

Forum on Recognition in Foreign Policy (Analysis) and (The Study of) Diplomacy

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Abstract: What if the quest for recognition, not power, rank or security, were the overriding objective of foreign policies? What if practices of recognition both empower and subjugate by fixing identities and reproducing the terms upon which agents become recognisable in the first place? Can recognition as encounter become the diplomatic task of, and condition for, a post-colonial international order? This Forum addresses some implications of putting recognition at the centre of foreign policy (analysis) and (the study of) diplomacy. A first intervention on recognition and domination provides the dual theoretical backdrop. On the one hand, theories of recognition are understood as a specific theory of action that remedies some of the shortcomings of rational choice theories within Foreign Policy Analysis. On the other hand, recognition can be the basis of a political theory of diplomacy co-constitutive of international order, where it corresponds to an ethical strategy both reproducing yet also addressing relations of domination. A second intervention exemplifies the implication for foreign policy analysis. It analyses the foreign policy of South Africa as a pursuit of relational recognition, in which the relevant circle of recognition is not that of great power status within international society at large, but the more immediate African environment in which also self-recognition is achieved. The concluding intervention places recognition into diplomatic theory. It analyses the necessity and yet inherent pitfalls of recognition without encounter through the colonial (non-)recognition practices, exemplified through the treatment of the Abyssinian Emperor Tewodros II by the British Empire.¹

Keywords: diplomacy; recognition; Foreign Policy Analysis; domination; imperialism.

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What if the quest for recognition, not power, rank or security, were the overriding objective of foreign policies? What if practices of recognition both empower and subjugate by fixing identities and reproducing the terms upon which agents become recognisable in the first place? Can recognition as encounter become the diplomatic task of, and condition for, a post-colonial international order?

This Forum addresses some implications of putting recognition at the centre of foreign policy (analysis) and of (the study of) diplomacy. As this opening article will show, these implications can be found at several levels. On a fundamental explanatory level, focusing on recognition changes the underlying logic of our usual theories of action. Constructivist and post-structuralist foreign policy analysis already shifted the explanatory weight away from (ir)rational choice by foregrounding foreign policy identity processes. These processes inform state interests and foreign policy action which, in turn, feed into stabilising the always precarious identity processes. Theories of action that are based on recognition embed this understanding of action into a wider relational and societal frame. Second, when applying such theories of recognition, the underlying theorisation of international society and diplomacy is altered. The very idea of recognition as an alternative to the quest for power, security and rank no longer makes sense, as the very content of these latter practices depends on processes of recognition. Starting with social theories of recognition thus differs from mere legal-formal recognition and its wider application to new (sovereign) subjects as a basic mechanism of international society. A political and not just legal-formal recognition means more than the acceptance of an *other*; it implies an opening of the *self*. Therefore, turning to recognition in the study of diplomacy questions not only the terms of established recognition practices, but also the recognition practices themselves so as to assure hospitality towards the other by avoiding any attempt at a unilateral approach, even a defensive one, to identification. The introduction to this Forum will shortly approach these topics in turn and hence set the stage for the two interventions that follow.

A theory of foreign policy action as a theory of recognition

For decades now, constructivist foreign policy analysis has driven home the point that foreign policy as a rational choice based on the calculus of a r/national interest is not wrong, but begs the question: where do these interests come from (for this argument, see for instance, Ruggie 1998, Weldes 1996, 1999)? If we all knew the r/national interest, there would be no reason to endlessly debate over it. The constructivist claim is that interest formation is informed, in turn, by identity processes. What Brazil *stands for* depends on what *Brazil* stands for (for a practical take on this, see Lafer 2004).

In a further twist, post-structuralist scholars have insisted on the processes and power politics that go into the constitution of agents or subjectivity. The foreign policy identity of states is never homogeneous nor stable. Indeed, foreign policy action not only responds to self-identifications and external role conceptions; it contributes to constituting them. Foreign policy is not about an interest in terms of any given state identity but is continually constituting that heterogeneous identity in a relational process with the other(s) (for this argument, see Campbell 1992, Hansen 2006, Zehfuss 2001). Relations come before we can establish the parameters of state identity and action.

This relational turn was foregrounded in earlier studies that exposed the indeterminacy of foreign policy action when seen as the maximisation of security or power (again, nothing new, see Aron 1962: 64, Wolfers 1952). One main reason has to do with the concept of power, which is not really measurable independently of very specific relations. Power is a relational concept. Applying this insight to the individual level, Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz (1970) have shown that without a prior understanding of the value systems of all actors involved in a power relation, the attribution of power can be highly misleading. And when applied to the macro level, the mere counting of resources does not add up to 'relative' rank in international society, as the attribution of status and authority is dependent on social conventions that establish the value of these resources in the first place, as well as the rituals and performances that continuously negotiate these conventions. 'Diplomats must first agree on what counts before they can start counting' (Guzzini 1998: 231).

In International Relations, it was probably Erik Ringmar (1996) who first connected these insights within a theory of recognition to produce a narrative theory of action. As he writes:

I will stress the social character of identities: people alone cannot decide who or what they are, but any such decision is always taken together with others. We need recognition for the persons we take ourselves to be, and only as recognised can we conclusively come to establish an identity... We need to be respected, not just by anybody, but above all by those people we in turn respect; we want recognition from the people we recognise. This means that ultimately only those people have the power to bestow a certain identity upon us who themselves already are what we would like to become. Perhaps we could call these audiences 'circles of recognition' (Ringmar 1996: 13, 81).

The term 'circles of recognition' is one he borrowed from (his teacher) Alessandro Pizzorno (1986: 367, see also Pizzorno 2007, 2008). In a later elaboration of his approach, Ringmar (2002) introduces the idea of 'recognition games,' in which identity is not only ontologically and explanatory prior to interests (for both actors and in observational theories), but where recognition, and not utility as such, is the actual game in town to understand action. Recognition comes here in more than its legal-formal sense, as it

refers not only to the recognition of a kind (being recognised as a ‘state’), but of being of a special ‘identifiable’ kind.

Taking Ringmar’s discussion of Soviet Russia as an example, there are two components of this wider social, not formal-legal, recognition. One consists in certain roles constituted by the conventions of international society, like being a ‘great power’. But then, there are also self-representations that mobilise autobiographies and collective memories that give an almost ‘personal’ touch, and usually purpose, for which recognition is sought for, as in Gorbachev’s ‘inhabitant of the “Common House of Europe”’. The strive for recognition in terms of these more autobiographic identities is thus part of the ongoing game of recognition that, in turn, can impact on the terms and practices in which this recognition is given. A primary example would be the EU’s attempts to find recognition for itself as a ‘normative power’ which not only reflects a certain self-definition, but potentially provokes or imparts a change of the terms and practices of the recognition game at large.

Any analysis would thus need to think of several circles of recognition in which actors act simultaneously. Any more autobiographic narrative identity has a domestic audience, if not multiple ones. There are also multiple international ones. As Karen Smith (in this Forum) writes, recognition is not only sought in terms of status among the established powers, as if international society consisted of a single or coherent circle of recognition; it is sought in any identity-relevant circle of recognition, also allegedly ‘minor ones,’ even if this clashes with (rational) expectations elsewhere.

As this discussion indicates, when theories of action become theories of recognition, this is usually accompanied by an ontological shift: the self cannot constitute itself without a ‘generalised other’ (Mead 1934). The self is within the ‘we’ (Honneth 2010). According to Judith Butler (2021: 44), humans are ‘social creatures who are already related to those with whom [they] negotiate the terms of recognition.’ And this also explains the search for recognition in the first place. Recognition does not take place between already given identities. Rather, as identities are always in the making through/with the other’s recognition, this unpredictability produces a vulnerability that is at the same time the source of the very search of recognition (Markell 2003: 14).

In this view, the underlying motive of action is hence always connected to the relational negotiation of identity. This negotiation can but does not need to be confrontational, as in the ‘struggle for recognition.’ ‘Others’ come in more forms than just enemies, as Lebow (2012) and others have argued; they can be friends (Berenskoetter 2007), or oneself in the past, as in Ole Wæver’s (1998: 90) formulation, where ‘Europe’s other is Europe’s own past which should not be allowed to become its future’ (for a discussion, see Prozorov 2010). In Yaqing Qin’s slightly different take, identities are never separated but immanent. In his reading of the Western dialectical tradition, here in particular the Hegelian concern with recognition, two different units co-constitute each other, whereas for him, the yin and yang understanding of these dialectics sees them as immanently related. They are both: two and one (Qin 2018: 116).

And such an ontological move often involves an even more fundamental ontological claim: relationism. Framed as a critique of substantialism, it asks us to conceive of relations before units, as these units are never already given (the *locus classicus* is Emirbayer 1997, in IR, see Guillaume 2009, Jackson and Nexon 1999). And, at times, the very distinction between the constitutive processes and the phenomenon itself cannot be upheld, as the latter is an emergent property of processes. States, then, *are* what their circles of recognition make of them, to reuse Pizzorno's term mentioned above. Foreign policy is not just something an actor does to some other actor; it only emerges out of the encounter with the other, out of the relation.

When moving our attention back to the field of international relations, these multiple types of recognition games and various concomitant circles of recognition can produce one of the thorniest issues for diplomacy. What happens when an actor's more autobiographic claims for identification and recognition, necessary for recognition in one (e.g. domestic) circle of recognition, are resisted within another circle of recognition? What if the actor then refuses to see its identity being negotiated within this circle of recognition, even if this is practically unavoidable, as the 'very practice of self-description goes through others and is thus itself premised on others' recognition' (Erman 2013: 136)? The problem here is not that recognition is not granted in principle, but that the terms of recognition would be considered the sovereign property of actors seeking it. It produces the tension between actors who insist on their right to articulate that self that seeks recognition – and to do so alone – and a society unable to continue if the terms of such recognition were individualised. The effect can be either the denial that any such circle of recognition exists, a form of atomism or anomie, or that the entire circle will have to abide to the terms proposed by whoever can impose them, a form of imperialism. It is pathological, because dynamics of recognition, a most social endeavour, end up destroying that very society.²

Clearly, then, processes of recognition are intrinsically related to power dynamics, although not reducible to them (Guzzini 2013, 2022b). So does Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, connect recognition to a theory of domination. First, in Weberian fashion, domination works through its recognition by the subaltern. And the value of resources across fields (their fungibility) is the result of struggles in the field of power, the closest we may get to Bourdieu's understanding of the state (Bourdieu 1994: 56, for his self-avowedly incomplete attempt to iron out the tension between a theory of horizontally related fields and the idea of the state as a meta-field, see Bourdieu 2012). It is a symbolic struggle to impose the categories of the legitimate vision of the social world that works by being recognised. As such, the state, holds the monopoly of the legitimate use of symbolic violence. Second, these relations are often 'dominated' by symbolic capital (and violence), that is the systematic misrecognition of the actual value of different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1980: chap. 7). In other words, in his understanding of symbolic capital, Bourdieu redefines 'recognition' away from a conscious consent or cognition towards a phenomenon where acts mobilise pre-existing schemes of cognition and behavioural dispositions, which agents have internalised in and through the practices with which they became 'competent' practitioners within fields. 'Doxic subordination' is hence the

effect of this symbolic violence, a subordination which is neither the result of coercion, nor of conscious consent, let alone a social contract. Instead, domination is based, as he writes, on a mis(re)cognition (*méconnaissance*) of that symbolic violence which works by not being recognised as such. It is based on the unconscious adjustment of subjective structures (categories of perception) to objective structures. Domination is hence always also based on recognition; and any recognition mobilises a relation of domination. There is a power politics of process (Guzzini 2017).

Diplomacy, domination and an order of equal recognition

It is probably not fortuitous that an approach that puts recognition within a relational ontology centre to our very conceptualisation of action moves from a concern with foreign policy analysis to one of diplomacy. The focus shifts from state action to social practice, in its institutionalised, ritualised and everyday character. At the same time, such a shift also redefines the normative agenda. Besides asking questions about individual policies and their effects on world order, diplomatic studies opens the view on the type of foreign policy, indeed diplomacy, necessary to achieve an order of *political* recognition, a community of diversity.

Diplomatic studies has had a remarkable revival in the last decades. Taking its cue from the institutional study of diplomatic rules and their role in world order, as famously done in the English School (Bull 1977, Buzan 2004), the discipline has recently aimed at both the more abstract and the more practical. It engages on a more philosophical level with the very nature of the international encounter, as represented by James Der Derian's conceptualisation of diplomacy as 'mediating estrangement' (Der Derian 1987) and the inspiring humanistic approach by Costas Constantinou (1996, 2013). And it becomes more sociological, and indeed ethnographic, where the actual practices have been scrutinised for their habitus, the bureaucratic routines, their implicit and explicit sexism in the topography of a largely homosocial space (see e.g. Neumann 2012, Standfield 2020, 2022), their cultural diversity (Nair 2019), or the reproduction of coloniality (Opondo 2022). The practice turn has often been central for combining both concerns (Constantinou et al. 2021, Pouliot and Cornut 2015).

Put into this context, a relationalist understanding of diplomacy through recognition is clearly related to, but not limited to, the renewed and improved study of status (e.g. de Carvalho and Neumann 2015), respect (Wolf 2011, 2019), misrecognition (See the 'Special Issue on Misrecognition in World Politics: Revisiting Hegel' 2018), Goffman-inspired approaches on stigma management (Adler-Nissen 2014) and established-outsider dynamics (Zarakol 2011), or the constitution of pecking orders (Pouliot 2016). Moreover, it links up with analyses that understand diplomacy as the very practice of world ordering: 'What sets [diplomacy] apart from other institutions is that it is the place where other institutions are acted out and brought to bear – making diplomatic practices the site where these institutions are reproduced and may change over time' (Sending et al. 2015: 17). And it also includes the performative effect of 'how diplomatic ideas and

practices of mediation are themselves productive of particular politics' (Adler-Nissen 2015: 299).

But it also goes beyond this, in that it questions the tacit power relations reproduced by the institution of diplomacy and everyday practices in world ordering. The English School's analysis of the institutions of international society could not close its eyes to the fact that these institutions were not only done *by* the West, but *for* the West, even if this only started to be taken seriously at a rather late stage (Bull 1989 [1984], Gong 1984). This concern was treated more systematically later, when a new generation of scholars came in (Keene 2002), exposing the underlying colonial epistemic and normative structures (in international law, see e.g. Anghie 2005, Grovogui 1996), if not origins of the discipline (Thakur and Vale 2020, Vitalis 2015). There is hence a historically structured field of recognition in its logic and topography of the encounter: Who does which recognition of whom? As Sam Opondo writes in this Forum, this can lead to 'pitfalls of recognition,' when it does not result in a proper encounter that '... is a provocation to think, to lose the common sense, and pose a problem as though we were the problem'. And theorists of recognition have become aware of this underlying problem of an asymmetrical meeting that formally reconfirms hierarchies, even when aiming to level the playing field.

A recent exchange between Judith Butler and Axel Honneth exemplifies attempts to redefine recognition in this context of domination. Both agree on the basic point, consistent with the relational ontology mentioned above, that recognition is not something some ready/given subjectivity grants someone else, but an emergent property of their relation. Actors/subjectivities change in the encounter. From there, they take different, if complementary, routes. For Honneth, recognition is not just 'cognising' (*erkennen*) or accepting another, but 'recognising' (*anerkennen*), an act that grants

the other a status or authority that instantaneously forces the subject of such an ascription to change its normative attitude by renouncing the boundlessness of its own actions, or, in short, to value the other in terms of the property or characteristic attributed to her (Honneth 2021: 25).

'A decentering takes place in the recognizing subject because she concedes to another subject a "worth" that is the source of legitimate claims infringing upon her own self-love' (Honneth 2001: 122). Accordingly, practices of mere identification and cognition (without recognition) are demeaning and impose an asymmetry more classically understood through the concept of domination. They show that one has literally 'no real regard for the other'. They render the other socially 'invisible.'

For Butler, therefore, the question starts earlier, as the circles of recognition are not given, nor are social vocabularies of recognition universal. The normative expectations as to whom we can have regard are themselves the effect of a historical struggle and evolution. When recognition is publicly denied, there is an implicit understanding of the norms of recognition that have not been followed. But there can be an invisibility that goes further, since it is inscribed in the very norms and categorisations. This opens the question for the practices and norms that allow recognisability. Butler would insist

that something has gone into the subject formation beforehand: subjects 'are born into discourses – including social categories – that establish their intelligibility as human subjects' (Butler 2021: 43), eligible for recognition. And one could add that the relevant circles of recognition that people feel or are made to feel committed to, are not something entirely of their choice, either.

As Jens Bartelson (2013) has argued within IR, given the close connection between practices of recognition and sovereignty, as well as their historical origins in the European state system, recognition which is meant to include, actually exclude potential members by relying on pre-existing categories that do not allow to constitute them as such, indeed to be 'seen' as such.

Such exclusions need not to be the outcome of any intentional withholding, but might as well result from prior failures to identify an actor as an object of possible recognition due to its lack of fit with the categories of available and predominant classificatory schemes (Bartelson 2013: 121).

Inevitably, then, acts of recognition, if unaware of the conditions for their very possibility, that is to say of the historically situated values and categorisational practices they activate, end up constituting encounters of domination. These include relations of exclusion, when the terms of recognition make subjectivities invisible, indeed 'irrecognisable.' But, just as in Bourdieu's analysis of misrecognition, they also pertain to the tacit subordination when subjects accept the terms and subjectivities in which they have been called upon and whose 'framework of knowledge within which the subject has become recognizable is also due to be reproduced through the recognition of that recognizable subject' (Birnbaum 2023: 338).

For Honneth, in line with his early studies (Honneth 1983), this corresponds to a Foucauldian take on subject formation in which theories of recognition are subsumed under theories of domination. Since any recognition boxes subjects into the categories applied to them, accepting recognition is nothing other than accepting subordination. For Butler, that would only follow if the terms of recognition were not only given, but also immutable, if there were no agency in resisting the terms of recognition and re-signifying them. Yet, the way that the sphere of recognition, or the Bourdieusian field, is constituted does not assure subjection in terms of domination. Indeed, Butler pleads for not falling into a realist trap and openly repudiates both Hobbes and Nietzsche. According to Butler, Hobbes is wrong by starting from an atomistic vision of the self in which the destruction of the other is not related to something in the self. And Nietzscheans are wrong when they think that all recognition is a form of enslavement. In an attempt to rescue Foucauldian thought from the realist tradition, Butler writes that this latter fails 'to understand the importance of reciprocal recognition as the basis for our social interdependency and the ethicopolitical mandate to live together without mutual destruction' (Butler 2021: 48-49, for a more comprehensive treatment, see also Butler 2020). In other words, the issue is to think the relationship between recognition and domination in a

non-trivial manner in which there is no recognition without a potential component of domination, yet where domination cannot subsume all there is to recognition. For this to work, recognition as encounter needs to end ‘the tendency to ignore the subjectivity of others,’ which exists even among the well-intended (Grovogui 2006: 52).

Diplomacy as political and equal recognition in these terms has hence reached normative ground. Instead of being a description of the world order, it is an invitation to realise a different world ordering. It is based on the implicit assumption that such ordering, although unable to abolish violence and domination, is the morally best way to mitigate it in a politically legitimate manner. Yet, as Andreas Behnke (2014) correctly notes, a political programme such as this is based on a circular logic: it assumes that which it wishes to produce. As he puts it:

[T]he ‘universal’ judgment that is supposed to emerge from the recognition of the other’s ethics of violence is in fact only conceivable if a prior shared moral code is in effect... The other, in other words, is not a radical other... (Behnke 2014: 201)

But rather than seeing in this a condition for its impossibility, it is simply the flipside of performativity, which is about discursive practices producing the phenomena that they presuppose.

And it is an ethical choice, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2022) insists. One can read Diagne’s study on translation as a foil to think recognition in contexts of domination. Translation is not free of asymmetries and domination, its accuracy is logically never possible, as it moves between life-worlds, and yet its practice is ubiquitous. Diagne bases his argument on Quine’s scepticism that opposes the attempt to resolve the question of translation on a logical level. We simply cannot prove that there is some form of universal language which allows the passage from one language to another. But neither can we prove radical otherness. Both positions are based on an apriorism. The meta-narrative of identity faces the logically equivalent meta-narrative of irreducible difference. Going for either of these two positions is hence a decision, as it cannot be logically established: ‘if one finds it this way, it is because one started from the principle that it should be like that’ (Diagne 2022: 34, my translation).

Diagne asks us to move from logics to practice and ethics. Having no logical solution, we are put before the ethical decision of assuming either the ‘ethnology of contrast’ of the radical other or the principle of empathy (Quine)/charity, that ‘expresses the idea of recognition and equality in a shared humanity, that gives rise to/is the underlying principle of translation’ (*qui est au principe de la traduction*) (Diagne 2022: 39). He gives two reasons for an ethical choice in favour of empathy/charity. The first is that it avoids perverting all translation by wanting it to be ‘strange’ at all costs. The second and crucial one is that it insists on the connection between translation and all forms of understanding. Children learn languages by looking for and probing the expected consent (*assentiment*) of their close circle. The child ‘learns to translate the behaviour into statements (*énoncés*), as, in so doing, it enters into a community by empathy’ (Diagne 2022: 40).

Translation is about *identification* with the other; it is making one's own language hospitable for what has been thought in the world of the other.

Diplomacy as world ordering is not only mediating estrangement when recognition is taken seriously. It is a commitment to a hospitality of translation even when, or indeed exactly when, the conditions for its possibility may not apply. It is a classical paradox of diplomacy that it presupposes a common language to work that is exactly then missing when it would be most needed.³ The logical paradox is practically negotiated, although never really solved, by pretending its existence and so keeping the possibility open for performatively achieving it.

When putting theories of recognition at the centre of the analysis, world order is hence not the expansion of this or the other alternative model and resistance to it; it is the emergent property of an ongoing and asymmetrical process of recognition. With theories of recognition seen as an analytical framework, this shows the still existing inequality, indeed lacking recognition, in the diplomatic encounter and the struggle for recognition as a continuous motive in foreign policies. Seen as an ethical choice, these theories may point to a version of an ethics of responsibility. With no illusion about the role of domination in processes of recognition, they invite participation in the creation of encounters that express recognition and equality in a shared (not unified!) humanity, as Diagne put it, by keeping the process open – and thus resisting what Albert Hirschman (1970: 335), quoting Flaubert, referred to as '*la rage de vouloir conclure*', the rage of wanting to bring things to a close.

The Pursuit of Relational Recognition in South Africa's Foreign Policy

Karen Smith

It has become common practice for analysts and commentators to describe South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy as ambiguous or inconsistent, due to the tendency to act in ways that seem to undermine its national interests and values. Attempts to explain this apparent inconsistency have ranged from an emphasis on the absence of a clear foreign policy strategy to interpretations focused on the state's (multiple) identities.⁴ An important element of the foreign policy of not only South Africa, but also of other so-called states from the global South, is their quest for recognition. As Nel (2010: 963) writes, 'International politics, as are all forms of politics, is not only about who gets what, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, about how people are treated'. This reflects an understanding of states' foreign policies as 'not only aimed at securing their material interests, but also fundamentally being about establishing their identities as particular

types of actors in international society – which requires recognition’ (Murray 2018: 6), and underlines the point that we have to think beyond the realist understanding of status and recognition being linked essentially to material power.

Recognition is often equated with or not sufficiently differentiated from status in IR. Wolf (2011: 108), for example, understands respect as recognition of an actor’s status. Similarly, Murray (2018) focuses on rising powers’ desire for recognition of their status as great powers by established powers as part of her work on power transitions. Similar arguments have also been made by postcolonial scholars who contend, for instance, that the act of mimicry by postcolonial states is an attempt to be recognised as equals by former colonial powers.⁵ Focusing on South Africa, Nel (2010) joins scholars whose work on recognition emphasises the struggle of states in the global South to be recognised as full and equal members by ‘the international community’ or ‘the society of states.’ These terms are in essence used as a shorthand for ‘the Western liberal international society,’ and in particular Western great powers such as the USA and the EU. The assumption is thus that states in the global South are driven primarily by the motive to gain recognition or acknowledgment from states of the global North that they are truly equals, not only in a legal sense. While being recognised in this way by the traditional great powers is undoubtedly of great importance to postcolonial states, including South Africa, this is but one form of recognition, and I contend that there are others, including recognition by lesser powers or peers, that can be equally or even more significant. Recognition when understood as entailing elements of acceptance or approval is much more subjective and dependent on who is doing the recognising and who is being recognised. In other words, relationality becomes essential to understanding recognition or, put differently, recognition is at its core relational.

There has recently been an upsurge in interest in relational understandings of IR, both in what Qin and Nordin (2019) call Anglophone thinking (by which they refer mainly to the practice turn in IR) as well as part of the globalising IR turn, as part of which scholars have highlighted relationality as being at the core of Chinese approaches to IR as well as indigenous philosophies in different parts of the world.⁶ The aim here is not to provide an overview of what relational approaches to IR entail – others⁷ have already done this; nor is it to argue for a particular type of relational theorising. It is, instead, an exploratory attempt to understand the foreign policy of a state – in this case South Africa – by drawing on elements of relational thinking.⁸ South Africa’s foreign policy is self-consciously relational, as reflected in the 2011 foreign policy white paper titled ‘Building a Better World: The Diplomacy Ubuntu.’ The white paper starts with the following statement: ‘South Africa is a multifaceted, multicultural and multiracial country that embraces the concept of Ubuntu as a way of defining who we are and how we relate to others.’ It continues, ‘This recognition of our interconnectedness and interdependency, and the infusion of Ubuntu into South African identity, shapes our foreign policy’ (DIRCO 2011: 4). While interpretations of *ubuntu* vary, it essentially means that people are people through other people, in other words it emphasises collective or common humanity. Applied to foreign policy, it implies an approach to international relations that places an emphasis on cooperation, mutual understanding and a greater sense of

responsibility towards a collective well-being. In the context of South Africa's relations with the rest of the African continent, it underscores the notion that South Africa and its citizens can only prosper if Africa does too.

For this paper, I draw on Qin's idea of 'relational identity' whereby identities and roles are shaped by social relations, allowing states to have multiple identities resulting from 'overlapping relational circles of various types and with different natures' (Qin 2018: 132). Scholars such as Murray (2018) and Wendt (2003) distinguish between 'thin' (essentially legal) recognition and 'thick' recognition, with the latter referring to recognition 'as a member of a group that is *valuable in its particular qualities*' (Murray 2018: 12-13, emphasis in original). This could, for example, include being recognised as a state that promotes human rights. The recognition I have in mind, however, is less about a state's distinctive qualities and uniqueness and rather its similarity to and alignment with the values of a particular group.

The emphasis is thus on enacting or emphasising a particular identity through foreign policy action, not for the purpose (at least not primarily) of achieving material power or benefits, but with the aim of being recognised by a significant other or others as holding a particular identity, specifically one that signifies acceptance or approval by a particular group. *Who* constitutes significant others is dependent on the issue and context. If one interprets the constructivist argument that being a Self – in other words, having an identity, depends on obtaining recognition from a significant Other or Others (see Wendt 1999) more broadly, this significant Other does not have to be either Western or powerful. For what constitutes a significant Other to one state is not the same as for another. This can mean that recognition by what might be regarded as insignificant states by some (for example, Cuba or Zimbabwe) can be equally (or in some cases even more) important for South Africa than recognition by the great powers. This can go some way to explaining foreign policy decisions and actions that defy rational explanation, leading to criticisms of ambiguity or inconsistency.

To understand the significance of recognition for South Africa, we therefore need to consider how recognition by different sets of actors matter in different contexts. In essence, I am suggesting that we understand recognition from a relational perspective – recognition *in relation to* and *by* African peers, liberal democracies, anti-imperialist states, etc. This is in line with Qin and Nordin's notion of the 'relational circle' (2019: 607) which consists of concentric relationship circles extending outward from the self, with proximity to the self indicating greater intimacy. Relatedly, they hold that the more intimate a relational circle is, the more influential it is (2019: 608). Similarly, in previous work (Smith 2012), I have employed the metaphor of the African family and community structure to show how South Africa's relational circles start with neighbouring African states that can be regarded as part of the clan (i.e. kinship group or the extended family, with members showing support towards and solidarity with one another); then proceeds to other African states who might be regarded as part of the tribe (where the relationship is not as close as with clan members, but still based on feelings of solidarity and shared values); and the rest of the developing world as neighbouring, and mostly friendly tribes. The global North, or West, is situated in the outermost, and thus least intimate circle.

This is reflected in South Africa's foreign policy white paper, which states that South Africa 'accords central importance to our immediate African neighbourhood and continent; working with countries of the South to address shared challenges of underdevelopment; promoting global equity and social justice; working with countries of the North to develop a true and effective partnership for a better world' (DIRCO 2011: 4).

Applying this to the South African state's multiple quests for recognition from different actors, one could contend that the recognition of greatest value is that from the most intimate relational circles – the recognition of being 'one of us' by other, particularly southern, African states. As a defining feature of South Africa's foreign policy, its regional approach remains unchallenged. However, ironically, the country's position in the region remains a contested one (Smith 2018). While regional acceptance is important for all states, given that a state's foreign policy is shaped in important ways by the regional dimension, it is especially pertinent for South Africa. The country has built its post-apartheid foreign policy largely on the back of its claim to represent not just its own citizens, but the sub-Saharan African region and the African continent. This representational claim can be seen as a two-sided strategy. On the one hand, it is what gives South Africa access to international groupings and leadership positions that are far beyond its reach were it to be judged purely on its own merit. On the other hand, through its memberships of groupings like BRICS and the G20, South Africa has lobbied for support from its African counterparts, on the basis that it represents them in these fora.

The other type of recognition the state has vigorously pursued is recognition by the rest of the global South (but particularly powerful actors like China and old anti-imperialist friends like Cuba and Iran). There is a long history underlying this commitment to the global South that policymakers still draw on. During its fight for liberation, the now ruling party developed strong ideological ties with other developing states that supported it in its struggle against the apartheid government. The third type of recognition is that by 'the West' (with recognition in this regard taking a number of forms, including recognition of its leadership role on the African continent, in terms of maintaining continental peace and stability and acting as a role model for peaceful transitions, its identity as a liberal democracy that respects human rights). While South Africa's international recognition in the post-apartheid era was initially built on acceptance by the Western powers, in recent years, being recognised by China has become more important.

South Africa's efforts to maintain these different forms of recognition has resulted in sometimes surprising and inexplicable foreign policy actions and decisions which, in turn, has resulted in criticisms of an inconsistent and ambiguous foreign policy. For example, its quest for recognition as an African state that prioritises the interests of the continent in its foreign policy have frequently clashed with its desire to be recognised as a liberal democracy with a value-driven foreign policy informed by its constitution.

This has manifested in a number of specific foreign policy actions, including South Africa's quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe, its refusal to arrest Sudanese President al-Bashir under the ICC warrant, and numerous votes in the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council (HRC) that were heavily criticised by Western powers. One specific issue relates to South Africa's stance on the promotion of sexual orientation and

gender identity (SOGI) rights in the UN.⁹ Once regarded as a role model for human rights on the African continent, it was the first country to enshrine LGBTQI rights in its constitution. Internationally, South Africa took the lead in calling for global acceptance of LGBTQI rights and in 2011 its leadership was considered critical to pass a HRC resolution to recognise these rights as human rights. In July 2016, however, in a vote that surprised many, the South African delegation abstained on a key vote in the HRC to appoint an independent watchdog on sexual orientation. This was in line with the position of other African states, not one of whom voted in favour of the resolution. In cases like this, South Africa often justifies its positions on the basis that it must show solidarity with the rest of Africa. In other words, its recognition as ‘one of us’ by African states becomes the overriding consideration, and trumps recognition by the ‘Western’ international community, including the hegemon, as a state that supports progressive liberal human rights and upholds the agreed-to rules of the multilateral system. While some commentators might regard such action as irrational, the notion of ‘relational rationality’ suggests that whether an actor’s action is rational depends on how they are related to the specific other toward whom the action is directed. The logic of relationality therefore holds that ‘an actor’s individualistic rationality is necessarily mediated by his or her relationships with others’ (Qin and Nordin 2019: 609).

One area that requires further exploration, and where the case of South Africa might be able to provide us with insights that could be more widely applicable to thinking about relationality is the question of how relationships come about or why some are stronger/more intimate than others. Qin (2018), for example, views relations as natural occurrences, including the positional power inherent in these relationships. An alternative understanding is that relationships are shaped by factors such as shared experiences and histories (e.g. of colonialism), by geo-cultural proximity and similarities (which could include linguistic and other cultural features). In the South African case, the history of the relationship between the current South African state and its counterparts is also important. For example, historical instances of loyalty and solidarity seem to bear more weight than other more obvious factors (based on existing foreign policy frameworks) such as material interest.

The South African government’s support of Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine is a case in point, where the Soviet Union’s support for the struggle against apartheid versus the West’s betrayal is frequently cited as one of the main reasons for South Africa’s position. In this vein, Naude (2019) suggests that the South African state’s behaviour can be understood by drawing on personality theory and psychoanalysis and foregrounding the role of past experiences of the state’s relations with Others. Insights from the literature on friendship in IR are also relevant here. Berenskoetter (2007), for example, holds that while geographical proximity, shared culture of political system, trade, shared membership of institutions, and so forth are important criteria for friendship (which is a form of intimate relationship) they are not sufficient. Instead, he holds that

friendship designates an intimate relationship between states voluntarily bonded by a shared moral space (sense of virtue) grown

out of significant experiences and translated into a genuine commitment to a common project which lends significance to the future. In short, friendship, as an evolving relationship, is a process of building a “common world” to which states become emotionally attached (Berenskoetter 2007: 670).

This suggests that relationships are not only the result of natural factors such as geography but that there is also a degree of agency involved. While the identities that shape relations can become entrenched and even naturalised over time, they are also often deliberately enacted by state actors. For example, while South Africa’s geographical position naturally implies that it is an African state, the identity of African-ness (and what the different assumptions and expectations underlying this designator), especially with regards to foreign policy behaviour, is one that is learned and performed.

For example, despite its geographical positioning, the South African state under apartheid was very much *not* an African state – both in the way the state enacted its own identity and also in how it was perceived by other African states. Being part of the intimate relational group of ‘African states’ is therefore not automatic (as, for example, Morocco has also experienced) and the relationships must be both actively pursued by the state in question, and be supported and cultivated by others in the group – particularly powerful¹⁰ members. Not all African states have equal influence in this regard, and sub-regional and (sub-)regional power dynamics are significant determinants. While following the end of apartheid, South Africa was regarded as the undisputed hegemon on the African continent, both the global and regional contexts have since changed, and South Africa’s leadership role is increasingly questioned and challenged by states like Nigeria, Kenya and others.¹¹ Relatedly, while what it means to be an African state in terms of the values a state is expected to promote and the positions it is expected to take are contested, there is a strong element of peer pressure, with certain forms of behaviour, including the promotion of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) rights condemned as ‘un-African’ (see Berry 2021).

In conclusion, this short paper has attempted to apply the idea of relational recognition to understanding South Africa’s foreign policy making, and also to draw out further questions and insights raised by this case. Gaining recognition from different actors in the international system requires behaving in ways that are influenced by the existing relationship to a given actor / set of actors, and what leads to recognition by one is not the same as for another. For example, while actively promoting SOGI rights at the UN will translate into recognition by Western liberal states, engaging in anti-imperial criticism of the international system and powerful Western states will do the same for gaining recognition from South Africa’s BRICS partners and many of its African counterparts. By emphasising the importance of different forms of recognition in South Africa’s foreign policy, we can therefore understand, as Shih and Huang (2014: 3) argue that, starting from the position of relationality, double standards or inconsistency in foreign policy is in fact a ‘systemic necessity’ rather than a form of idiosyncrasy. While applying a Chinese relational approach to South African foreign policy is one manifestation of globalising

foreign policy studies and IR more broadly, the South African case can also be utilised to rethink existing formulations not only about foreign policy and recognition, but also to advance thinking about relationality in different contexts.

Diplomatics, Imperialism, and the Pitfalls of Recognition

Sam Okoth Opondo

[...] As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend.

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967 [1952]: 216-217)

A Poetics of Empire

In a 2017 visit to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar, Boris Johnson – the then British foreign secretary – recited the opening lines of Rudyard Kipling’s poem *Mandalay*. “‘The temple bells they say, come you back you English soldier’—remember that?’ Johnson mutters under his breath upon ringing the 42-ton Tharrawaddy Min Bell as the British ambassador to Myanmar informs him of the inappropriateness of the poem (Booth 2017). Johnson’s nostalgic invocation of the colonial working-class soldier at a time that he was leading the BREXIT campaigns was read as a populist strategy aimed at securing some form of imperial continuity in everyday existence (Smith 2021). By turning to ‘Great Britain’s laureate of empire’, Johnson tapped into a literary tradition known for dramatizing the geopolitical ‘great game’ (in *Kim*) and maintaining the racialised and gendered idea of empire for future generations in Britain and abroad. For instance, the British soldier in *Mandalay* desires to be shipped ‘somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst/Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a man can raise a thirst.’ To this moral imaginary, Kipling added an imperial ecology as the British soldier remembers watching ‘the steamers an’ the hathis pilin’ teak/ Elephints a-pilin’ teak / In the sludgy, squidgy creek.’¹²

In a kind of tragic *anagnorisis*, Johnson reveals his commitment to the imperial ideal/idea of an Anglosphere, the creation of Empire 2.0, and its related orientalist fantasies.¹³

Whereas diplomatic theorists like Costas M. Constantinou (2000: 288, 289) have illustrated how poetry ‘envisions and revisions forms of political life’ and can be used ‘to point—to point back to some other times’ so as to highlight other traditions and counter-traditions of security, diplomacy, or even being, Johnson recalls a poem that restates and reestablishes the colonial regime of recognition. That is, instead of taking the invitation to ring the bell as a diplomatic gesture that could lead to reckoning with an imperial past or enacting the multiple ethico-political and cultural encounters that a diplomatic visit to the Shwedagon Pagoda could provoke, Johnson recalls a poem about colonial Burma (from 1824–1948) where ‘natives’ work alongside elephants’ in an interspecies ‘empire of teak.’ As we learn from George Orwell’s autodiegetic narrative in *Shooting an Elephant*, elephants in colonial Burma were a form of ‘undead capital’ that mediated colonial, moral, and racial orders of valuation and recognition (for more on elephants as undead capital, see Saha 2017). As Orwell’s narrator puts it, ‘it is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant – it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery.’ The story concludes with a commentary on the racialised character of this quest for recognition, as the narrator reflects on how Europeans do not only perform for each other, but also for the ‘natives’ given that ‘every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.’ As Frantz Fanon illustrates in the epigraph above, this quest for colonial recognition could lead to all kinds of necropolitical actions as one either seeks to affirm their human worth, or, in the case of the coloniser, ‘to avoid looking a fool.’¹⁴

This interspecies ‘empire of teak’ was essential for the shipbuilding industry in places like Glasgow that maintained Britain’s naval power, the construction of railway cars (that ‘opened up’ the hinterland abroad and built the nation at home), and the luxury homes, embassies, and other commodities related to the ‘empire within’ (see Tachco 2018: 120). Amitav Ghosh’s *Glass Palace* novel highlights the centrality of elephants to both the colonial teak economy and the empire within by demonstrating how the quick and painful death of anthrax-infected elephants in Burma was ‘felt on the London Stock Exchange’ and the loss was so significant such that ‘few were the insurers who could gamble against a disease such as this’ (Ghosh 2001: 98). To make sense of the ‘empire within’, we could, following Alexander Barder, shift our analyses from the focus on the ‘trans-actional diffusion of norms, practices, and knowledge’ from the west to the non-west to how ‘international hierarchy has historically resulted in experimentation and innovation of various norms or practices that re-shape the domestic space of various imperial and hegemonic powers’ (Barder 2015: 2). This idea of empire as pedagogy is evident in the British diplomat and classical geopolitics theorist Halford Mackinder’s 1910 lecture on ‘Burma—the Buddhist Religion.’ While Mackinder (1910: 19) acknowledged the sacred status of the Shwedagon Pagoda in the cultural life of the Burmese, he was more concerned about how knowledge of the British Empire’s ‘geography, history, resources, climates, and races’ could be widely diffused and the ‘sympathy and understanding’ arising therefrom ‘imparted to the coming generation.’ Noting the immensity of such an undertaking, Mackinder recommends the use of ‘Schools of the Empire’ which incorporated the British Museum and even poetry into the theories of land and sea power informing his reading of the conquest of places like Mandalay. Like Kipling, Mackinder recognises

the transnational and interspecies relations involved in Britain's imperial enterprise as evidenced by 'elephants manipulating the great logs of teak wood in the timber yards.'

The above imperial imagination permeated society and became trans-generational through pedagogies, aesthetic objects, missionary outreach, popular culture, methods of state cultural governance, and everyday practices complementing the 'more overt violent modes of containment' (Shapiro 2004: x). Edward Said sums up nicely the workings of this imperial apparatus under the title the 'pleasures of imperialism' (Said 1994: 150). Attention to the spectre of these 'pleasures of empire' and their often disavowed horrors helps contextualise Johnson's attachment to Kipling's words/worlds where, in addition to the soldier in *Mandalay*, we find 'Mowgli, the perfect colonised subject, and Kim, the perfect coloniser', sitting side-by-side with various animal and liminal subjects in a colonial context which is to be perfected as part of 'the *White Man's Burden*' (Nyikos 2019: 145).

Here, we could learn from Said's careful treatment of Kipling (and Joseph Conrad), who, in spite of differences in tone and style, both played a key mediatory role as they 'brought to a basically insular and provincial British audience the color, glamor, and romance of the British overseas enterprise' (Said 1994: 132). Through texts like *Toomai of the Elephants* (from *Jungle Book*), Kipling produces an imaginative geography of empire that 'folds distance into difference through a series of spatialisations' that ossify conceptions of the self/others and thereafter empire and diplomacy (Gregory 2004: 190). His literary imaginations also transpose orientalism to the African context where it intersects with the 'colonial library' and 'negative interpretations' of Africanness that constitute the colonial order of recognition (Mudimbe 1988: 8, Said 2003 [1978]: 2, Mbembe 2001: chapter 1). Obviously, Kipling's engagement with more-than-human beings offers an excellent opportunity for theorising diplomacy beyond the human while also presenting an imperial bestiary that enables us to question the forms of recognition and statuses that emerge from colonial relations and ways of knowing.¹⁵ In the following sections, I inter-articulate literary texts and imperial contexts not in an attempt to map what Timothy Hampton (2009) calls the *Fictions of Embassy* or to contribute to the growing field of diplo-literary studies (also see Craigwood 2019, Hampton 2019, Hepburn 2020), but to think critically about the coeval emergence of diplomatic and colonial forms of recognition and encounter. The literary and historical analyses of international/inter-textual/interspecies diplomacies and their imperial contexts that I perform here are supplemented with a critical *diplomatics*, where colonial archives reveal the often occulted or silenced overlapping histories and geographies of imperial and diplomatic modes of recognition.¹⁶

Quasi-states, encounter, and recognition

Attentiveness to how diplomatic recognition and encounters intersect with imperialism should provoke us to probe 'the mediation of estrangement' and pose the problem of diplomacy anew (Constantinou 1996: 110). In the case of Johnson's 'diplomatic gaffe', his ready-to-hand poem activates colonial regimes of recognition making it impossible for him to consider contrition, apology, or even the observance of diplomatic etiquette as he

visits a site of colonial harm. As Gilles Deleuze (2004: 139) notes, there is a difference between objects of encounter and objects of recognition. Among other things, recognition involves practices in which our knowledge, habits, beliefs, and values are reconfirmed and possible relations between bodies and peoples subjected to forces that ‘cannot think difference in itself’. In contrast, the object of encounter does not reconfirm our habits, our understandings, senses, or our values. It presents the possibility of a different relation ‘with the imperceptible’ and is a provocation to think, to lose the common sense, and pose a problem as though we were the problem.

Obviously, Myanmar is not the only site where Johnson’s nostalgia for empire overcodes his imagination of other forms of diplomatic encounter and relation. As readers of Johnson’s infamous 2002 article in the *Spectator* will remember, Johnson already invoked the benefits of British imperialism for Africa while disavowing its horrors thus enabling him to confidently state one (Tony Blair) should not:

[...] blame Britain, or colonialism, or the white man. The continent may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more (Johnson 2002: 14).

Accordingly, Johnson urges Europeans not to feel guilty for Africa’s present condition as the ‘best fate for Africa’ would be if ‘the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction’ (Johnson 2002: 15). What Johnson expresses crudely in his article has been the mainstay of moralistic theories of recognition that decry the postcolonial normative order where ‘quasi-states’ exist alongside states with ‘positive sovereignty.’ According to Robert H. Jackson, a quasi-state is one to which ‘the international community currently accords sovereignty, but which has a comparative lack of power and agency...a state whose writ often does not extend throughout the country; and where it does, it is observed irregularly’ (Jackson 1990: 1). This is due to the fact that former colonies acquired ‘statehood’ that made them internationally recognised as full juridical equals to other members of the state’s system and yet, they are said to lack all but the most rudimentary empirical sovereignty capabilities (Jackson 1990).

Beyond claiming that quasi-states are sustained by an international normative framework grounded on negative sovereignty, the thesis also invokes a standard of development and civilisation that is assiduously used to integrate and rank subjects and entities within the dominant regime of power and recognition (Jackson 1990: 4, 141). Naeem Inayatullah has criticised Jackson’s call for ‘differential statuses – deciding which community should get which status’ – within a status hierarchy (from outright independence, to associate statehood, to international trusteeship). According to Inayatullah, Jackson does not acknowledge the entanglements between sovereignty and capitalism and his concern for the rights of citizens of the third world leads him to promote ‘formal inequality’ among states while failing to recognise the ‘meaning of independence for those who value it above all else’ (Inayatullah 1996: 72). Like Inayatullah, Siba Grovogui has demonstrated how the degree to which African states are ‘quasi-states’ is actually a reflection of the ‘quasi sovereignty’ they received at independence due to a Eurocentric

regime of recognition and international law that failed to fundamentally ‘transform the structures of domination’ (Grovogui 1996: 2).

Geopolitical, archival, and literary entanglements

When read alongside the quasi-state thesis, we see how Johnson’s Kipling-mediated chronophagy (eating time) reanimates imperial imaginaries from the past that he uses to overcode the diplomatic encounter with postcolonial Myanmar in the present (for more on chronophagy, see Mbembe 2002: 23). A similar activation of the colonial archive exists in Kipling’s children’s story *Toomai of the Elephants* where imperial history and biographical time converge to educate the young about the colonial order of human and more-than-human beings. The story opens with a domesticated elephant’s poetic lamentation about his estrangement from the wild elephants he should be hunting due to his imperial or human-determined vocation. Told from Kala Nag’s (which means Black Snake) point of view, the elephant’s poem reads thus:

I will remember what I was, I am sick of rope and chain – I will remember my old strength and all my forest affairs [...] / I will forget my ankle-ring and snap my picket-stake. I will revisit my lost loves, and playmates masterless! (Kipling 1913: 242)

The elephant’s poetic quest for freedom is followed by a short story celebrating Kala Nag’s heroic service to ‘the Indian Government in every way that an elephant could serve it for forty-seven years.’ By following the elephant’s heroic story, Kipling’s geopolitical and orientalist imaginaries come together to form a broader and even deeper imperial imaginary. For instance, we learn how Kala Nag was ‘hoisted into a ship at the end of a steam crane and taken for days across the water, and made to carry a mortar on his back in a strange and rocky country very far from India, and had seen the Emperor Theodore lying dead in Magdala, and had come back again in the steamer entitled, so the soldiers said, to the Abyssinian War medal’ (Kipling 1913: 248). The shift from poetry to prose allows Kipling to introduce Little Toomai who, following his family’s profession, aspires to become an elephant handler or even one of the wild-elephant hunters under the employment of the colonial government. The hierarchy of genres of beings within empire becomes clear as Toomai’s exceptional luck gives him access to Kala Nag, the wild elephants, and Petersen Sahib (‘the greatest white man’ that he knew). Rather than being repulsed by the imperial transformation of Kala Nag into a killing machine, Toomai’s resolve to join the trackers or hunting team is strengthened and his status elevated for being the sole human being to witness the elusive wild-elephant dance.

Through a contrapuntal analysis of narratives of the oppressed that challenge narratives and imaginations that celebrate and sustain empire, we can read Kipling’s reference to Tewodros II (anglicised as Theodore) and the celebration of Kala Nag’s feats during the Napier expedition/Magdala campaign of 1868 as part of the history of entangled imperial worlds as well as diplomatic recognition (Said 1994: 32). To do so, we can revisit the events surrounding Tewodros II’s (emperor of Abyssinia)¹⁷ October 1862 letter to

Queen Victoria that opens with a statement of shared Christian faith, monarchical culture, friendship, and metaphorical kinship rather than the spectacular death that Kipling privileged (for more on metaphorical kinship, see Haugevik and Neumann 2019: 8). Assuming Britain's strategic interests would align with its ontological commitments, Tewodros II appealed to British orientalism and the desire to ward off French incursion into this part of Africa. Not only did he ask for a diplomatic alliance with the queen so as to ward off the 'Gallas and the Turks' encroaching on his territory and the Muslims 'oppressing Christians', he also asked for safe passage for his ambassadors and deeper diplomatic friendship with the 'great Christian queen who loves all Christians' (Hozier 1869: 28).¹⁸ In spite of all these appeals, the British chose to ignore this missive from an African sovereign even after it was forwarded to Aden and then dispatched to the Foreign office where it reached in February 1863.

In his analysis of Emperor Tewodros II's letter, Richard Pankhurst notes that the letter 'couched in terms reminiscent of medieval crusades' was in some sense anachronistic. For all the invocations of a shared faith, the letter 'evoked little sympathy from the more commercially-minded British government of the mid-nineteenth century' (Pankhurst 2002: 11). With the American civil war affecting cotton supplies, British interest in Egyptian cotton and its need for the Ottoman empire to 'buttress against the expansion of Russia – which they saw as a threat to the British empire in India', meant that Tewodros II's pleas were of little strategic significance to the British. In a tragic turn of events that illustrates the power of the archive, the increasing significance of paper in everyday bureaucratic practices, race, and the lack of recognition for Tewodros II's status or claims to mutuality, the Foreign office forwarded his letter to the India Office where it was filed and forgotten (Pankhurst 2002).

The delayed response to the diplomatic letter and Tewodros II's desire to force negotiations led him to imprison Charles Duncan Cameron (the Queen of England's envoy). Further complications arose when emissaries sent to mollify Tewodros II were also imprisoned. Irrked by Tewodros II's efforts to force Europeans to recognise him as an equal, the much-publicised Abyssinian campaign of 1867-1868, and the subsequent siege of Magdala was undertaken in order to 'save face' and 'teach the Africans a lesson' (Rosen 1998: 168, see also Matthies 2012). Not only did this campaign involve thousands of British and Indian soldiers deployed for the rescue mission, but the mission also included numerous elephants (like Kipling's Kala Nag), advanced weapons, embedded journalists, artists, and scholars who meticulously recorded the campaign and narrated it to European audiences. The visual remediation of empire and the archive is illustrated in a biographical and historical note on 'Photographs from Abyssinia' held at Northwestern University's Herskovits Library of African Studies where we learn how the embedded photographers 'main function was not to portray the incidents and personalities of the military campaign but the more mundane task of duplicating and printing the maps, plans and sketches of routes needed to guide the advancing troops'.¹⁹ This strategic function of the photographs was complemented by an ontological desire to represent the negation of the enemy. As the archival note indicates, 'the photographers' greatest disappointment was not being able to obtain an image of King Theodore's body after he had

committed suicide' thus giving more weight to Kipling's literary depiction of Kala Nag's witness account.²⁰

Conclusion

It is worth noting that even after the encircled emperor had committed suicide (rather than be captured), the British soldiers still looted the royal ornaments and treasures, religious manuscripts, and over 1500 items some of which made their way to private collections, libraries, and museums in the UK. This was also a performance of what Gregoire Chamayou (2014:139), writing with more recent events in mind, calls a *humilitarian* power that enables empire to moralize and normalize its violence by 'killing and healing' in a single gesture. Furthermore, this performance of power enables empire to narrate itself to itself through a 'synthesis of a power of destruction and a power of caring, *murder* at the same time as *care*' as evidenced by the case of Prince Alemayehu, Tewodros II's young son, who was taken to Britain and became a ward of Queen Victoria. While Prince Alemayehu's body remains buried at Windsor Castle, a lock of Emperor Tewodros's hair remained in the National Army Museum until March 2019 thus illustrating how empire 'miniaturizes the planet' and makes it part of 'Europe's museum' (Appadurai 2021). After years of calling for its restitution, Tewodros II's lock of hair (which unlike bone and tissue is not regarded as 'human remains') was considered for deaccession and thereafter returned to Ethiopia's minister of culture for interment alongside the emperor's body in Ethiopia (Bailey 2019).

The museum-empire-embassy relationship that facilitated the repatriation of Tewodros II's lock of hair is an acknowledgment of the violence of the past through a kind of reverse accreditation and reparative practice that makes the museum a kind of embassy and the lock of hair an emissary. Ironically, the party that received this fragment of the sovereign from the past was interpellated as the proper representative of a contested sovereign thus facilitating a project of state cultural governance in present-day Ethiopia. This diplomatic exercise is a replay of earlier scenes of repatriation such as King George V returning one of Tewodros II's confiscated crowns to Ras Tafari Makonnen (Haile Selassie I) after the latter had gifted him two lions, and Italy turning over various artifacts based on the stipulations of Article 37 of the 1947 Peace Treaty (Pankhurst 1999). While Britain's National Army Museum's council didn't seem to question the status of the European museum itself or the form of recognition that it privileges, its restitution effort revisits the imperial past and acknowledges the problematic status of its collections and previous relations in ways that Boris Johnson fails to do in his visit to Myanmar.

Obviously, the above spectres of imperialism appear in a modern international that underwrites diplomatic and cultural recognition while working 'as a principled refusal of any claim to imperium' (Walker 2016 [2005]: 72-32). However, the 'pedagogies of empire', ideological fictions, and the discursive practices and institutions they produce maintain hierarchies, identities, violences, and exceptions that make the hegemonic discourse on diplomatic recognition inadequate for accounting for the entangled words

that emerge in empire's wake. As Jason Dittmer's analysis of the role of more-than-human diplomatic actants in the disassembling and reassembling of the British Foreign Office from 1839-1874 illustrates, the 'archive' affected 'the state apparatus' as well as the 'wider *dispositif* of the geopolitical order' (Dittmer 2016: 102). These textual practices and their related imaginaries are reflected in the theories, official and unofficial discourses, and aesthetic genres of expression that support imperialism, nation-states, and their recognised genres of being and relation. In his examination of correspondences in the British Foreign Office archives during the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century, Brian J. Yates demonstrates how British foreign policy shifted alongside the conception of Abyssinian identity over the same period. By reading the official and cultural archive 'contrapuntally' rather than univocally, we get a better sense of the dramas surrounding Tewodros II's letter to Queen Victoria while discerning how recognition or lack thereof transforms our ethical and diplomatic relations with others (Said 1994: 51). That is, these documents illustrate how Abyssinians as a group stopped being considered the epitome of African civilisation and diplomacy such that European diplomatic action and imperatives shifted from protecting Abyssinia's Christians to one that 'rejected religious commonalities as a basis of foreign policy in favor of economic expediency.' We also see how the discourses on enmity, hierarchies of humanity, and civility were mobilised as the British came to see the Abyssinians as 'a hindrance to the spread of civilization in northeast Africa', thus enabling the kind of violent intervention that Kipling celebrates in *Toomai of the Elephants* (Yates 2018: 241, 247). Today, Ethiopia, the African polity that resisted colonialism, has become a site of intense contestation over imperial legacies, diplomacy, and recognition. As the Ethiopian state negotiates or negates the varying identities of Ethiopian peoples, these entities are recognised and legitimised or delegitimised by external actors such as the British (against Italian fascists), the UN, the Organisation of African Unity and thereafter the African Union, Israel, neighbours in the Horn of Africa, as well as the redemptive visions of Rastafarians. If Fanon's anti-imperial pedagogy alerts us to the 'pitfalls of national consciousness' and the challenge of postcolonial politics, the imperial spectres above call upon us to heed his lessons on recognition as well and even consider the pitfalls of recognition (Fanon 2011 [1961]: chap. 3).

Notes

- 1 The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, which were integrated in the revision. At the end of a decade-long teaching at PUC-Rio, Stefano Guzzini dedicates his contribution to his students and colleagues at IRI.
- 2 A related issue is the discussion of 'ontological security' in international relations, where states aim not only at reaching physical but also ontological security, understood as the security of the self, which 'entails having a consistent sense of self and having that sense affirmed by others' (Zarakol 2010: 6). Its initial theorization started from understanding a pathology that states may feel more secure by having enemies and conflict than friends and peace. Disoriented by moments of peace that upset their identity narratives, they return to their ontological security, looking for enemies and conflicts (Mitzen 2006). Increasingly, this homeostatic logic of a return to some given identity security has ceased to be seen by actors and observers as a pathology, but as a legitimate move by actors, defending themselves by providing nationalist definitions of the self, 'threatened' by international society's refusal to accept the state's identity discourse

as is. For such critique of a theory that has been turned reflexively by actors and unwittingly by observers into a nationalist apology, see e.g. Mäklsoo (2015) and Rosedale (2015). For a detailed discussion, see Guzzini (2022c, 2022a).

- 3 Shared or common language here implies the possibility of understanding each other, but not an agreement about its content. It is about agreeing on a language in what one disagrees.
- 4 See, for example, Nathan (2005), van der Westhuizen (2008), Serrão and Bischoff (2009), van Wyk (2012), Naidu (2015), Kotze (2015), Smith (2016).
- 5 Priya Chacko's (2012) work on India's quest for nuclear weapons is a case in point.
- 6 See Trownsell et al (2021).
- 7 Kurki (2022) provides a useful overview of the different strands of relational thinking in IR.
- 8 To date, relational approaches to foreign policy have been employed mainly in the context of studying China's foreign policy. See, for example, Song (2020), Shih (2019), Pan (2018). See Jordaan (2017b, 2017a, 2020) and Berry (2021) for further detail.
- 9 The type of power referred to here could be material, institutional or ideational.
- 10 For more on this, see Scholvin (2018) and Smith (2018).
- 11 Kipling Rudyard, Mandalay, Kipling Society Poem, available on the web at: https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_mandalay.htm
- 12 I use the term anagnorisis in the sense that Aristotle uses it in his *Poetics* where peripeteia (reversal, or turns) and anagnorisis (a change from ignorance to knowledge where a character recognizes their true nature leading to friendship or hostility) are central to complex plots in tragedy. See Aristotle's *Poetics* (Baxter and Atherton 1997 [335 BC]: 1452a, p. 78).
- 13 Orwell George, *Shooting an Elephant*, Orwell Foundation, available on the web at <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/shooting-an-elephant/>
- 14 Unlike Kipling's imperial bestiary, Costas M. Constantinou's turn to the horse and the dog in order to enact a kind of politics predicated on 'bestial fraternity, creative passion, instinctive or sensual perception, and non-logocentric skill and performance' (Constantinou 2001: 787).
- 15 I use the diplomatics here as a concept rather than the professional practice. However, the method itself offers numerous insights on how to approach the archive. For Janet Turner (1990), diplomatics is the study of the 'elemental archival unit'. It involves studying the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a document: its protocol (opening formalities), text (body) and eschatol (closing section). Also see Luciana Duranti (1989). Also note that the age-old science of diplomatics was concerned with 'the authenticity of charters or diplomas ... and other early medieval legal documents in archives by the study of their form' (Skemer 1989: 377).
- 16 As a modernizer bent on unifying his empire at the end of the *Zamana Masafent* period (the era of princes that ran from 1769-1855), Tewodros II had worked with Europeans to develop the technology and military strength required to rule over local warring factions. Originally known as Kasa Hailu, the emperor took on the name Tewodros II with a view to fulfilling the prophecy of earthly supremacy attached to his name and directed local loyalty to the emperor in order to maintain his status as *Negus Negast* (King of Kings) and the elect of God.
- 17 In a critical reading of history of the empire and the regimes of recognition in Ethiopia, Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer (2010: 162) point out how Tewodros II's leadership made it possible for Abyssinians 'to colonize and convert the Wallo and Yeju Oromos to Orthodox Christianity or expel or exterminate them.'
- 18 See Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University Libraries. 'Photographs from Abyssinia: taken during the progress of the expedition for the release of the prisoners, 1867-8, by the photographers of the 10th Company. Royal Engineers', The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs: 1860-1960 2. <https://dc.library.northwestern.edu/items/96b6ce46-3f6d-409d-99ff-871092bd97a7>
- 19 Ibid.

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Fórum sobre reconhecimento em (Análise de) Política Externa e (Estudo da) Diplomacia

Resumo: E se a busca por reconhecimento, e não por poder, posição ou segurança, fosse o objetivo primordial das políticas externas? E se as práticas de reconhecimento tanto empoderassem quanto subjugassem, fixando identidades e reproduzindo os termos nos quais os agentes se tornam reconhecíveis em primeiro lugar? O reconhecimento como encontro pode se tornar a tarefa diplomática e a condição para uma ordem internacional pós-colonial? Este Fórum aborda algumas implicações de colocar o reconhecimento no centro da (análise) política externa e (do estudo da) diplomacia. Uma primeira intervenção sobre reconhecimento e dominação fornece o duplo pano de fundo teórico. Por um lado, as teorias de reconhecimento são entendidas como uma teoria específica de ação que corrige algumas das deficiências das teorias de escolha racional na Análise de Política Externa. Por outro lado, o reconhecimento pode ser a base de uma teoria política da diplomacia co-constitutiva da ordem internacional, na qual ele corresponde a uma estratégia ética que reproduz, mas também aborda, as relações de dominação. Uma segunda intervenção exemplifica a implicação para a análise da política externa. Ela analisa a política externa da África do Sul como uma busca de reconhecimento relacional, na qual o círculo relevante de reconhecimento não é o do status de grande potência dentro da sociedade internacional em geral, mas o ambiente africano mais imediato no qual o autorreconhecimento também é alcançado. A intervenção final coloca o reconhecimento na teoria diplomática. Ela analisa a necessidade e as armadilhas inerentes ao reconhecimento sem encontro com as práticas coloniais de (não) reconhecimento, exemplificadas pelo tratamento dado pelo Império Britânico ao imperador abissínio Tewodros II.

Palavras-chave: diplomacia; reconhecimento; análise de política externa; dominação; imperialismo.

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