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Everyday Diplomacy

Introduction to Special Issue

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This article considers the relevance of an ethnographic approach towards the study of diplomacy. By drawing upon recent interdisciplinary developments we critically reassess the ongoing assumption that in the modern world diplomacy is separated from other domains of human life, and that the only actors authorized and able to conduct diplomacy are the nation-state's representatives. Having outlined recent theoretical interventions concerning the turn towards the study of everyday, unofficial and grass-roots forms of diplomacy, the article suggests some of the ways in which ethnography can be deployed in order to understand how individuals and communities affected by geopolitical processes develop and pursue diplomatic modes of agency and ask how they relate to, evaluate and arbitrate between the geopolitical realms that affect their lives. In so doing, we propose an analytical heuristic – 'everyday diplomacy' – to attend to the ways individuals and communities engage with and influence decisions about world affairs.

Keywords: diplomacy, ethnography, exchange, popular geopolitics, the everyday

This Special Issue seeks to contribute to an expanding field of work that sheds light on the practice of diplomacy through ethnographic material. The articles reflect on the nature of anthropological engagements with diplomacy, and also build on older and newer work across the fields of political geography and critical geopolitics that has focused on 'popular' forms of

geopolitics, everyday diplomacies, and, more generally, the role of culture in diplomatic practice. Importantly, some of the most prominent ethnographic accounts of official diplomatic personnel have been written by scholars of International Relations (Neumann 2012a, 2012b; Kuus 2013). This body of work has brought critical empirical insights into how foreign policy is made, and state-to-state diplomacy conducted. The debates it has spurred have challenged the notion that ‘diplomacy is only reserved for the work of diplomats representing sovereign territorial units’ (Constantinou 2016: cf. Dittmer and McConnell 2016; see also Cornago 2013), and brought attention instead to the role played in the conduct of diplomacy by non-elite actors, and institutions other than the nation-state, as well as international organizations. As the advocates of this illuminating body of scholarship themselves recognize, however, the theoretical developments that have emerged from a wider understanding of diplomacy have not always been matched by the development of specific methods for collecting data on everyday diplomacies. It is in relation to this specific concern that the articles in this Special Issue seek to make a contribution.

We seek in this introduction to engage with this interdisciplinary body of scholarship at two levels. Firstly, we aim to show the type of insight that ethnographic data stands to bring to the study of diplomacy. In order to achieve this, we also reflect more widely on the relationship between anthropology and diplomacy and ask why there have not been more sustained interactions between anthropological methods and approaches and those working in the field of diplomatic studies. Secondly, we also seek to expand and enrich the types of empirical material that scholars concerned by the study of diplomacy deem relevant to their analysis. Scholarship across the fields of ‘popular geopolitics’ and ‘cultural diplomacy’ has tended to focus chiefly on discourse. We suggest that this methodological emphasis has drawn attention to the ways in which the forms of diplomatic activity important to everyday life also inform people’s modes of acting and behaving. As a result, the focus on discourse has also

meant that insufficient recognition has been granted to the role that ideas of diplomacy play in shaping collective and individual self-understandings.

In order to open up the field of everyday diplomacy to a wider range of influences and debates, we engage in particular with recent work in ‘Global History’. Global historians have increasingly documented the role that diplomacy plays as a register of everyday practice for individuals and communities inhabiting imperial frontiers, and in doing so shown how it has shaped the ways in which such communities have facilitated and mediated relations and connections across the frontier realms they inhabit (e.g., Rothman 2011; Alavi 2015; Khan 2015; Bryant 2016). We reflect on the insights that the ethnography of diplomacy might derive from this expanding body of scholarship in order to better to understand the long-lasting flows of people, things and ideas across various geopolitical boundaries and realms, as well as illuminate the forms and modes of mediation these circulatory processes have engendered.

From Popular Geopolitics to Everyday Diplomacy: Insights from Ethnography

There is an ongoing assumption in much policy-oriented writing that the most influential modes of conducting diplomacy in the world today are those that take place behind the closed doors of presidential offices, international organizations and embassies (e.g., Kissinger 1994), and that the only actors authorized, or able, to conduct diplomacy – i.e., to act on behalf of, speak for, and mediate between players on the international stage – are the nation-state’s representatives. Diplomacy also refers to the techniques and skills deployed by diplomatic personnel in order to achieve the interests of the international actors they represent. These techniques include the planning of strategies and the application of tact with the aim of building harmonious relations in complex processes of bilateral and multilateral negotiation between polities, be these nation-states, international communities, or increasingly also transnational companies and NGOs that are hiring their own diplomats (Ross 2007; Neumann 2012a: 3).

Recently, a new and critical approach, arising out of the connected fields of ‘popular geopolitics’ and ‘grass-roots diplomacy’, has brought recognition to the role that local communities and non-elite actors play in international affairs. Recent events in Ukraine and Russia have brought vivid attention to the ways in which nation-states seek to cultivate grass-roots support for their international diplomatic efforts as well as for pursuing proxy wars (Dunn and Bobick 2014): what is widely referred to as ‘public diplomacy’ (cf. Altman and Shore 2014) or ‘popular geopolitics’ (Billig 1995).

This body of writing, however, tends to emphasize the manipulation of local communities and non-elite actors by nation-states and international organizations. How far does the focus on the manipulation of such actors by powerful nation states fully reflect the significance of everyday forms of diplomacy to the field of ‘popular geopolitics’? How do communities affected by such processes actually relate to, evaluate, and arbitrate between the diplomatic practices that affect their lives? The articles in this Special Issue seek to address these questions ethnographically through consideration of a wide range of sites and actors uniquely poised to offer insights into the conduct of everyday diplomacy. What strategies do Kyrgyz brokers in Moscow deploy in their dealings with migrants from Kyrgyzstan and the Russian authorities? How do the clothing choices of women in Tajikistan respond to the claims made on them by state-sponsored nationalism but also the opportunities for the development of new fashions and styles in this internationally connected Central Asian state? What do the activities of Afghan traders in Ukraine, and of Indian merchants in China, tell us about the role played by traders in inter-state and transregional diplomatic relations? What might a study of mobile Sufis across a range of Balkan states tell us about the relationship between religion and diplomacy? And fieldworkers themselves become caught up in diplomacy, as, for example, when a British fieldworker was asked by his informants in Russia what he thought of

accusations that their country was responsible for the downing of the Malaysian Airline flight in 2014.

Scholars in International Relations have also increasingly sought to document the types of diplomatic engagement, knowledge and skill that are cultivated by particular communities and groups of non-state actors. This work has sought to contest the notion that such modes of diplomacy are merely derivative of official forms of international diplomacy. It has argued instead that the 'character and effect' of such diplomacies need to be understood on their own terms and that doing so illuminates notions and practices of diplomacy that have been 'long silenced in hegemonic forms of global governance because they frequently will not be reconciled with dominant concepts and categories' (Beier 2010: 3). Constantinou, for instance, has recently argued that the term 'diplomacy' should not be reserved only to describe 'the work of diplomats representing sovereign territorial units'; doing so, he suggests, means that the representatives of non-territorial units (ranging from NGOs to religious movements) are assumed to act in a manner that merely 'resembles' diplomats (Constantinou 2016: 24). Constantinou and others in International Relations writing in a similar vein have argued for a more expansive understanding of diplomacy. Diplomacy should not be understood as a professional skill enacted solely within the realm of statecraft, but as a wide range of social activities which can include 'a means of getting one's way, presenting the case of something or promoting the interests of someone, influencing or forcing others to do what they would not otherwise do' (ibid.: 24). As a result of this increasing willingness to develop more open understandings of diplomacy, there has also been a turn towards the use of 'the ethnographic method' by scholars to describe and theorize the workings of diplomacy in the hands of both state and non-state actors.¹

Two types of site have been recognized by scholars as being particularly fertile contexts for the study of everyday forms of diplomacy. Firstly, particular types of communities have

been documented as developing and pursuing varying types of diplomatic strategy. For example, communities affected in especially intense ways by international conflicts, such as stateless populations, are increasingly treated as a developing and deploying diplomatic skills in their political struggles. Some such communities deploy diplomatic skills that mimic those of the state (e.g., McConnell, Moreau and Dittmer 2012), while others develop their own distinctive logics of diplomatic activity (e.g., Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Beier 2010). Secondly, ‘zones of friction’ (Tsing 2004) or ‘global frontier realms’ (Christelow 2012) are increasingly regarded by scholars across a range of disciplines as excellent contexts in which to explore non-elite forms of diplomacy. People living in such ‘frontier realms’ – which are peripheral but not marginal to both multiple polities and often culture areas – are frequently documented as being sophisticated boundary crossers who are also endowed with the capacity to forge connections between politically divided spaces (e.g., Leach 1970; van Schendell 2002; Hess 2009; Scott 2009; Marsden and Hopkins 2012).

In order to ethnographically attend to such communities and geopolitical contexts and the registers of diplomatic practice these entail, we propose an analytical heuristic of ‘everyday diplomacy’ to attend to the ways individuals and communities engage with and influence decisions about world affairs. We are aware of the theoretical and methodological problems arising from the use of ‘everyday’ as a category of analysis that is a ‘subject in its own right’, and that is contested, historically positioned and culturally variable (Darby 2016). Examining the totality of interaction that the everyday entails (Lefebvre 1991), Schilling (2003: 32) poignantly asks: ‘Where should one seek out everyday life? How might it best be observed?’ In order to address these questions, it is necessary to consider briefly the historical development of the concept of the ‘everyday’. Studies of the ‘everyday’ have been a prominent feature of work across the social sciences from the beginning of the twentieth century: philosophers and historians such as Simmel, Heidegger, Elias and Braudel, to name but a few, sought to account

for the mundane, the ordinary and the repetitive vis-à-vis processes of modernization, industrialization, alienation and urbanization occurring in the European metropolis. Similarly, sociologists and ethnographers including Park and Burgess of the Chicago School brought a vivid focus on 'the everyday' through their examinations of the lives of the urban poor, mainly in North America. In the work of the latter scholars, the 'everyday' connoted commonality and similarity among people whose lives and narratives had been excluded from official historical accounts, and communities marginalized from participatory political processes and economic development. In a similar vein, 'cultural studies' in the 1970s and 1980s conceptualized the 'everyday' as a site of resistance by groups who either appeared not to fit within, or actively distanced themselves from, the 'mainstream'. Sub-cultures and counter-cultures were depicted as contesting dominant ideologies and discourses, especially from the domain of 'public culture'.

The influence of such thinking about public culture as a wellspring of resistance and opposition continues to be visible in studies of 'public diplomacy'. Highmore (2002) however, has recently argued that the 'everyday' is not only a space in which discourses are contested, while Hviid Jacobsen (2009) has also argued that the terrain of the everyday cannot be reduced to 'lived experience' by 'ordinary' or marginalized people. Rather, the 'everyday' is a category of analysis that is usually deployed in opposition to different temporal, political and social categories, ranging from 'holidays', to 'the elites', the powerful, the state, the political, the heroic, and, of course, the event (Hviid Jacobsen 2009). Indeed, in much anthropology, the everyday has recently been used to examine a diversity of different phenomenon, including mundane activities, lived experience, repetitive practices, as well, indeed, as eventful ruptures (such as outbreaks of communal violence, natural disasters and moments of moral breakdown) that are used as devices for revealing the taken-for-granted dimensions of everyday life (Das 2007; Stewart 2007; Zigon 2007; Humphrey 2008; Ring 2008; Ibañez-Tirado 2015).

We build on the insights that this body of work has brought concerning the benefits of exploring the everyday and the event as conceptually part of the same field; and by developing the notion of everyday diplomacy we do not attempt to construct a form of diplomacy that stands in opposition to institutional forms of international politics, nor to suggest that ‘everyday diplomacy’ happens beyond the boundaries of the nation-state or the offices of those who are authorized to conduct diplomatic practices. Rather, the notion of everyday diplomacy that we advance seeks to bring attention to aspects of diplomatic practice that have been under-examined in work on interstate diplomacy, popular geopolitics and grass-roots diplomacy. We are interested in particular in the ways in which historic and ongoing geopolitical processes are experienced by communities, and how such experiences form the ground upon which distinctively diplomatic skills, such as mediation, communication, persuasion, dissuasion and negotiation are enacted, instantiated and embodied, becoming salient aspects of individual and collective self-understandings, as well as of the affective and semiotic worlds such communities create and inhabit. ‘Everyday diplomacy’ thus does not escape the domains of institutional politics or professional diplomacy; nor is it unaffected by the forms of authority upon which the representation of the nation-state depends. It allows us to track, rather, the intersection between a more diverse range of modes of being diplomatic, and geopolitical processes that affect human life in a great range of social and historic circumstances (cf. Neumann 2012b).

In the articles in this Special Issue we find that everyday diplomacy is entangled with approaches to the everyday as learned and embodied practice (Bourdieu 1990); as actions or ‘ways of operating’ that are performed by heterogeneous individuals embedded in a great variety of forces and social relations (de Certeau 1984); and as practices constituting multiple processes through which power attempts to govern social subjects (Foucault 1979). The notion of everyday diplomacy thereby offers anthropology a domain in which the everyday can be

questioned but ethnographic cases also deployed in order to illuminate aspects of geopolitics and international relations that all too often remain concealed from view.

We ground our use of ‘everyday diplomacy’ in specific case studies rather than seeking to draw a clear boundary around the types of activities or communities that can be classified as belonging within the realm of the ‘everyday’ and those that do not. In this way, ‘everyday diplomacy’ reveals the ways in which diplomacy is understood, experienced, lived, enacted and embodied by different people in a variety of domains of action and experience, including in their styles of dress (Ibañez-Tirado), working lives (Marsden, Reeves), and modes of dealing with ‘others’ (Cheuk, Henig). Additionally, the articles also address the implications of researchers appearing ‘diplomatic’ during fieldwork in politically contested locales (Morris). Our aim, therefore, is to describe and analyse what the everyday demands from different groups of people whose lives are intensely affected by world politics.

While the aim of the Special Issue is to present ethnographic studies of diplomatic processes that might serve to act as a framework for future work, we also think, given the obvious parallels between anthropological and diplomatic practice, that there is a need for reflection on why diplomacy has thus far been largely an elusive focus of anthropological enquiry. Ethnographic studies of diplomacy that do exist are rarely related to one another in a coherent or systematic way. Anthropologists have frequently referred to their subjects as exhibiting diplomatic etiquette, skills and aptitudes (e.g., Hendry and Watson 2001). Additionally, scholars in the fields of international relations and political geography have increasingly sought to conduct ‘ethnographic’ research on international diplomats (Neumann 2012a 2012b; Nagelhus Schia 2013; c.f. Kuus 2013). These studies have illuminated much about the conduct of diplomacy, most especially the importance of circuits of affect and materiality to the fashioning of the ‘everyday diplomacies’ that are visible as much within spaces of professional diplomacy as they are beyond these (Dittmer 2016). Finally, attempts to

document and theorize the lives of international personnel is an increasingly ubiquitous aspect of work across the social sciences (e.g., Altman and Shore 2014). Nevertheless, there is little of a unified ‘anthropology of diplomacy’ to speak of. This situation is striking given the increasing importance within and beyond the academy of discourses about ‘popular’, ‘grass-roots’ and ‘cultural’ diplomacy. The public importance of diplomacy to everyday life has become ever more visible in recent years in the evolving geopolitical realms that have emerged in the aftermath of the ‘global Cold War’ (Kuan-hsing 2010; Kwon 2010). In this context we suggest that now is a timely opportunity to ask why it is that anthropologists have engaged with so many – inevitably transnational and geopolitically fractious – fields of the (geo)political domain in recent years without addressing in a systematic fashion the insights that ethnography stands to offer into the understanding of everyday diplomacy.

We now explore the major analytical problems that have stood in the way of developing the ethnography of everyday diplomacy, and address the debates that do exist concerning diplomacy in anthropology.

Anthropology and Diplomacy: An Awkward Relationship?

Anthropologists have for long been recognized as being ‘betwixt and between’ figures who deploy forms of mediation in order to pursue ethnographic research (Turner 1967; Douglas 1982). They, like journalists, are also mediators in the sense that the texts they produce are designed to mediate between the groups they study and specific audiences of scholars and broader publics (cf. Hannerz 2004; Werbner 2010). Indeed, anthropological expertise in the study of processes of mediation and the importance of these to the organization of social dynamics, family life and urban neighbourhoods, to name a limited range of fields, are also widely acknowledged across the social sciences (e.g., Barth 1959; Dresch 2005; Singerman 2005; Liu 2007; Humphrey et al. 2008).

What explains the apparent absence of formal and intellectual interaction between diplomatic studies and anthropology? Although, as we have documented above, anthropologists have conducted studies concerning particular expressions of diplomatic practice, for example the importance of linguistic etiquette to the establishing of diplomatic relationships (Beeman 2003), there have been fewer attempts to theorize the relationship between anthropology and diplomacy per se. Part of the explanation lies in the uneasy relationship between anthropology and colonialism (Asad 1979; Stocking 1991); more recently, the 'war on terror' has influenced disciplinary debates about the ethics of the participation by anthropologists in foreign policy engagements (Gonzalez 2007; Shryock 2003; Werbner 2010); and we can point also to the less often addressed but equally profound impact of the global cold war on anthropology (Price 2008; Chari and Verdery 2009; Kwon 2010). Whereas the role of anthropologists in colonialism and anti-terrorist domestic and foreign policy has received considerable attention across a number of disciplines, it is the complicated relationship between anthropology and the global cold war and its aftermaths that needs to be critically reassessed (Chari and Verdery 2009; Mandler 2012).

Let us first explore where the unease with the notion of an anthropology of diplomacy lies. In the early 1980s, and closely related to the emergence of public diplomacy in a bipolar international context characterized also by an increasing interest in the study of the 'Third World' (Prashad 2008), scholars declared the emergence of 'anthropological diplomacy' or 'cultural diplomacy'. The term 'public diplomacy' or the notion of 'grass-roots' diplomacy is a product of the cold war and appeared in the 1970s to designate the strategies and efforts of international actors, especially the United States, the U.K. and other European countries, to understand, engage with and influence foreign publics on a wide range of topics concerning matters of democracy, economics, war and potential cross-border conflicts (Bruce 2008; Cull 2008). According to Bruce (2008), public diplomacy developed from the politically charged

term 'propaganda', and based its strategies on public opinion research, cultural anthropology, social psychology and media studies. 'Anthropological diplomacy', according to Magnarella (1982: 4), was constituted by 'the study of the theory and practice of peace and conflict resolution among societies, based on knowledge of a society's fundamental cultural premises' and the 'impact of diverse cultures on the diplomatic process'. Importantly, however, such trends built on older anthropological works. As early as the 1940s, anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict had studied the impact of 'culture' in international politics; her research, later published as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1967), was written for the U.S. Office of War Information and aimed to predict the behaviour of Japan during the Second World War (cf. Mandler 2012).

In the 1970s and 1980s, anthropological diplomacy dealt with the use of anthropological theories to explain forms of behaviour, pragmatism and negotiation that could be labelled as being diplomatic. For example, Bell (1971) appealed to the anthropological notion of 'alliance' to examine 'crisis management' in the context of China and its emergence as an important actor in the bipolar world. Similarly, Magnarella (1982) analysed the importance of cross-border ethnopolitics and the pressure put on politicized 'ethnic groups' such as Cypriot Turks and Greeks in the shaping of the world order and ideas of the Third World. Other work conducted in the field of 'anthropological diplomacy' at this time revolved around the potential contribution that anthropology could make to understanding the negotiation process and the planning and implementation of international policies. For example, Faure and Sjöstedt (1993) analysed the extent to which national cultures condition the nature of multilateral negotiations, insofar as negotiation is based on communication and this is determined by specific cultural values. In comparable terms, anthropologists of West Asia sought to explain how Iranian modes of diplomatic negotiation were inflected by distinctively Iranian cultural ideas and practices, in particular surrounding the notion of

etiquette or tarof (e.g., Bateson 1979; Beeman 2003; von Maltzahn 2009; see also Marsden, this issue).

After the end of the cold war (as a geopolitical order), ‘anthropological diplomacy’ was largely abandoned. In its place, and in part due to the rapid advances in media technologies, public or grass-roots diplomacy experienced a rebirth, especially in the disciplines of Political Geography and International Relations. Currently, scholars of ‘public diplomacy’ call for recognition of the importance of non-state actors, and the ‘cultural’ dimensions of public identities, such as race, class, religion, memories, in shaping policy to influence public opinion through media technologies (e.g., radio, TV and the Internet) and organized exhibitions and student exchanges (e.g., Dittmer and Dodds 2008, Dittmer 2016; Müller 2009). Given that some of the ethnographic case studies in this Special Issue concern mobile and dispersed ‘partial groupings’,² it is important to note that the recognition of such aspects of popular or unofficial diplomacy also brought attention to the potential role that transnational communities could play in official diplomatic processes involving nation-states. In his study of asylum seeker and migrants, Cull (2008: 50) argues that these social groups are generally seen as a welfare problem to be managed and controlled rather than as a diplomatic resource, and suggests that there is an urgent necessity to pay more attention ‘to the interpersonal level of communication and the people whose lives cross the international boundaries who carry messages whether international actors like it or not’. Therefore, Cull argues that ‘the role of immigrants and migrant workers as a mechanism of international cultural transmission should be considered in the creation of policy toward them’ (ibid.). Cull raises interesting issues about the potential diplomatic roles to be played by migrant communities. Yet there are also clear ethical issues that arise from treating migrant communities and diasporic groups in such a strategic manner, and these have been widely recognized by ethnographic work on Muslims migrant communities in the context of the so-called ‘war on terror’ (Howell and Shryock 2003;

Soares and Otayek 2007; Werbner 2010; Buggenhagen 2012; Green 2014; Rytter and Pedersen 2014). Indeed, the ethical issues of involvement in such morally problematic aspects of foreign policy have no doubt been a further factor in encouraging anthropologists to steer clear from seeking to engage in a dialogue with students of diplomacy.

Despite these geopolitical entanglements of the discipline with the cold war and its enduring legacies, we have identified three bodies of anthropological literature that concern themes directly related to modern diplomacy and diplomatic practices. As of yet, however, these are rarely framed directly in relationship to diplomacy per se; a further consideration of them might therefore contribute to laying the ground for a more coherently developed and ethically sensitive anthropology of diplomacy. Specifically, recent anthropological work on ‘humanitarianism’, ‘the political’ and ‘diplomatic knowledge’ offers considerable scope through which to ethnographically attend to the study of diplomacy. In what follows we provide a brief overview of these bodies of literature, as well as a consideration of how the case studies presented in this Special Issue might add to them.

Diplomacy and Humanitarianism

An expanding body of work concerns the shifting nature of diplomacy, and the ways in which new types of actors and organizations (from lobby groups to NGOs and private diplomatic corporations) are playing an ever more important role in the field of international diplomacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Hess 2009; Neumann 2012a). This is particularly the case in interventions that are conducted in the name of humanitarianism (Gilroy 2005; Simpson 2013), and has been illustrated through studies of actors involved in such interventions (e.g., James 2011). Importantly, there have also been attempts made to assess the measurable influence that NGOs are having on particular fields of international diplomacy – for example, that of international environmental negotiations (Betsill and Corell 2008).

Humanitarianism is not merely an ethnographic site in which anthropologists might study everyday diplomacy, but also a field that is playing an important role in shifting definitions of what constitutes diplomatic activity. Contemporary humanitarian interventions, Fassin and Pandolfi suggest (2013: 12), are ‘legitimised in terms of moral obligation, rather than a political principle’, thus shifting the international political order from its legal groundings in international law towards questions of legitimacy of particularistic moral frameworks, the very ‘stuff’ of anthropological interest. Indeed, as Minn (2007) has argued, along similar lines, ‘the issue of moral politics is central to humanitarian activity’ and to forms of international intervention. Most humanitarian activities, Minn demonstrates, are conducted in transnational contexts, because of the nature of donors, receivers and deployed personnel as well as the type of arenas in which humanitarian programmes are implemented (such as borders, refugee camps and conflict regions). Furthermore, as both Pandolfi (2002) and Fassin (2008) suggest, essentialized categories such as ‘refugees’ or ‘street children’ are constructed by humanitarian agencies as (geo)political subjectivities because the agencies give increasing importance not only to caring and saving lives but also to ‘giving testimony’, speaking for or representing those who suffer, to the wider world. There is a growing body of work on how humanitarianism operates in situ, and what modalities of moral reasoning and practices it engenders (Bornstein 2012; Scherz 2013). These studies have developed ethnographically sensitive theoretical models that locate such actors in transnational forms of increasingly mobile sovereignty and governmentality (Pandolfi 2002).

Anthropologists working in such sites and contexts, therefore, are well positioned to explore ethnographically and with ethical sensitivity the increasingly important role played by NGOs and international humanitarianism at large in the conduct of diplomacy. Several of the articles in this Special Issue indeed deal with communities that have been at the receiving end of global projects of humanitarianism. Magnus Marsden’s ethnographic study of the

importance of ideas about diplomacy and ‘being diplomatic’ to the self-understandings of Afghan traders in the former Soviet Union documents how these actors have reflected on multiple and overlapping forms of ‘humanitarian intervention’ that have been brought to bear on Afghanistan over the course of the long twentieth century (Billaud 2015; Nunnan 2016). Marsden’s suggestion, however, is that the traders, in the context of their region’s long immersion in long-distance trading routes and trans-imperial political processes, have developed critical skills and diplomatic capacities that play an important role in their trading activities, modes of establishing political positions in the societies in which they work, and self-identities and understandings. Importantly, such skills not only facilitate the traders’ relationships with cultural others, but also the forms of loyalty, trust and community that are critical to their relations with one another, and thus their commercial activities.

In her article exploring ‘embodied diplomacy’ in Tajikistan, Diana Ibañez-Tirado also examines the influence that the Tajikistan state places upon its people acting in a manner that confirms to state nationalism if they are to benefit from circuits of international development funding. According to Ibañez-Tirado, a critical element of Tajik official national identity is presenting a worthy and respectable body to the international community, and this is something that citizens of the country have embraced through actively changing their bodily positions in relation to official policy. As she also shows, however, Tajikistan’s populace also tactically engage with the pressures of official policy in a manner that allows them to shape alternative spaces of creative agency.

Diplomacy and the Political

A further critical seam of anthropological thinking that is relevant to understanding of ‘everyday’ diplomatic processes and practices is an expanding body of work that seeks to explore the effect of official forms of diplomacy on everyday life, and the ways in which people

living in circumstances vividly affected by these engage with and reflect upon such processes (e.g., Bayly 2007; Kwon 2010; Achilli 2014). The study of politics has for a long time been entangled in the meta-narratives of political modernity, such as democracy, nationalism, the nation state and citizenship (Spencer 2007). However, the anthropology of politics has increasingly moved towards the study of ‘the political’ as a way of overcoming such reductionist models of politics. This analytical shift has emphasized the need for a more expansive and situational analytical framework that includes the expressive and affective dimensions of the political, and the local and intelligible meanings and practices it entails. Viewed from the perspective of the grass roots, the political often takes the form of everyday negotiations and mediations between enmity and friendship at various scales, and the forms of negotiation these constantly invoke (Spencer 2007: 15). Anthropologists have documented, for example, the insights that come with recognizing the place of affect and emotion in the experience of international borders and boundaries (e.g., Navaro-Yashin 2009; Reeves 2014) and of electoral politics and democracy (e.g., Spencer 2007; Michelutti 2008).

Although we find such recent ethnographies of the political inspirational in many respects, it is important to emphasize that what has less frequently been the focus of sustained discussion is the way in which diverse actors, especially non-professional diplomatic personnel, are drawn into diplomatic projects of mediation which might involve different polities and communities or spheres of life (such as the legal and the illegal). The closest body of work that does address these issues is work on so-called ‘cultural diplomacy’. As we have already pointed out, this strand of theorizing mainly addresses the ways in which nation-states deploy cultural forms and practices – such as art, scholarship and music – to promote mediation and ‘understanding’ and forge relations with others across the boundaries of the nation-state. From our perspective, a major problem with this type of writing is that it is romanticizing: by depicting only one element of diplomacy (its role in promoting cross-cultural exchange), it

ignores other contentious elements of being diplomatic (such as maintaining and holding a particular position). This asymmetrical element of diplomacy has been convincingly illustrated by Sahlins (2014) in his analysis of the workings of the Confucius Institutes across the globe. Such asymmetry, however, is rarely explored ethnographically in the wider literature on cultural diplomacy. A greater recognition of the importance of ‘normatively ambiguous’ practices – ranging from the ability to withhold information to ‘self-promotion, deceit and coercion’ – to diplomacy would make possible a better understanding of ‘actually existing’ everyday diplomacies (Constantinou 2016: 24; cf. Marsden 2016). Indeed, several of the articles in this Special Issue suggest that the study of everyday diplomacy requires a consideration not merely of the skills required to interact across cultural boundaries, but also the relationships between those engaging in diplomatic activities and those they claim to represent, as well as the forms of power and authority critical to these.

These aspects of being diplomatic are clearly on display in Madeleine Reeves’ article in this issue. Reeves explores the role played by intermediaries (posredniki, ortmochular) in securing work, permits and housing for Kyrgyz migrant workers in Moscow. In the context of Moscow, Reeves shows, the ‘rational legal bureaucratic instantiations of the state are often dependent on the proliferation of unregulated informalities’, such as those provided by intermediaries involved in the provision of accommodation to migrants. As a result, the work of intermediation is the ‘object of intense commentary’, commentary that itself unfolds within highly charged ‘affective spaces’. These broker figures are lauded by those who procure their services as being skilled ‘diplomats’, but their capacity to withhold information and act craftily, and the ways in which they subtly use fear as much as persuasion in their practices, mean that they, like all brokers, are figures of great moral ambiguity. A key insights of Reeves’ contribution, however, is to show how these intermediary diplomat-like figures negotiate the complex position they occupy in society not from a position of social distance but one of

proximity to those with whom they work. Being diplomatic in this context therefore requires the constant and careful negotiation of ‘the stakes and limits of ethical compromise’.

Jeremy Morris’s methodological article also explores how a particular type of actor – the fieldworker – is drawn into becoming a part of diplomatic processes of mediation and representation. Morris therefore brings the question of diplomatic knowledge to bear on the nature of fieldwork practice itself. He explores how, during the course of conducting fieldwork in Russia, he has been frequently called upon by his informants to take positions in relationship to diplomatic disputes involving the U.K. and Russia. Morris’s article addresses the delicate balance that is required, during fieldwork in such settings, to both demonstrate neutrality and the capacity of making an ‘affective response’. As such Morris brings attention to the processes through which fieldworkers as informants are unwillingly incorporated into diplomatic processes.

Diplomatic Knowledge

A rather different take on anthropological diplomacy, not merely as an analytical field but also as a radical political responsibility, has been recently outlined by the French social theorist Bruno Latour. Latour (2013) has argued that anthropology is inherently diplomatic because it mediates between modern and non-modern conceptions and conditions of the world. More broadly, Latour argues that diplomacy offers a better model for the anthropological project than models that revolve around asymmetrical attempts to understand ‘other cultures’. This is because diplomacy requires all parties in a negotiation to be willing to rephrase and redefine their positions (Latour 2007). Latour’s project directly addresses the key concerns we have with current work on popular geopolitics because of the degree to which he conceives of diplomacy as a form of ‘practical knowledge’ that can be embodied, learned and transmitted

rather than a capacity that is confined to ‘specific professional communities’ (cf. Cornago 2013: 22).

An extensive body of literature does exist in anthropology that treats diplomacy as a form of practical knowledge or reasoning (cf. Sahlins 1972; Turner 1991). Such writing explores how persons in heterogeneous societies and contexts negotiate, navigate and mediate between these. In the field of religion, for instance, Michael Lambek (1990) has analysed the ways in which Muslim religious authorities on the island of Mayotte must implement Islamic scriptural teachings on a Muslim society, yet always in a manner that does not alienate people in the society from Muslim authorities. In Lambek’s study, diplomacy is above all else a technique that allows a person in authority to achieve some goals, but not others, while nevertheless maintaining the impression, to themselves and the publics who follow and scrutinize their behaviour, of their holding a single position. Another study that conceptualizes the everyday practice of diplomacy in a similar manner is Abusharaf’s (2009) work on Sudanese migrants and refugees in Khartoum and the U.S. Abusharaf describes the coping strategies of women as being everyday acts of diplomacy that constitute a form of moral agency.

Conceptualizing diplomacy as a skill or a technique has brought considerable insights to the study of everyday life and the multifaceted and heterogeneous social relationships on which it is based. As we suggest below, we think that ethnographies of everyday diplomacy must also assess the degree to which the category of diplomacy itself is invested with meaning and significance by particular groups, networks, and communities, as well as acknowledgement that the type of social formations that invest in the field of the diplomatic are not always organized on or in reference to the ‘national order of things’.

David Henig’s article on Sufi networks in the Balkans, and the roles they play in the fashioning of relationships across boundaries of region, language and religion in ethno-

religiously divided context, takes up the theme of knowledge in an especially clear manner. Ka-Kin Cheuk's article concerns the activities of Indian middleman traders in the Chinese trading city of Keqieo, a globally known centre for the purchase and export of fabrics. In the context of a volatile relationship between India and China, as well as the negative stereotypes that exist in China of Indians, the activities of the traders sometimes becomes a focus of international conflict and dispute. For the most part, however, Cheuk shows how the traders successfully maintain their business interests in China by establishing long-term relationships of trust with Chinese suppliers. Importantly, however, such relationships of trust are not amicable in any simple sense: as with diplomats, the traders fiercely maintain their positions and bargain ruthlessly, while still creating channels and opportunities for commerce to continue.

Conclusion: Histories of Mediated Exchange

If the first obstacle in developing 'anthropology of diplomacy' is the effect of colonialism, the cold war, and the war on terror on anthropology, then the second and equally crucial limitation of modern diplomatic studies has been its entanglement in the Westphalian framework of international and inter-communal relations. The logic of the Westphalian system takes the state and territorially bounded sovereignty – composed of racialized, ethnicized or nationalized political identities – for granted as a starting point for analysing relations between the polities, and geopolitics at large (cf. Ho 2002; Sheriff and Ho 2014). This tendency creates what is often described as methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), and reproduces the commonly held assumption that the only actors authorized to conduct diplomacy are the nation-state's representatives. How can we move beyond the grip of these frameworks in order to reimagine everyday modes of diplomacy, and what role can ethnography play in such a move?

In his attempt to re-imagine and re-think diplomatic studies, Iver B. Neumann defines diplomacy as ‘the mediated exchange between polities’ (2012b: 7). Neumann proposes to explore such forms of exchange by paying attention to the ‘diplomatic sites’ at which diplomacy actually does take place, and the ethnography of institutionalized practices of interacting and communicating in ‘mutually recognised times, places, and formats for meetings’ (Neumann 2012a: 5; also Neumann 2012b: 15–44). This broader and more inclusive understanding of diplomacy as a mediated exchange between polities and communities, with an emphasis on the ethnography of the precise sites of such exchanges and interactions, enables us to move beyond the Westphalian framework as a starting point of analysis and focus instead on specific agents, sites and practices of diplomacy (cf. Cornago 2013).

Anthropologists have long sought the origins of human society and culture in such dynamics and exchanges. Claude Lévi-Strauss, following Marcel Mauss’s comparative work on the entwined relationship between practices of gift giving, pretensions and morality, famously argued that the exchange of words, women and things were foundational in the evolution of human societies. In his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss writes that: ‘Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions’ (Levi-Strauss 1969: 67, cited in Sahlins 1972: 302). Anthropologists have also sought to theorize specific and concrete overlaps between trade and diplomacy, such as those explored ethnographically in Marsden’s article in this issue. Marshall Sahlins, discussing Levi-Strauss’s approach, suggests that ‘trade ... is a most delicate, potentially a most explosive, undertaking’ (Sahlins 1972: 302), noting that anthropologists have extensively documented ‘the risks of trading ventures in foreign territory, the uneasiness and suspiciousness, the facility of a translation from trading goods to trading blows’ (ibid.; cf. Grant 2011).

Historians have consistently underscored the importance of exchange to the ways in which older forms of diplomatic practice came to know and deal with difference. Stephen

Kotkin has sought to place exchange at the heart of his definition of empire, arguing in the context of the Mongol Empire that exchange was not a ‘bi-product of interaction’ or an ‘occasional phenomenon’, but ‘the *raison d’être* of their empire: empire as exchange – essentially without barriers of religion, tribe, or language, thanks in large measure to Realpolitik (the inverse scale of the conquerors to their conquests)’ (Kotkin 2007: 504). Historical anthropology on transimperial and translocal networks of trading and religious personnel has for long emphasized the importance of diplomatic knowledge and practice to the complex political roles that both commercial and religious personnel have occupied across space and time (e.g., Subrahmanyam 1992; Ho 2002 2006; Ssorin-Chaikov 2006; Can 2012; Aslanian 2014). More recently, scholars have also explored the relevance of such types of communities for understanding geopolitical processes in more recent times, including during the cold war (Khan 2015). On the basis of such work, scholars of diplomacy have increasingly called for greater recognition of the ‘hidden continuities’ between ‘professional diplomatic intercourse’ and ‘everyday life’. They have argued that in order to fulfil a recognition of such forms of diplomacy there is an urgent need to recover the ‘old meaning of diplomacy as a way of knowing and dealing with otherness’ (Cornago 2013: 1), involving encounters between entities that might result in both intercultural exchange and moments of untranslatability. The concept of ‘the diplomat’ as a professionalized and permanent type of personnel is modern, and prior to the development of the modern nation-state, envoys were recruited for a specific diplomatic mission from trading communities and networks, according to their skills in the delicate art of trade; ‘when their work was done, they returned to their original duties’ (Istanbuli 2001: page; cf. Cornago 2013). Such interactions between anthropology and global history have brought greater recognition of the degree to which diplomatic practices, skills, knowledge and models of action have been historically embedded in particular communities, networks and polities.

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¹ Political geographers and scholars in International Relations have debated the extent to which ethnography is a feasible research method in the study of foreign policy elites. Kuus (2013) suggests on the basis of conducting research in the EU that such work is often more interview-based than ethnography per se (see also Vraști 2008). Other work criticizes such studies for positing such a thing as ‘pure’ ethnography (Rancatore 2009).

² By ‘partial grouping’ we refer to groups or networks of individuals who are geographically dispersed, connected across geopolitical divides and long distances yet nevertheless embedded in particular localities and formed in relationship to ongoing circulations and exchanges over time (cf. Aslanian 2011; Ho 2014; Marsden 2016).