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Estrangement in Diplomatic Practice

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Estrangement plays an implicit role in conflict (conflict resolution, nonproliferation, sanctions), international commerce (trade and investment), and global governance (globalization, governance, and multilateralism) but has attracted scant attention in the study of international relations. However, the concept has come to fruition in the sub-field of diplomatic studies as an important theoretical tool to explore and explain diplomacy with several authors positioning it at the core of their theoretical premises. The practice turn in diplomatic studies has pushed scholars to address the historical dissonance between theory and practice, with the hope that cross-fertilization could potentially provide further insight. This leads to the research question; does estrangement affect the day-to-day practice of diplomacy?

The study finds that that diplomats do suffer from a sense of estrangement in the practice of their profession. The findings indicate that the nature of the diplomatic profession; the context of international society; and how individual nations conceptualize diplomacy are causal factors, which result in three main categories of phenomena: (a) powerlessness, (b) meaninglessness, and (c) social isolation; which are enhanced in smaller, remote, low-activity, culturally dissimilar posts. The study presents a link between theory and practice, thus justifying, strengthening, and reinforcing the use of estrangement as an ideal tool to explain and explore diplomacy.

Keywords: estrangement, alienation, separateness, diplomatic studies, diplomacy.

Estrangement in Diplomatic Practice

Estrangement is an inherent feature of international relations. In the simplest terms, estrangement is the separation of two entities. It most often relates to the separation or alienation of an individual from the affection of a group or another entity. In common usage, we speak of "family estrangement" where a member or members of a family are separated or alienated from other members of the family, "parental estrangement" where one or both parents are separated or alienated from each other or children, or "sibling estrangement" where one or more siblings are separated or alienated from the others. It is thus most commonly associated with a state of unnatural separation or alienation and thereby invokes the sense that reconciliation or mediation is required.

In the context of international relations, estrangement invokes the separation or alienation of one country from the affection of a group of countries or an international entity. The estrangement of one or more countries from the affection of another group of countries can be found in conflict (sanctions, territorial disputes, terrorism, war, conflict resolution), international commerce (trade and investment), and global governance (globalization, governance, and multilateralism). Thus, within international society or the 'family of nations', estrangement is similarly associated with a state of unnatural separation or alienation, and thereby invokes the sense that reconciliation or mediation is required - this is the domain of diplomacy.

Diplomacy is the management of relations between estranged social groups. For this reason, estrangement has proven to be an ideal theoretical tool to explore diplomacy and its role in international relations. This includes studies of the earliest beginnings of diplomacy, the evolution of diplomacy, and the transformation and potential futures of diplomacy, as well as those which explore diplomatic practice as both a sociological phenomenon and theoretical instrument to explain international relations itself. Yet, to date there have been no attempts to explore estrangement in the context of the day-to-day practice of diplomacy.

This study explores how estrangement affects the day-to-day practice of diplomacy. It therefore seeks to draw a substantive link between the theory and practice of diplomacy,

as recommended by leading scholars in the field.[1] The study first explores the rich intellectual tradition of estrangement and its use to explain diplomatic *theory*. The study then turns to the challenges of investigating estrangement in the context of diplomatic *practice*. It looks at how these challenges can be overcome through qualitative methodology using grounded theory. The study explores the personal constructs of the sources, contexts and impacts of estrangement on diplomats in the course of their duties, elaborating on how estrangement plays an important role in both diplomatic theory and practice.

A rich intellectual tradition

Estrangement has a rich intellectual tradition. It weaves through the works of philosophers across time and space. Plato, arguably the progenitor of Western philosophy was an individual estranged from his society: "disaffected, disillusioned, and convinced that it would be utterly pointless for him to participate in the public life of his city".[2] Estrangement, of course, is a human condition and is not specifically a Western phenomenon. Confucius, the progenitor of one of the main streams of Eastern philosophy, was as much the alienated philosopher as his European counterparts. Confucius resigned as the justice minister of the state of Lu, and set on a path of self-imposed exile in a series of journeys through Wei (衞), Song (宋), Chen (陳), and Cai (蔡), before returning to teach. Although not a central subject in Confucian philosophy, estrangement is unequivocally an implied subject in the structure of the hierarchical social system put forward by Confucius.[3] Yet, it's in the Western tradition of philosophy that estrangement came to the fore as a subject for explicit contemplation. Estrangement can be traced as a theme through the theological writings of Luther and Calvin; and in the equally influential musing on social contract theory of Grotius, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.[4]

However, it was not until the end of the 18th century, when Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel would directly address the concept of estrangement—most often translated from the German as 'alienation'. Hegel dedicates a chapter of his influential work *Phenomenology of Spirit* to estrangement, which has been thought of as the first work to elevate the term to

a 'position of philosophical importance'.[5] Hegel utilizes the term 'estrangement' in two senses.

First, Hegel utilizes the term in the sense of separation or discordant relations, such as can occur between an entity and something strange, foreign, different or alien. Thus, when an entity becomes 'alienated' it is separated from the whole. This usage was an intellectual tradition woven into the fabric of the Reformation, in the theological context of man's separation from God. Accordingly, it brings with it the idea that estrangement is a condition that simply exists, rather than a condition that is intentional or self-willed. This is the most common usage in international relations. A state separated from, or having discordant relations with, international society due to differences or inability to conform. In this context, separation is not intentional or self-willed but rather the result of circumstances. Thus, we can think of examples such as China, Japan, and Korea's entry into the Western European diplomatic system in the 19th century.

Second, Hegel utilizes the term 'estrangement' to refer to surrender or sacrifice.[6] This usage refers to the overcoming of separation or discordant relations through the willing sacrifice of individual sovereignty to social order. Accordingly, it alludes to the renunciation or relinquishment of particularity to universality, a debate which, at the time of writing, set the Romanticist cult of the individual against conservative defenders of existing social, political and economic mores. Thus, using the above example, China needed to overcome separation or discordant relations through the willing sacrifice of a particular sovereign order to a more universal social order. Thus, estrangement occurred as China gave up its position at the center of the East Asian diplomatic system and found itself on the periphery of the Western European diplomatic system.

Contemporary understandings of the term focus on the writings of Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and equally are influenced by any number of psychologists and social commentators who based their work upon one or all of these three during the 1960s and 1970s. As Richard Schacht wrote in 1970, "There is almost no aspect of contemporary life which has not been discussed in terms of 'estrangement'. Whether or not it is the salient feature of this age, it would certainly seem to be its watchword".[7]

A key focus of scholars has been workplace alienation and associated social-psychological processes of alienation. The study of workplace alienation derives from early Marxist studies on the separation between capital and labor. Capitalism results in a worker seeing employment as a means of survival rather than a means of self-fulfillment. At the same time, bureaucratic development results in a loss of individualism – as a result, an employee becomes alienated. Later scholars focused more on the social-psychological processes of alienation, finding it to be either a multidimensional comprised of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement, or a unidimensional construct, comprised of the sense of disconnection from one's work, society, or identity.

After a hiatus of nearly thirty years, estrangement reemerged as a topic of research across several disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and applied disciplines such as organizational management and nursing. Scholars have sought to reengage with the concept, increase conceptual clarity, and to develop and test scales for its measurement.[8] This has included a more recent focus on alienation in the context of the public policy process– an area highly relevant for diplomacy.[9]

Estrangement, international relations, and diplomatic theory

Estrangement is an inherent, but often neglected component in international relations. Indeed, mainstream theories are built on foundations that implicitly recognize the role of estrangement in state-to-state interaction. Man's nature, according to Hegel, involves both distinct individuality (competition and survival) upon which the basis of realism rests, as well as the universality and need to participate (cooperation and interdependence) upon which the basis of liberalism rests. Estrangement is an inherent feature of both realist and liberalist approaches to international relations theory.

Realist international relations theory holds the basic assumption of a zero-sum, atomistic and anarchic international system, in which units (states) compete for power and pursue rational self-interest. In such as system, conflict is ultimately inevitable and particularly likely during changes in the dynamics of power distribution. In realist international

relations theory, estrangement between states is taken as an inherent and permanent fixture of the system.

Liberal international relations theory holds the basic assumption of a positive-sum pluralist international system, in which units (states, as well as firms, NGOs, IGOs, etc) are interdependent and cooperation between them feasible. Conflict in such a system occurs when external factors prevent cooperation, with the shift from economic competition to military conflict taken as a historically proven fact. In liberal international relations theory, the mediation or overcoming of estrangement is taken as an inherent condition for the maintenance of stability.

The only mainstream approach to directly address questions of estrangement is the English School. The publication of *The Expansion of International Society* in 1984 spurred research into one particular aspect of estrangement, namely the estrangement of states from international society. International society is defined along English School lines, as "a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values", which "form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another".[10] The ensuing English School debate focused on the conceptualization of international society, its expansion, and the inclusion and/or exclusion of states and the spreading of norms. This debate transformed into a wider debate on the role of 'pariah' or 'rogue' states within the international system and the role of norms in mediating this estrangement.[11]

Accordingly, estrangement, like the state, is inherent in the realist, liberal and English School conceptualizations of the international system. However, while the conceptualization of the state as an inherent fixture in international relations theory has attracted scholarly attention, the conceptualization of estrangement as an inherent feature has escaped direct scholarly inquiry. The lack of scholarly attention is due to the acceptance of estrangement as familiar. As Hegel noted "...the commonest way in which we deceive ourselves or others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar, and accepting it on that account...".[12] Estrangement is all too familiar in international relations. However, in the sub-field of diplomatic studies, estrangement found a home.

The situating of estrangement in the study of diplomacy occurred with the 1987 publication of James Der Derian's text *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*.[13] Der Derian uses estrangement or alienation as theory to explain mediation of estranged individuals, groups and entities, specifically diplomacy and "its origins and transformations which are related to conditions of estrangement, and the attempt to mediate those conditions through systems of thought, law and power".[14] Rather than allowing estrangement to rest in the background, Der Derian tackles the concept head on in a bid to explain diplomacy.

Der Derian provides four reasons why estrangement is suitable to the study of diplomacy.[15] Firstly, estrangement, in the context of alienation theory, is suited to historical analysis. Hegel used estrangement theory to explain the estrangement of the particular to achieve the universal; Feuerbach used it to explain the estrangement of essential humanity to religion; and Marx used it to explain the estrangement of the worker from work, the product of work, other workers and nature itself. In these ways, through alienation theory, authors have used the concept of estrangement to explain the historical condition.

Secondly, Der Derian contends that the primeval estrangement of man from man necessitates mediation. How this mediation occurs and how these relations evolve over time "constitutes a theoretical and historical base for the study of diplomacy".[16] Anthropological, archaeological and sociological studies of the evolution of diplomacy, such as the work of Ragnar Numelin serve as justification of the use of estrangement in the study of diplomacy.[17]

Thirdly, Der Derian contends that as alienation theory constitutes a 'systems theory', it avoids the micro-macro dichotomy and resultant bifurcated analysis. Systems theory approaches allow greater interdisciplinary insight. The non-Cartesian non-representative and non-referential nature avoids the creation of closed binary categories, such as between subject-object, form-content or structure-agency, which plague theoretical approaches to diplomacy in mainstream international relations.

Finally, Der Derian suggests that the rich yet unexploited philosophical tradition of estrangement could represent a valuable contribution to classical approaches to diplomacy in international relations theory. Research into estrangement as a concept in law, history and philosophy often only extends to Marx, notes Der Derian. This provides an opportunity to explore classic approaches as yet neglected or forgotten, and stimulate traditionalist approaches to innovative approaches to the application of international relations theory and the treatment of diplomacy.

Despite (or perhaps because of) Der Derian's attempt, estrangement has since remained a largely neglected approach in international relations theory. The fact is Der Derian's work is not an easy read. It has been considered "tedious to read" and "obscure and imprecise".[18] It has been described as "not ordered for maximum clarity", and "often turgid".[19] Yet, with nearly every criticism of style comes a matching recognition of a creative and provocative approach to diplomacy and international relations. Der Derian's work "moves theory beyond the rich, classical analysis of the phenomenon, without breaking with the classical furrows".[20] The work "treats its subject with a scholarship and a philosophical sureness rare in contemporary international theory".[21] Perhaps the most balanced account came from a practicing US diplomat, who in the scholarly journal, *The Review of Politics*, noted:

> "The stylistic problem is unfortunate. This is a profoundly interesting approach to diplomacy, one which gives this diplomat much to think about and has changed my idea of North-South diplomacy. It is well worth reading despite its heavy manner".[22]

Der Derian's work is impossible to neglect. It brought estrangement to the forefront of diplomatic studies. On its thirtieth anniversary, a panel of leading scholars feted its contribution to scholarship in *New Perspectives*.[23] According to Google Scholar, as of February 2018, it has been cited more than 600 times.[24] Most importantly, over the last thirty years, it has become an essential point of discussion or reference in attempts to theorize diplomacy.[25]

Estrangement and diplomatic *practice*

'Practice' relates to meaningful activity pursued within a shared social context.[26] In a traditional conceptualization of diplomacy it relates to the activities undertaken by government representatives in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. This research assumes the study of diplomacy to be essentially a study of practice, based on the fact that classical texts, seminal works, and more modern studies sustain practice as a consistent, albeit sometimes implicit reference point.[27] The practice of diplomacy can be simplified to consist of four broad core tasks: representation, negotiation, reporting, and the protection of nationals abroad.[28] Each of these four core tasks involves the mediation of estrangement.

Representation involves "acting for others" and "standing in for others".[29] In acting for others, the diplomat mediates the physical estrangement of the sovereign. He or she acts on behalf of the sovereign – speaking, signing documents, or even committing the state to action. In standing in for others, the diplomat mediates the political estrangement of the sovereign. He or she symbolizes the power, prestige, and influence of the sovereign – attending and hosting functions, speaking to media, or maintaining a presence at key events while the sovereign is physically distant. In representation, the diplomat's core function is mediating physical and political estrangement of their sovereign.

Negotiation is dialogue between parties to secure an agreed outcome, resolve points of difference, gain advantage for an individual or collective, or craft outcomes to satisfy third-party interests. It also allows for strategic delay or diversion, publicity, or intelligence gathering. At its heart lies the exploration and mediation of estranged positions between the sending and receiving state. In a sense, professional diplomats act as third-party mediators, selling a negotiated outcome to both their own and the partner government. This understanding is clearer in a historical context, when diplomats were not always nationals of the country they represented, or in the modern context of the professional negotiator, hired to achieve specific outcomes for a principal.

Diplomatic reporting is the acquisition of accurate and regular updates on the affairs of a host state.[30] The strength of diplomatic reporting is the collection of material that cannot be ascertained outside of the narrow social circle accessible to the diplomatic corps. Thus, while journalists, academics, or professional investigators may access a broad swathe of

information, they remain outside the trusted professional body of diplomats. The sharing of such information between sovereign authorities is necessary for the maintenance of stable and predictable relationships. Diplomats mediate the estrangement of information between sovereigns and thus reduce the instability and uncertainty of interaction between estranged societies.

The protection of nationals abroad, also known as the consular function, is the fourth core function of diplomacy. It involves managing the administrative affairs of sending-state citizens visiting or resident in country, in cooperation with the host-state government.[31] In certain circumstances, it can also involve non-state participation in the practical pursuit of other functions of diplomacy in regional areas where the sending-state has no representation.[32] The consular function thus mediates physical estrangement. In fulfilling the administrative function, it mediates the estrangement of the state and its citizens abroad, and in fulfilling a representative function beyond the reach of the embassy, it mediates the physical and political estrangement of the sovereign.

In certain circumstances, the consular function mediates estrangement in a less obvious way. Diplomats are notoriously estranged from nationals of their own country. They are often thought of as elite, arrogant, often thought to have "more in common with each other than with those they allegedly represent". [33] The consular function with its sturdy connection between the citizen in need and the caring and considerate diplomat can mediate this estrangement. As noted by senior diplomatic studies scholar, Jan Melissen, the consular function "offers a chance for diplomats to demonstrate that they are not an alienated elite. While this is hard to show for a great deal of diplomatic work, it is self-evident in the consular line of duty".[34]

Estrangement is clearly associated with the core diplomatic functions. Yet, there is an historical dissonance between practice and theory, which has seen the concept of estrangement often remain nestled solely within theoretical studies. The practice turn in diplomatic studies has sought to overcome this separation, noting that there is a clear need for "cross-fertilization between theory and practice". [35] Yet, to date no research has explicitly explored the role of estrangement in the day-to-day practice of diplomacy.

Researching estrangement in diplomatic practice

On initial investigation, measuring estrangement or alienation in diplomatic practice lends itself to mainstream approaches of organizational management, namely quantitative methods using survey and/or interview to supplement understanding with the aim to generalize to a wider population. However, such methods are impossible in diplomatic practice for a number of reasons.

First, the "culture of secrecy" in diplomacy places constraints on direct or indirect observation.[36] Second, in the modern foreign ministry, there is a heightened awareness of security risks associated with participation in research activities. In particular, surveys or questionnaires of social or psychological nature raise security concerns. A survey measuring the degree of estrangement at post could be used to compromise an individual diplomat. Finally, the means to overcome the culture of secrecy often involves a closer relationship or even observer-participant relationship that inherently raises questions regarding the social-sciences methodological requirement of "distance and detachment".[37]

The distinctiveness of the diplomatic environment means that it is difficult to apply "off the shelf" theory to diplomatic practice. In such circumstances, it is necessary to generate a general explanation of social action that is shaped or "grounded" in participant experience – grounded theory.[38] Grounded theory derives from post-war sociological methodologies that sought to move away from speculatively derived theory and instead make it more reflective of practical situations, but remains a "method in flux… that has different meanings to different people".[39] Its strength lies in the identification of core concepts through participant experience, and allowing this to determine the direction of research inquiry; before proceeding to repeated data analysis and collection loops, where processes, core phenomenon, causal conditions, and consequences are explored. Grounded research is generally based on repeated narrative interviews of anywhere from 20 to 60 individuals.[40] It can include other data collection methods, such as observations, documents, recorded events, and imagery to validate research findings.[41]

Reflecting the above, this study began with pre-screening tests of 35 multinational official representatives of state and state-like actors who were either at post, or had undertaken at least one posting in the last five years. Respondents were selected from three cohort groups who attended a postgraduate public policy training institute. After initial interviews, selected 26 individuals were selected based on the criteria of lived experience of the phenomenon of estrangement, demographic distribution, and availability and willingness to proceed with repeated narrative interviews in-person, teleconference, or text exchange over three years after they returned to their home country (and potentially went on their next posting). These individuals varied in experience, ranging from a single overseas posting to multiple postings at which the last was as head of mission. For each participant, repeated interaction was discontinued when saturation occurred – the point of time when no additional properties or dimensions could be discovered. In total, this resulted in 84 interview hours, and a data corpus of 45 pages of field notes and observations, demonstrating rigor and evidentiary adequacy.

Coding consisted of two distinct procedures. "Initial coding" involved the broad analysis of interview transcripts and notes to develop initial categories, and the division into further sub-categories for contrast, comparison, initial analysis, and the formation of direction for subsequent fieldwork. This step is often related as two distinct processes: open and axial coding.[42] However, in this case, the two processes were treated as a singular merged process of data reduction. "Secondary" or "selective" coding involved drawing relationships between categories, and through an integrative process validating those established relationships – essentially confirming the codes, categories, and resultant theory with participants. Additionally, during this stage efforts were made to disconfirm assertions to avoid cognitive bias towards confirmation.

Given the importance of confidentiality, respondents were accorded assurance that all potential identifying material could be reviewed and/or removed. All references to respondents below refer to individuals in one of three cohorts first interviewed during Spring/Summer 2013, 2014, or 2015.[43]

Results: Estrangement in diplomatic life

Broad analysis of interview transcripts and notes brought out three categories of causal conditions associated with estrangement in diplomatic practice. These were all connected to the individual and their perception of diplomacy. They included (a) the nature of the diplomatic profession; (b) the context of international society; and (c) national conceptualizations of diplomacy.

The nature of the diplomatic profession itself was the primary causal condition. Respondents noted their position as a member of the diplomatic service separated them from the wider society. This occurred initially with different recruitment processes from other civil service appointments; continued with distinct social circles separate from other members of the civil service; and culminated in their first overseas posting. An individual's first diplomatic posting in particular was an important source of estrangement. The first diplomatic posting resulted in acts of estrangement including separation from civil service age/entry cohort; separation from family; and separation from friends. For most respondents, these acts had a greater impact because they occurred at a point of time in an individual's life when such relationships are consolidated. Several respondents even noted a strong desire to leave the profession during the first posting. As noted by one respondent:

> "…It was terrible. Before leaving I was on top of the world. After three weeks, I was lost and felt more alone than I had ever felt… I hated the work and there was nothing I could do to change my situation, and nobody I could talk to – except my colleagues who expected me to be much better".[44]

How an individual adjusted to the nature of the diplomatic profession varied widely between respondents. For certain individuals, the foreign ministry provided training, mentoring, and even ongoing counselling to overcome their alienation. For others, alienation was part of diplomatic life – something to be either overcome or would subsume an individual. The State Department recruitment website epitomizes this on a single page with a quiz to determine whether foreign service is for you – its opening lines:

"Joining the Foreign Service is a career opportunity of a lifetime, but it isn't the right lifestyle for everyone. While some people might find the career challenging, exciting and rewarding, others will see it as a less-than-perfect match".[45]

The context of international society was the second causal condition. Respondents noted that on overseas posting they were separated from home, family and friends, but at the same time separated from others in the same situation. One respondent noted that on posting they soon came to terms with the fact that the number of acquaintances greatly outnumbered the numbers friends, a situation one respondent called "temporary friends".[46]

The position of an individual's country in international society to an extent determined the level of estrangement. Several respondents noted that they preferred to spend free time with colleagues from either allied and preferably culturally similar states. The logical extension being that a state, which is estranged from international society results in the state's diplomats also being estranged – suggesting that efforts to isolate a state politically could potentially have a direct personal impact on individual diplomats. However, other respondents noted this is not necessarily the case. Particularly those from economically advanced states noted that there was always a need to maintain a "professional distance" – one respondent went further to note that there was no such thing as a "true friendship" even between close-working colleagues from allied states.[47]

That a diplomat suffers alienation as a result of the incapacity to fully confide in non-national colleagues is not a new phenomenon. As noted by Nicholson in his seminal text Diplomacy, the diplomat is "governed by several different, and sometimes conflicting, loyalties".[48] It also hides the darker side of recruitment by foreign intelligence agencies, which understandably seek to socially engineer and exploit such conflicting loyalties. Reflecting this, the position of an individual's country in international society to an extent determined the level of estrangement. In most circumstances, "estranged countries" be it for political, historical, or even geographical reasons, resulted in more estranged individual diplomats, thus hinting at a linkage between the individual diplomat and state-level sanctions.

Finally, how nations conceptualize diplomacy was the third causal condition. There was a significant difference between states in which the role of the diplomat was highly professionalized, regulated and formalized and those in which the role of the diplomat was more amateur, more influenced by social class, and less formal. Surprisingly, the former experienced a greater degree of estrangement. This is despite the fact that states with a highly professionalized diplomatic service also enjoyed access to psychologists and social workers with whom they could easily discuss causes of estrangement. This group believed that the distance between the center of power or control over their career increased their sense of estrangement. They felt they had little influence over key decisions that would significantly affect their everyday lives. Even in well-structured organizations with benchmark transparency and accountability in decision-making, including direct feedback mechanisms, there was a sense of separation from decision-making. Respondents noted, not being able to gossip in coffee queues, at water coolers or in smoke-rooms; with coffee before meetings; or even talking while walking to another ministry for a meeting; had reduced their sense of attachment.

The latter felt that the causes of estrangement were overcome by "excitement", "tourism" and even "a shopper's dream". They generally had a very low consular workload, were accustomed to a degree of separateness from fellow nationals (because of previous study/travel), and saw their current position as temporary. Diplomacy was seen as more of an opportunity or escape, rather than a profession to which they were bound. For these individuals, there was generally already a sense of detachment that distance did not impact. To illustrate, one respondent noted that becoming a diplomat resulted in little change in his life. He was born overseas to diplomatic parents, largely educated overseas (or in the home country at American/British schools), and felt just as comfortable at home while on a diplomatic posting as he did back at the ministry.[49] For him, life overseas did not engender a sense of separation. Essentially, he was already estranged from the average citizen in his society.

When the causal conditions – the nature of the diplomatic profession; international society; and conceptualization of diplomacy – engendered a sense of estrangement, they were

associated with three broad categories of subjective phenomena, namely (a) powerlessness, (b) meaninglessness, and (c) social isolation.

Powerlessness relates to domination or control by others, and can include domination or the inability to influence agenda and decision-making.[50] It is an important research topic in labor relations and organizational management. In the context of the current study, it related specifically to three areas: the sense of distance and lack of influence over the policy agenda and decision-making at the foreign ministry; an inability to change or in more extreme cases, a sense of being trapped in a specific geographic position and professional role for the service period of their posting; and, especially at the beginning of the posting, the imposition of a new structure of reporting at the post, different and sometimes distant from what they were acquainted with at the foreign ministry.

In one specific example, a respondent recalled a consular case in which she had invested substantial effort, including multiple meetings with the customer, and liaising with host-country authorities.[51] Her report had strongly recommended a specific response, which was rejected by the foreign ministry. She noted that at the foreign ministry, she could have pushed harder, even direct interaction with senior colleagues and even ministerial liaison officers. At post, she had no absolutely power to garner support for her recommendation.

At the same time, a smaller number of respondents noted that they felt empowered while at post. These individuals noted that the new responsibilities, the greater level of responsibility, and importantly the very specific role in a team – in what could be defined as a hostile environment – empowered them to undertake tasks that were beyond their previous experience. One respondent specifically noted being assigned a specific role in operational security and consular emergencies empowered them to a higher level of responsibility than previously experienced. In contrast, on return to the foreign ministry, they no longer felt empowered, and were again just another civil servant with limited responsibilities.[52]

Meaninglessness relates to the sense of not being integrated into the workplace practice.[53] It is perhaps one of the oldest and most noted expressions of estrangement. The coldness,

futility, and fatalistic life of the heartless bureaucrat featured in the works of Russian writers such as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Goncharov actually finds some form in the modern diplomatic post. Life at post can be "mind-numbingly boring", "a steady relay of paper from one pile to another pile", and "heartless rules to stop you thinking too much".[54] Respondents noted that meaninglessness consisted of two main elements: the inability to understand why actions were being undertaken; and the enhanced understanding that bureaucratic rules and regulations do not fit all situations. As noted by one respondent: "I find consular work the most difficult… situations beyond my control and nothing I can do to help. I felt hopeless!".[55]

In one specific example, a respondent emphasized that meaninglessness resulted from the state of the relationship between the home and host countries.[56] The relationship between the two countries was not limited, and securing an audience or even attention in the host-country was not difficult. However, he was assigned a contact in the host-country foreign ministry that was neither at the same rank, but additionally was not even a career diplomat. He felt this was because the specific line ministries in the host-country preferred to deal directly with the line ministries in the home country, rather than go through the foreign ministry. Essentially, he thought the relationship between the two countries was so good that his role as intermediary was redundant. Once again, this suggests a linkage between the individual diplomat and the state-level relationship.

Powerlessness and meaninglessness in diplomatic life hold a broad fit to research on policy alienation.[57] Policy alienation occurs when individual frontline public employees question the policies they are required to implement. Frontline employees have a sense of professionalism and commitment. When required to implement policies serving contemporary public policy values such as value, efficiency, transparency, and accountability, which distance themselves from the public they serve, they can experience alienation. In the same way, practicing diplomats develop a sense of professionalism, which engenders commitment to certain values. When forced to implement policies that challenge these values, diplomats similarly experience a sense of policy alienation.

Social isolation is another phenomenon resulting from the causal conditions. An individual normally holds a sense of personal identity vis-à-vis their community, which builds self-esteem, motivation, and a sense of belonging.[58] Social isolation is the separation of the individual from their community, resulting in lower self-esteem, motivation, and a decreased sense of belonging. It can also have more dire consequences, with social isolation linked to higher morbidity and mortality rates.[59] It can be thought to consist of two forms: social disconnectedness and perceived isolation, where the former concerns the "lack of social relationships and low levels of participation in social activities" and the latter concerns "loneliness and a perceived lack of social support".[60]

In the context of the current study, social disconnectedness was associated with separation from friends and family while at post; while perceived isolation was associated with separation from community, such as schools, churches, workplace, or neighborhood, and separation from routine, such as commuting, jogging, or shopping. All respondents experienced social isolation to some degree. More modern foreign ministries recognize social isolation as an occupational risk and address the condition accordingly through occupational health and safety standards. However, despite this, respondents from more modernized foreign ministries demonstrated a higher degree of social isolation. On further investigation, context played a determining role in the degree of social isolation. This suggested context could also play an important determining role in other phenomena.

During secondary coding, respondents were re-interviewed to draw relationships between the context and subjective phenomena. As is the nature of diplomacy, different countries will assess the same post differently, dependent on specific criteria and national interests. In an integrative process with respondents, diplomatic posts were divided into four categories: locale, activity, similarity, and size.

Locale concerns the nature of the post, ranging from metropolitan to remote. Generally speaking, most countries will assess diplomatic hubs, such as Washington, New York, Geneva, Beijing, Paris, and London as metropolitan posts, requiring a substantial presence, in number of diplomats, seniority of representation, or both. Similarly, most countries will assess diplomatic posts in locales with a smaller diplomatic corps as remote. Respondents

all noted that remote posts increased social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness. However, individuals at the same time agreed that high activity substantially decreased these phenomena.

Activity concerns the degree of intensity in fulfilling diplomatic tasks. Posts can be deemed high or low-activity. Importantly, activity is independent of locale. A diplomatic post may be considered high-activity by one country, because of the simple fact that it has a high consular workload even though it is located in a remote locale. Equally, a post in a metropolitan locale may be considered low-activity for another country, because of the fact that it pursues national interests in alternative locations. Respondents noted that low activity posts increase feelings of social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness, while high activity decreases these feelings.

Similarity concerns the degree to which the sending country and host country share historical, social, economic, political, and cultural traits. Respondents noted that being in a post in which they had a full understanding of the historical, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions decreased the sense of social isolation. Yet, it also had an impact on powerlessness and meaninglessness. Similarity made respondents "feel at home"; reduced misunderstanding regarding bureaucratic rules and regulations; and reduced the sense of being trapped in a specific geographic position and professional role for the service period of their posting. Respondents noted that posts with a high degree of similarity decreases feelings of social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness. However, activity tended to overwhelm the effect of similarity. Feelings of social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness are not increased in a dissimilar, but high activity post.

Size concerns the number of sending country nationals working at the post. The size of the post can range dramatically from a single accredited diplomat to a post such as the U.S. post in Baghdad, Iraq, which grew to house over 16,000 U.S. citizens, including 2000 foreign service officers.[61] Respondents noted the presence of more sending country nationals reduced social isolation; increased the importance of the post in foreign ministry decision calculations, thus strengthening the capacity to influence agenda and decision-making, thereby reducing powerlessness; and also, allowed a deeper reporting structure

thereby reducing the sense of meaninglessness. Respondents noted that size was a factor in decreasing feelings of social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness. However, once again, activity overwhelmed the effect of size. Thus, respondents agreed that in a remote, dissimilar, small post, in which one could expect heightened feelings of social isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness, a high degree of activity substantially changed these feelings.

It's important to note that the duration of all of these phenomena regardless of context was limited to the period of overseas posting. Respondents felt that these phenomena were significantly reduced on returning from post. Indeed, several respondents noted that even preparing for an appointed return allowed them to forget the feelings they'd experienced and "actually enjoy" the country to which they were posted. Several respondents also noted that there are strategies for dealing with the phenomena. The first and most prominent was returning home for vacation. Respondents noted that a trip home reduced their sense of separation immediately, but like any other civil service employee, led to an "unhappy weekend before returning to work". In more modern foreign ministries, there are rules to ensure employees are able to travel home from hardship and non-family posts on a regular basis – essentially directly addressing some of the more obvious causes of estrangement. Other respondents from more modern foreign ministries, noted that there were strategies to address these phenomena, which substantially reduced their impact, and counselling available if required.

Conclusion

As an inherent component of international relations, estrangement escaped direct attention until explored as a theoretical tool to explain diplomacy. As a consequence of James der Derian's classic, it became an essential field of discussion, which has featured consistently in attempts to theorize diplomacy. While several of these attempts have edged ever closer to linking theory and practice, to date no study has directly explored the role of estrangement in the day to day practice of diplomacy.

The model that emerges from this study is that the nature of the diplomatic profession; the context of international society; and how individual nations conceptualize diplomacy are causal factors in diplomatic estrangement. Additionally, diplomatic estrangement results in three main categories of phenomena: (a) powerlessness, (b) meaninglessness, and (c) social isolation; which are enhanced in smaller, remote, low-activity, culturally dissimilar posts. However, diplomatic estrangement is of relatively short duration and highly influenced by a return to the foreign ministry, and importantly, reduces with every posting. During the professional career of a diplomat, estrangement is overcome and ultimately assimilated into everyday life. Anecdotally, it appears that diplomats actually miss the sense of estrangement and anxiety once in retirement. Estrangement is an accepted and very real aspect of diplomatic life.

The study brings out an important linkage between theory and practice. This has been an abiding concern of the diplomatic studies community. As noted by the editors of the *Sage Handbook of Diplomacy*, "diplomatic practice and theory are two sides of the same coin" in which cross-fertilization is needed.[62] This study shows that the concept of estrangement serves as an ideal tool to theoretically explain diplomacy, as well as a very real life dimension in the everyday life of diplomatic practitioners. It therefore justifies, strengthens, and reinforces the use of estrangement. This points to the value of further research into how estrangement impacts the practice of international relations, in areas as diverse as conflict, international commerce, and global governance. From theory to practice, estrangement is an ideal tool to explain and explore diplomacy.

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