Hungary (r. 1235-70) that,

> The oaths that both the tartars and Hungarians would take to seal an alliance would have no meaning because the infidel tartars would not feel bound by oaths sworn on Christian relics: ‘infidels’, since they do not possess the true faith, certainly cannot be bound by oaths whose sanction was the judgement of the Christian God (Muldoon 1979, 60).

Following Muldoon’s point, one solution, at least, to ensure that treaty partners would honour agreements, was to swear oaths on respective sacred objects as a symbolic act that would be comprehensible and relevant to all parties—based of course on the assumption that the parties recognised what kinds of ritual objects mattered to each other. The practice had already been used on certain occasions prior to the Reformation. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (an early English history dating first from the late-ninth century), for example, recorded that a peace agreement in 876 between Christian Anglo-Saxon rulers and pagan Danes had been sworn on the Danes’ sacred temple-ring (Swanton 1996, 74-5; Chaplais 2003, 31-2). Similarly, a seventeenth century treatise on diplomacy, Gasparo Braggiacia’s *L’ambasciatore in sei libri* (1626), one example from the outpouring of normative literature about diplomacy produced at the time, reflected (albeit in his case from a pointedly Catholic perspective) on whether it was licit for Christians to accept oaths sworn on the Qur’an in agreements made with Ottomans (Bragaccia 1627, 361). Clearly, Europeans were grappling with questions about whether diplomacy might take place in ways that were meaningful and binding to them across difficult conceptual boundaries, and whether certain objects or protocols might acquire a shared value by powers from different cultural traditions. And behind this was a series of other moral debates within pre-modern Europe about whether the quest for peace, as a traditional diplomatic ideal, was of such great value that it might trump other moral qualms, such as whether, from a European Christian perspective, peace with ‘others’ could ever be reliable and lasting.[10]

As Braggaccia’s treatise suggests, at the very time when Europeans were engaging with difficult questions amongst themselves about the interplay between diplomacy, identity and legitimacy, diplomacy was itself becoming globalised on a much more sustained level than beforehand. Quite apart from the ongoing interactions between Christian powers in the Latin West and Muslim powers in the near east, notably, the Ottomans and Persians, there was also a growing level of contact between Europeans and powers from Africa and Asia. It was during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for example, that the first ‘ambassadors’ from Africa and Asia came to Europe, while Europeans began to send their own representatives to those non-European powers, as will be discussed later (e.g. Lowe 2001; Martínez Ferrer and Nocca 2003; Massarella 2012).

These cross-cultural relations between European Christians and non-Christian, non-Europeans, at the macro-level of formal diplomacy, had a backstory for Europeans that predated the early modern period, as we have already seen with the issue of peace treaties. There had been centuries of diplomatic contact between Latin Christians and Muslims, most notably. In the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent IV Fieschi (r. 1243-54) had elaborated a legal basis for interacting with non-Christian societies, principally Islamic powers, arguing that Christians could not legitimately invade their territories simply because they did not accept the ‘true’ faith as understood by Catholics. In turn, this generated a broader series of arguments that had significance for the ways in which Christians engaged diplomatically with other peoples. One of Innocent IV’s followers, Hostiensis (d. 1271), who was himself a canon theologian, took the contrary view to his master, by arguing that those who were not in a state of grace (in effect, non-Catholics from their perspective) forfeited their *dominium*, that is to say their rights to exercise authority, a point later reiterated by the English theologian John Wyclif (c. 1324-84). But this was rejected at the eighth session of the Church’s Council of Constance (May 1415), fearful of the consequences for the Church’s own claim to authority if it were seen to lose, even temporarily, its state of grace. In effect, the council’s decision against Hostiensis affirmed the legitimacy of non-Christian powers, and by extension the capacity for Christians to negotiate with them. It is worth adding that a similar argument, with explicit reference to the Council of Constance, was later used by the Spanish Thomist, Francisco de Vitoria (c. 1485-1546), in a lecture of 1539 delivered at the University of Salamanca (his classic work addressing the moral questions associated with Spanish colonial power), in which he justified the property rights of American Indians (Muldoon 1979, 5-9; Muldoon 1980; Pagden and Lawrence 1991, 240-3).

The significance for this essay of these debates about the existential identities of non-Christians lies in the fact that, from the standpoint of the Latin West, attempts were made conceptually to understand how to bridge cultural divides and to accept that non-Christian societies might be accorded diplomatic recognition in terms acceptable, or recognisable, to Christians. There was an evident understanding that so-called ‘infidels’ exhibited the markers of civilisation as understood in Europe, a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful diplomatic engagement: a respect for the other, even if the religious and cultural differences remained.[11] Indeed, it should be added that the inverse could also be true. Muhammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Miknāsī, a Muslim ambassador active in Europe during the later eighteenth century, and author of an important set of travel writings, while evidently disliking Euro-Christian ‘infidels’, could nevertheless pursue negotiations with a degree of pragmatism and equanimity (Matar 2015).

Even the language of ‘friendship’ could be found in agreements signed between Christian and Islamic powers. For example, an agreement of August 1535, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, undertook to protect the restored bey of Tunis, Mulay Hassan, marking a ‘perpetual friendship…peace and mutual closeness’ between the two.[12] This is worth emphasising. ‘Friendship’, as a word, was heavily loaded in pre-modern European diplomatic discourse, and was commonly deployed in formal treaties and alliances (Lesaffer 2002). It implied, from the Christian perspective at least, mutual recognition, even, so it seems in this case, across clear cultural boundaries.[13]

So far, then we have seen that the cultural challenges to European practices of diplomacy, at a formal level, were twofold. The first was felt specifically within ‘Europe’, as different confessional communities had to find new ways, or perhaps rearticulate old ways, of engaging with each other in a context where mutual trust had been severely damaged, and where conflict was consequently increased. The second challenge was of finding ways for Europeans to engage with powers who were simply outside the framework of Christianity. In terms of the challenge within Europe, the search for shared diplomatic languages evidently took time and required some difficult moral compromises, especially for Catholics who felt that they were the legitimate guardians of the old Latin West. The first peace treaty between Protestants and Catholics, for example, only dated to the 1604 Treaty of London, agreed between the Stuart king of England, James I (r. 1603-25), and Philip III of Spain (r. 1598-1622)—close to ninety years after Martin Luther made his stand against Rome that precipitated what we know as the Reformation. When the two parties came to the formal ratification of their treaty, inevitably some ground had to be conceded on matters of practice, so as to avoid some confessional difficulties. The peace was ratified both in London and in Valladolid (Castile), where the Spanish court was at that period located. Customarily, peace treaties between Christians had been finalised with oaths on the bible and often with the celebration of Mass, an act that conferred peace-making with a semi-sacramental authority that was comprehensible to all parties. While James I swore his oath ratifying the treaty on a Vulgate Bible (he was, after all, a baptised Catholic, even though he was a Protestant by confession), the peace ratification in Spain generated problems. Given the bitterly irreconcilable differences between Protestant and Catholics over the meaning of the Eucharist, the peace in Spain was finalised in a specially designated secular space, clearly in an effort to defuse a potential problem of mutual trust.[14]

2. Bridging divides in the early modern world: alternative diplomacies

The English and Spanish clearly demonstrated that they were capable of compromising their ideological concerns to ensure that confessional mis-translations in the act of peace-making were minimised. One of the reasons why peace was in any case made easier between England and Spain during James I's reign, though, was that he was himself married to a Catholic queen, Anna of Denmark. The case of England's diplomacy during the early seventeenth century indeed points us to alternative articulations of 'high' diplomacy that could bridge ostensibly large cultural or religious divides within Europe. It is certainly striking that from James I until James II (r. 1685-88), England had a succession of Catholic consorts, aside from the republican period of 1649-60 (in turn, Anne of Denmark, Henrietta Maria, Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena). While relations between princely husbands and wives were not always smooth, precisely because of confessional and political differences, these consorts nonetheless enabled a closer degree of integration between England and the continent that might otherwise have been the case. The presence of Catholic queens opened-up alternative ways of doing diplomacy and secondary channels for negotiations between England and Catholic powers on the continent. Henrietta Maria, for example, facilitated informal diplomatic contacts between the Stuart court and the papacy during the 1630s (though this was also the cause of suspicion in England) (Hibbard 1983). More generally, dynastic unions have always been a staple of European diplomacy, a means for making peace between rulers. We should not forget that marriage was itself a sacrament in Catholic Europe, and could act as a powerful articulation of obligation and friendship on the international stage (Russell 1986, 85-9; Bély 1999, especially chapters VIII and XII; Ffolliott, 2000).

Marriage as a distinctive form of international peace-making—that is to say as a kind of symbolic diplomatic language in its own right—in turn raises a different set of questions about how diplomacy worked and, by a further extension, about how we understand the very notion of 'diplomacy' as a sovereign prerogative. So far, this account of cultural translation has been framed by the roles played at the level of princes and states. Equally, it has assumed—working from the premises set on a macro and normative level by scholars of legal history—that there were clearly defined, and importantly clearly distinct, cultural communities, principally, in this context, the Latin West. Princes were of course individual people and their diplomatic representatives were increasingly seen as the embodiments of princes, almost as princes *in absentia*. Furthermore, since, as was claimed at the very outset of this essay, diplomacy is fundamentally about individual social interactions, we should also take close account of the practitioners, those who did the diplomacy on behalf of their sovereign masters.

Looking at diplomacy from their perspectives adds important dimensions to an understanding of how diplomacy could bridge different kinds of divides (religious, political, linguistic), and of diplomacy as an act of cultural translation. It furthermore re-aligns attention from thinking only in a narrow sense about formal practices of diplomacy that have constituted traditional diplomatic history, or the broad categorisations employed in legal history of seemingly rigid legal communities (notably the *respublica christiana*), to the multiplicity of ways negotiations actually took place in practice. Taking a more personalised and organic approach to diplomacy in turn encompasses the 'connected histories' that, so it has been reasonably argued, existed between peoples in a global context, pointing us to the rich variety and frequency of cultural translations that took place aside from (or perhaps in spite of) the formal levels of state relations in the early modern world (e.g., Subrahmanyam 1997; Ghobrial, 2013).

While the gradual monopolisation of diplomacy by princes and their states entailed a parallel 'professionalisation' of diplomacy as a career, this was by no means entirely settled in the early modern period, even into the seventeenth century (the time by which scholars hitherto often assumed that 'modern' diplomacy had effectively been established). There were in fact a range of individuals who operated as practitioners of diplomacy in Europe and further afield, including (though not exclusively) merchants, artists, missionaries, translators, and women. This range of diplomatic actors facilitated diplomacy across different divides, precisely by virtue of their semi-formal or informal roles: they allowed greater flexibility for 'states' and princes to pursue peace where more formal contacts might have been problematic (Von Thiessen and Windler 2010; Van Gelder and Krstić 2015). We can get a sense of this by looking at the kinds of roles artists, as one category, played as cross-cultural diplomats. After all, they had the kinds of skills that enabled them to move around Europe and potentially to switch between different identities, since, especially as portraitists, they were often experienced at engaging and communicating with patrons and sitters. Marika Keblusek has put this neatly in describing artists as 'double agents', who combined their creative expertise that was so valued by princes and courts, with their capacity to slip in and out of diplomacy (Keblusek 2011; see also Duerloo and Smuts 2016).

Strikingly, art historians have also applied linguistic terminology and philosophy to describe the potential power of paintings as symbolic, and even constitutive, forms of diplomacy. Thus, paintings might act as ‘mute diplomats’, articulating ideas and political rhetoric through visual metaphors and imagery in ways that mimicked the vocalised oratory of ambassadors, and which could be understood commonly across more obvious linguistic divides. Paintings, as a privileged ‘language’, might indeed have the capacity to go beyond what official ambassadors might reasonably or tactfully say themselves (Colantuono 2000). Paintings might also serve as performative utterances, as the art historian Ulrich Heinen has argued with reference to Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Drawing on linguistic philosophy, Heinen suggests that Rubens created paintings with the intention of affecting political decisions by eliciting specific responses from their audiences as part of a process of peace-making (Heinen 2011). In effect, paintings generate perlocutionary results.[15]

Rubens stands out as probably the outstanding example of someone who doubled as both a painter and a diplomat, his career reaching its apogee during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), the war that engulfed much of Europe and indeed which in some respects was the first global war. His involvement, as a semi-official diplomatic agent on behalf of the Spanish, in negotiations, from 1627-30, to end a war between England and Spain, was grounded on his reputation as an artist, and the appeal he had to the English king Charles I (r. 1625-49) and his minister-favourite, the Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628). Thus, Rubens’s paintings were used as forms of cultural communication, as acts of diplomacy in their own right, in part as gifts to bridge divides. The artist himself even become a gift. Rubens was arguably valuable because he could be used as form of flattery: his very person carried symbolic capital, and as much, if not greater, weight, than his actual negotiating skills (Auwers 2013). Here, the visual arts, and the artists who created material objects, provided a shared cultural language that was able to transcend the hard boundaries of politics and religion that ostensibly existed between England and Spain.[16]

Artists were not unique as actors who might facilitate cross-cultural diplomacy, using particular skill sets to by-pass more formal communication channels that might otherwise have been blocked by significant cultural, religious, or political divisions. To take another example, merchants by their very nature obviously moved around for trade. Their mobility, coupled with the fact that it was often in the interests of merchant companies to maintain various lines of communication in different political contexts, provided them with both the capacity and incentive to assume diplomatic functions, as another category of semi-official ambassadors. In some cases, then, merchant-diplomacy took the form of individual merchants operating on behalf of their native European states; in others, this entailed mercantile companies, such as the Dutch and British East Indies Companies, taking on diplomatic roles. In fact, they were so powerful that they assumed some of the characteristics of states themselves (Weststeijn 2014; Stern 2011). In the parlance of contemporary IR, as sub-national communities with the capacity to operate their own diplomatic agendas aside from the kinds of agendas and restrictions of ‘states’, they were engaging in ‘para-diplomacy’.[17] Given the relative weakness of European states beyond Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it seems entirely understandable that mercantile companies, who had their own interests at stake in maintaining and developing economic relations with communities outside Europe, should seek to develop. Christina Brauner’s work on diplomacy between merchants and African powers, especially in the Gold Coast, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, is revealing in this regard, where she explores the various ways the different interest groups and individuals interacted in part through gift exchanges (Brauner 2016). It furthermore reminds us of the importance of material culture as a language of diplomacy. As with the use of sacred objects for peacemaking (such as the Danish ring), or of paintings (in the case of Rubens), objects used in relations between European merchants and African powers were intended to ameliorate relations through their functions as culturally translatable objects.

Artists and merchants thus represented two categories of informal cross-cultural diplomats. To take a third category, we can look at members of religious orders in the early modern period. Generally European by extraction, they could even play reverse roles as diplomats, representing non-European powers to European powers, as was the case in the example of the Safavid monarch, Shah Abbas (r. 1588-1629), who used members of the Augustinian and Carmelite orders as representatives to Europe during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Their value, clearly, was that they understood better than others the different cultural worlds between which they moved. As missionaries who crossed boundaries both ways, they might also complicate further the notion of rigidly delineated political communities hitherto described by historians of international relations. Indeed, the fact that we have examples of Europeans operating as diplomats for non-Europeans back into Europe directs attention to the intriguing phenomenon of individuals in the early modern world whose very identities straddled different communities, and who in themselves entwined cultures of diplomacy and translation.[18] It might even be argued that all diplomats in effect purposefully inhabit and operate in the gaps between communities (or ‘states’) defined by their separateness, as the political scientist Paul Sharp has argued. In doing so, they act as cultural bridge-builders through their roles in mediating this ‘separateness’ (Sharp 2009).[19]

More particularly, it can be added, in the early modern context, some of these transnational individuals assumed diplomatic identities because they were literally translators, imbuing them with a privileged capacity to mediate. In the pre-modern world there was no single, accepted, international language. For understandable reasons, the actual practicalities of conversation and dialogue amongst Europeans was relatively unproblematic. At least until the seventeenth century, Latin remained a fairly common language, though French was becoming important in its own right. The challenges of managing interactions between Europeans and those from outside Europe were more complex, though not in practice insurmountable. On practical levels, various individuals who had language skills became potentially valued agencies of diplomacy. In the Mediterranean World of Spain and North Africa, for example, Christian and Muslim powers made use of various translators, such as Moroccan *talbes* and former captives, though not always without difficulties, given the challenges for the Spanish, for example, of finding reliable translators who could both speak and read Arabic (Féria Garcia 2007). Just as famously, the Ottoman Dragomans operated as cultural brokers who were able to straddle the different protocols of Ottoman and European diplomacy thanks to their ambiguous identities.[20] Similarly, the case of one individual, Michel Antonio Corai (c. 1558- c. 1615), as explored by Federico Federici, provides important insights into how an individual whose culturally and ethnically cosmopolitan background, coupled with his linguistic abilities, provided him with the credentials to cross different kinds of cultural boundaries (Federici 2014).

3. Diplomacy and cultural commensurability

A series of key questions evidently thread through these discussions of diplomatic engagement between Europeans of different confessions, and between Europeans and non-Europeans, as this concluding section of the essay considers. Are cross-cultural diplomatic interactions fundamentally grounded on difference and misunderstanding? Did early modern diplomacy, by contrast, work in culturally relativistic frameworks, accepting the co-existence and equal validity of multiple communities? Alternatively, might diplomatic choices follow rational processes where actors recognise mutual interests and commonalities? In 1640, one of Spain’s leading ambassadors, Diego Saavedra Fajardo (1584-1648), published an advice manual dedicated to the king of Spain’s heir. In its own right, it was a major contribution to the genre of princely advice literature that were common in the early modern period, and in Catholic Europe in particular where theorists grappled with the challenge of articulating philosophies that squared religious conviction with practical political imperatives.[21] Amongst the chapters of the work, written as a series of 100 moralising political emblems, was one devoted to the question of whether Catholics could trust those who did not share their faith. He began with an image of Mount Vesuvius, which was active at the time he wrote his work. While everything on the surface appeared calm, so he wrote, beneath its cover the volcano was seething and readying to erupt. Thus, heretics and infidels might appear trustworthy on the outside, but beneath their surfaces they simmer with concealed wickedness. However—and this is the key point—he added later in the chapter that

> Nations have no security of what they negotiate other than the religion of the oath. And if by this they attempt to deceive, commerce in the world would end, and it would not be possible to settle truces or peace agreements. But even if there is no oath, treaties should be fulfilled, for from truth, fidelity and justice, there is born in those treaties an obligation that is reciprocal and common to all people. And as one is not allowed to kill or hate a heretic, so neither is it allowed to cheat him, or to break a promise to him (Saavedra 1999, 971-2).

Ostensibly, this passage seems to distil issues of diplomacy and cultural commensurability to a matter of rational choice that all parties might share—of doing to the other what you would have done to yourself as necessary for co-existence. But does this also suggest that diplomacy works within natural law as a binding force common to all people? That might be the inference if we also look to the moral philosopher James Dunn, who has argued in a relevant essay on the concept of 'trust' that the force of a promise (of course fundamental to treaty-making) comes from a combination of voluntary self-commitment (arguably, a rational choice) *and* the psychological and social foundations of human collective life (Dunn 1996, 91).

Opinions differ amongst scholars about the extent to which cross-cultural interactions have been shaped by differences: the question of cultural commensurability has been especially important, for example, in scholarship on early modern 'ethnography' (e.g. Schwartz 1994; Rubiés 2000). The theme of cultural commensurability and diplomacy also remains a concern in the field of IR too. In what has become a classic work of IR, Raymond Cohen has, for instance, argued for the need for diplomats to understand what he has seen as hard cultural differences. More specifically, Anglo-Saxon diplomatic culture (he is principally concerned with American diplomacy), so he argues, is primarily concerned with linguistic interactions. This 'low context', as Cohen terms it, stands in contrast with the 'high context', more symbolically-shaped cultural communication that is typical of Mediterranean and Asian cultures. Cohen does not end, though, here. While accepting, then, that there are fundamentally different cultural traditions for negotiating, Cohen seeks to offer practical suggestions for successful diplomacy across these high and low contexts (Cohen 2002). Learning to recognise the different negotiating contexts, of using experience and empathy, and by inference recognising and accepting cultural differences, might accordingly provide the grounds for diplomatic *modus operandi*.

This point is arguably of central importance. Peoples find ways to interact, and arguably have always sought ways to find common grounds for talking to each other through diplomacy. These were, and are, to a degree, comprehensible, pragmatic, and rational choices. After all, to return to the early modern world, 'others', whether they were heretics (from a Catholic perspective), or non-Europeans (from a Eurocentric viewpoint) were an irreducible reality of international relations, and it was in the interests of princes and states, from whatever cultural tradition, operating through their intermediaries, to find ways in practice of co-existing. But this does not necessarily entail accepting that diplomacy is governed by universalising and universally accepted codes of conduct. That point might be developed further by drawing on a recent essay on diplomatic engagement between the Spanish and Shah Abbas, in which Joan-Pau Rubiés argues that cultural commensurability should not in reality be reduced to single, and mutually exclusive, paradigms of either natural law, which accepts a universality of understandings and practices, or of cultural relativism. Rather, diplomatic translations necessarily follow from experience and practice, as Cohen—mentioned above—has in effect argued in a different context. For Rubiés, negotiating parties make rational choices about how to engage with each other, and they understand what matters to each of them, while also recognising that they might have real differences. Where diplomacy fails, it might therefore be less the result of fundamental incommensurability, than for more practical reasons, where, for instance, there are straightforward political problems (Rubiés 2016).[22]

As we have seen through the course of the essay, the kinds of issues evident in the study of early modern diplomatic practice have powerful resonances with recent and emerging approaches to IR. Rubiés's 'pragmatic' approach to studying cultural commensurability certainly bears comparison with the recent methodological interest amongst IR specialists in 'constructivism', and this is worth reflecting on.[23] While scholars of IR continue to debate what constructivism precisely means, it broadly offers new ways of understanding cross-cultural diplomacy, and importantly, of diplomacy as a set of practices undertaken by people, that is to say as something that is socially constructed. Such an emphasis on the role of individuals, and possibly by extension of experience learned from cultural 'entanglements', arches this essay back its beginning. Looking at European diplomacy in its early modern context provides a rich testing ground for exploring issues of diplomacy, translation and mediation. At the normative level of high politics in Europe, as we have seen, the early modern period experienced contrary forces where new ways of doing diplomacy, as a sovereign enterprise, were spreading, but where some of the grounds for peaceful international relations were placed under sustained political, cultural and ideological pressures. Evidently, though, European diplomacy was not entirely hamstrung by this changing landscape. Practices were considerably more flexible and nuanced in practice that formal discourse and normative values might suggest, not least as diplomacy was conducted by individual people with personalities, even if those were, and have always been, subject to personal preferences, prejudices and their own interests. Diplomacy can be viewed as an organic culture that is fluid and not necessarily constrained by hard boundaries (political, religious, etc). This allows for mistakes, mis-translations and differences, but also for engagement, the acquisition of shared practices, and for viable co-existence.

4. Further reading

Cohen, Raymond. 2002. *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World*. 3rd edition. United States Institute of Peace: Washington.

A work that examines ‘cultural gaps’ in negotiating across cultures, with reflections on how to overcome those differences.

Der Derian, James. 1987. *On Diplomacy. A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

A challenging work of intellectual history and theory, considering how diplomacy mediates relations in a context of fundamental human alienation.

Osborne, Toby and Joan-Pau Rubiés, eds. 2016. *Diplomacy and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern World*. Special Issue of *Journal of Early Modern History* 20 (4).

van Gelder, Maartje and Tijana Krstić, eds. 2015. *Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Special issue of *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2-3).

Two special editions of a journal that exemplify recent scholarship on diplomacy, translation and cultural mediation in the early modern period.

Mattingly, Garrett. 1955. *Renaissance Diplomacy*. Baltimore: Penguin.

A classic, though now much-debated, history of diplomacy, concentrating on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It focuses on what the author sees as the spread of permanent diplomacy and the challenges to diplomacy presented by war and religious division.

Nicolson, Harold, 3rd. ed. 1965. *Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
A famous study of diplomatic practice by a former diplomat, with reflections on the issues ranging from diplomatic language to the routines of a diplomat's life.

5. Related Topics

Power; Translation history, knowledge and nation building in China; Translation and religious encounters; Social contexts, ideology and translation; Translation and colonialism

6. References

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[1] In this context, the state might, for example, constitute a territorial unit, but equally it might refer to the entity that claims the unique authority to represent and maintain 'national interest'. This essay takes its lead from a series of workshops I chaired, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, on the theme 'Translating Cultures: Diplomacy between the Early-Modern and Modern Worlds' [AH/K005049/1]. The first workshop considered diplomacy across cultural and religious boundaries (26-7 September 2013); the second workshop examined symbolic diplomatic languages, including art and architecture (31 January-1 February 2014); the final workshop, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, looked at the interplay between early modern diplomacy and contemporary practice (16-17 April 2014). I am grateful to the AHRC for supporting these workshops and to the various participants for their involvement.

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[2] For some broader reflections on the cultures of translation, with reference to diplomacy, see Bellos (2012).

[3] On the potential importance of acquiring a shared and politically 'neutral' vocabulary of diplomacy see, for example, Abu Jaber (2001). For a slightly different approach that explores the cultural difficulties of establishing a common diplomatic lexicon across languages, see Cohen, 2001, and touching on similar issues Wigen (2015).

[4] This essay, of course, is examining diplomatic practice from a European point of departure, though alternative approaches might reasonably decentre Europe and European exceptionalism. See, for example, Suzuki, Zhang and Quirk (2014).

[5] The best exploration of this remains Mattingly (1955), though this is not without its shortcomings. For another English language survey consult Anderson (1993).

[6] For a classic example, Grewe (2000), especially Part One. See also Lesaffer (2004b; 2000, 180).

[7] 'Heresy' itself has customarily been described in Catholic thought as a corrupting disease (Moore 1983). See also Audisio (1992, especially 17-20).

[8] It was in the eighteenth century, for example, that the Lutheran Prussians (though Prussia has a sizeable Catholic community too) undertook serious efforts to establish a permanent embassy in papal Rome (Bedon 2008, 324-7).

[9] For an excellent analytical survey of peace treaties see Lesaffer (2004a).

[10] For some reflections on the conceptual and practical efforts to address these problems see Lesaffer (2000). It remains a matter of debate, by contrast, as to whether the Ottomans in this period conceived of relations between *dar al-Islam* (the world of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the 'abode of war' beyond the Muslim world) in monolithic terms and fundamentally predicated on war (Yurdusev 2012, especially 190-1).

[11] Whether this sense of respect as a prerequisite for diplomatic engagement was mutual is potentially another matter. For a discussion of Ottoman conceptions of diplomatic contact with Europeans consult Yurdusev (2004).

[12] 'Que entre el Emperador, y sus Succesores, y el Rey de Tunez, y los suyos aya perpetua amistad…y pacifica, y mutual vecindad' (Dumont, 1726-31: IV, part II, 128). See also Ziegler (2004) and Feria García (2005; 2007).

[13] This might be qualified, however, by considering. This treaty, at least, indicates that Christian and Muslim signatories in fact had markedly different understandings of the same agreement, literally shown by the parallel text of the surrender treaty.

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[14] The National Archives, Kew, SP94/11/107, Cornwallis to the Lords of the Council, 10 June 1605; Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1603-1607, p. 247. See also Da Veiga (1989, 123).

[15] These ideas of course resonate with the work of J. L. Austin's 1955 Harvard lectures, first published in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*.

[16] Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), best known as the court painter to Charles I, can also be understood in this context, as an artist whose work and identity facilitated diplomacy (Osborne 2016).

[17] On the theme in IR of sub-national diplomacy and 'deterritorialisation' from the state see, for example, Cornago (2016) and Duran (2015).

[18] There have been a number of valuable studies of individuals from particular ethnic, religious, or 'national' backgrounds who worked for powers of other cultural traditions, and whose transnational and fluid identities in effect qualified them as diplomats because of their often unusually deep familiarity with the powers with which they engaged. For example, Cruz (1986); Windler (2002); Isom-Verhaaren (2011, Chapter 2). See also the special edition of the *Journal of Early Modern History* (2015), on diplomatic intermediaries in the Mediterranean world.

[19] In an important theoretical work, James Der Derian (1987) also articulated an understanding of diplomacy as way of addressing the existential 'estrangement' of humans from each other and the external world, and, by extension, between communities, in changing cultural and historical circumstances.

[20] For a good recent survey of the roles of dragomans as intermediaries see Gürkan (2015).

[21] For a useful treatment in English of Saavedra consult Bireley (1990).

[22] Windler has used comparable ideas in his studies of diplomacy in eighteenth and nineteenth century Maghreb (2001; 2002).

[23] For a useful survey of the approach see Hurd (2009). Three of the major contributions to this approach include: Onuf (1989); Wendt (1999); Kratochwil (1989). Rubiés's interest in characterising diplomatic engagement in terms of rational choices has parallels also with Wigen's approach (2015) to language games and conceptual entanglement.