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DIPLOMACY AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIC FACE-WORK AND POST-COLONIAL EMBARASSMENT

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Diplomacy as Impression Management:
Strategic Face-Work and Post-Colonial Embarrassment

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Abstract

This paper proposes to understand diplomacy as a form of impression management. Drawing on Erving Goffman's dramaturgy, I show how diplomats seek to repair sudden cracks in the fragile international order. I analyse Greenland's and the Faroes' puzzling ability to continue controversial seal and whale hunting despite massive international regulation and criticism. In diplomatic negotiations, the two former Danish colonies use post-colonial embarrassment and irony to push Denmark into negotiating an exemption to the EU's ban on seal products in 2009 and defend pilot whale hunting in the Faroes. Analysing diplomacy as impression management implies, first, that diplomacy cannot be seen as a one-to-one reflection of the relative capabilities or identities of the involved states. Rather, diplomacy should be understood as a social world of its own, abiding to its own rules, norms and codes of conduct. Its inhabitants may represent national interests but they also defend particular views of cosmos and they are saving face. Second, a focus on face-work and social order may help explain both the "conformist" bias of diplomacy and the way it may enable contestation of hierarchies.

Keywords: *animal rights, face-work, diplomacy, embarrassment, Goffman, impression management, irony, symbolic interactionism, post-colonialism*

INTRODUCTION[1]

Since the 1970s animal rights groups have argued that seal and whale hunt is barbaric. Using bloody images of baby seals and "mass whale massacres", they have criticised the hunting of large sea mammals, particularly seals and whales. In 1986, the International Whaling Commission banned all commercial whaling. Today, both whaling and sealing have become widely suspect practices in international relations.

In 2009, heavily influenced by the anti-sealing campaigns, the European Union banned the trade of all seal products. However, the EU's trade ban on seal products includes an exemption to respect "the fundamental economic and social interests of Inuit and other indigenous communities". Why this exemption? This paper shows how Greenland, in a sophisticated negotiation with Denmark, its former coloniser, made the EU accept an "Inuit exemption". Moreover, the paper demonstrates how representatives from the Faroes, a small group of self-governing islands in the North Atlantic, pushed Denmark into defending controversial pilot whale hunting despite international protests and damage to Denmark's image. The diplomatic instrumentalisation of "post-colonial embarrassment" is crucial for achieving these results. Through creative impression management and "inappropriate behaviour", Greenlandic and Faroese representatives turn their inferior position as former colonies into a position of strength. This successful diplomatic face-work is relevant for our understanding of bigger issues concerning diplomacy, post-colonialism and subject positions in international politics.

There exist surprisingly few IR theories of diplomacy. For most IR theories, diplomacy is somewhat beside the point (see Hyde-Price, 2006). There are even fewer studies that investigate the everyday of diplomacy (for valuable exceptions, see Constantinou and Der Derian (eds) 2010; Neumann, 2005; 2007; 2011; Jackson, 2008; Galtung 1965; Pouliot 2010).[2] In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in diplomacy among IR scholars who point to its importance for contemporary international politics.[3] Critics argue that we need a "much more critical and intrusive approach to the world of diplomacy and international affairs" Ross 2007: 26). I hope to contribute to the rapidly evolving research on what Martin Wight called the "master institution of international relations".

This paper advances two theoretical claims. First, diplomacy cannot be seen as a one-to-one reflection of the clash between different national interests. Rather, the diplomatic world ought to be understood as a world of its own, abiding to its own rules, norms and codes of conduct. While diplomatic scholars have known this for a long time (e.g. Der Derian 1987; Enloe 1990; Constantinou 1996), IR still lacks ways of engaging with the diplomatic world. I show that diplomats are not only representatives of their states, but also defenders and performers of a particular social order.

Second, I suggest that a focus on face-saving may help explain the "conformist" bias in diplomacy as well as instances of performative contestation. Diplomacy can, I will argue, be

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[2] For a historical sociological approach to diplomacy, see Jönnson and Hall (2005). For a macro-anthropological take on diplomacy, see Feldman (2005). Outside the IR discipline, social theorists such as Bruno Latour have pointed us in the direction of diplomacy to address today's major global conflicts. Latour argues that through diplomacy we can start a dialogue of how the world is constructed, moving away from the assumption that only one side controls. For Latour, diplomacy cannot begin "[…] until we suspend our assumptions about what does or does not count as difference. There are more ways than one to differ – and thus more than one way to agree – in the end" (Latour, 2002: 43). Along these lines, Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian promote what they call "sustainable diplomacy", which is to "engender normative, yet pragmatic change" (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010: 2).

[3] 'Guerrilla diplomacy' (Copeland, 2000) calls for diplomats to reinvent themselves, Snow and Taylor (2008) point to public diplomacy, but also more traditional aspects of diplomacy such as peace negotiations and embassy work have received renewed scholarly interest (Neumann, 2008; Jönnson, 2005).

understood in terms of what Goffman called the "interaction order". Within diplomatic interaction orders (perhaps more so than in other types of interaction orders), a central issue is to avoid losing face, i.e. to avoid embarrassment. From this perspective, diplomacy can be interpreted as national "face-work". Diplomats maintain their nation's face, be it in meetings with other diplomats, email correspondence or telephone conversations. Instead of interpreting diplomacy as "merely a polite form of neo-colonialism" (Wiseman 2011: 710), this paper shows that diplomatic interaction is a two-sided process providing ways to expose, affirm or contest material and social inequalities.

The paper is organised as follows. The subsequent briefly presents the Danish postcolonial configuration and the whaling and sealing practices in Greenland and the Faroes. The third section suggests that diplomacy is a practice taking place within specific interaction orders. The fourth section specifies the diplomatic interaction order as centred around impression management, face-work and a strong focus on avoidance of embarrassment. The fifth section use the framework to analyse concrete violations of the diplomatic interaction order, illustrated by the instrumentalisation of post-colonial embarrassment and irony in Faroese-Greenlandic-Danish meetings. The analysis builds on in-depth interviews and participant observation. The conclusion suggests a dramaturgical agenda for IR and diplomatic studies in particular.

1. "PROGRESSIVE" DANISH POSTCOLONIALISM

The development of a global anti-whaling discourse fits into a meta-narrative about protecting the environment, initially domestically (from the mid-1960s in the US, for example) and then worldwide. Epstein argues (2008: 104-108) that a key event was the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. It consolidated a synecdoche whereby

protection of the "environment" was equated with protection of "endangered species" in international forums, underpinned by a shift towards animal rights. Today, there is massive critique of whaling and sealing practices across the world.

Given this massive criticism, why does Denmark – a state that generally seeks to project an image of itself as animal- and eco-friendly – continue to defend these controversial practices on the Greenland and the Faroes? To answer this question, I first present the Danish postcolonial arrangement before moving to the framework and analysis.

A crucial element in Danish post-colonialism is awkwardness. Drunken Greenlanders urinating in the streets of Copenhagen do not seem to match with Queen Margrethe II's praise of a Greenland that deserves "respect" and self-government. Awkwardness is also evident in the way Denmark handles international criticism of Faroese and Greenlandic fishing and hunting. Seeking to constitute itself as "progressive" post-coloniser, Denmark balances between two global discourses: On the one hand, defending "original cultural habits" and on the other hand protecting "animal welfare". Both discourses are "progressive". Also the former colonies are torn between promoting cultural distinctiveness and meeting standards of animal- and bio-friendly behaviour.

These tensions play out in a particular postcolonial configuration. Greenland and the Faroes have special status as self-governing entities within the Danish realm. Since 1979, the Home Rule Act grants them substantial autonomy vis-à-vis the Danish government. However, as former colonies, each with less than 60,000 inhabitants, Greenland and the Faroes depend on aid from Denmark. There is lack of educational resources, material and social infrastructure – also with the possibility of increased self-determination. Denmark upholds an annual block grant, which covers 60 pct. of the Greenlandic home rule budget and 25 pct. of the Faroese home rule

budget.

When Denmark joined the European Communities in 1973, the Faroes remained outside the EC to avoid participating in the Common Fisheries Policy. Instead, the Faroes and the EU concluded a bilateral agreement on fishery with annual quotas. In 1985, following a referendum, Greenland became the only country (so far) to leave EU. The reason was the unpopular fisheries policy, which opened Greenlandic fishing zones to big European companies. Greenland is now one of the EU's overseas countries and territories (OCTs) along with Aruba, French Polynesia and other former European colonies.[4] Today, Greenlandic authorities seek to use the EU to subsidise Greenlandic welfare without compromising Greenlandic self-determination or fisheries policy (Gad et al. 2011).

The agreements between Greenland, the Faroes and the EU imply that Denmark is cast as caretaker of "its" overseas territory/dependency when it comes to diplomatic representation and negotiations in Brussels. This is not just a formal detail; it affects the inter-personal relations between Greenlandic, Faroese and Danish representatives.

PLAYING EQUALS

Danish diplomatic assistance is not unproblematic for officials from the former colonies. Greenlandic and Faroese self-governing authorities, influenced by global discourses of decolonisation and independence, want to speak with their own voice. Consequently, they have established a Greenlandic and a Faroese EU Representation in Brussels. Here, four Greenlandic and Faroese diplomats, two secretaries and two stagiaires work full time with EU matters. Yet

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[4] In accordance with part 2 and articles 182 and 299(3) of the Treaty of Rome, the OCTs are constitutionally tied to a member state without being part of the Community. The arrangement involves duty-free status, access to the EU cooperation programmes, relating to production, trade development, human, social and environmental development, cultural and social cooperation and regional support/development aid, including the free movement of people, goods, services and sectoral reform.

Greenland and the Faroes still need the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to defend their interests. One senior Danish diplomat explains:

> Basically, the other member states do not mind walking over Greenland because they are only 56.000 people. But they do not feel like standing on "Mother Denmark" [sic] who is part of the "club". Of course we use this situation strategically.[5]

Crucial for the role division between "Mother Denmark" and its former colonies is that this inequality cannot be directly addressed. On the one hand, Greenland and the Faroes are ashamed of their colonial past. On the other hand, Danes former colonisers are ashamed of having been colonisers. There is a double shame of post-colonisation. As I will demonstrate, this gives rise to diplomatic face-work where embarrassment or the anticipation of embarrassment is key.

The post-colonial relationship is concealed through a discourse about equality in everyday relations between Nuuk, Tórshavn and Copenhagen. This resembles the "covering up" of hierarchies by subordinate groups in South Asia identified by Scott (1990).[6] Inspired by Bourdieu's studies of gift-giving rituals, Scott argues that domination cannot take place overtly: "In order to be socially recognized, it must get itself misrecognized". The relationship between Greenland, the Faroes and Denmark comes with a heavy historical baggage. It therefore requires a lot of work to cover up the dramatic differences in material, educational and institutional resources. In their in-depth study of diplomatic practices of Greenlandic and other overseas territories, Hannibal and Holst (2010) have demonstrated that Danish, Greenlandic and Faroese representatives cooperate to keep up appearances even when they disagree. One Greenlandic diplomat explains: "We have a good cooperation. We have worked together for many years. We

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[5] Interview, Senior Danish Diplomat, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 2009, see Hannibal and Holst (2010).

[6] Thomas Mitchell (1990) has convincingly argued, that Scott's proposition rests on a rigid division between body and mind. Scott argues that elites may control the outward behaviour of the poor, but not their minds. In other words it relies on the distinction between a public (and behavioural) acquiescence and a realm of private (and largely mental) autonomy.

have developed a particular form of working together".[7] Playing equals demands tact and effort from both sides and a lot of management of embarrassment.

2. SETTING THE DIPLOMATIC SCENE

To understand how the post-colonial relation is negotiated through management of embarrassment, I conceptualise diplomacy as a symbolic practice. The two main claims that I make is that diplomacy can be seen from the perspective of an "interaction order" and that within this order, diplomats engage in various forms of impression management.

Assuming that diplomacy can be studied as impression management, I am inspired by the practice-oriented approach to international politics (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). This label covers an approach seeking to bridge everyday performances with macro-sociological structures without bracketing them in turn (Pouliot 2007). However, one problem with Adler and Pouliot's practice perspective is that it "generates an exaggerated sense of stability and can obscure both the social processes that generate change and the inherent instability of practices themselves" (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011: 337). To contribute to the practice turn and address this particular shortcoming, I draw on Goffman's dramaturgical model (Goffman 1959) and his concept of "face-work" (Goffman 1967). This makes it possible to study the performative aspect of diplomacy.

Goffman works with the assumption that humans are active, creative participants who help construct their social world, not simply passive, conforming objects of socialization.[8] These assumptions have been somewhat obliquely introduced in IR via different versions of social

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[7] Interview, senior diplomat, Greenland's Home Rule Government, 9 Oct 2009.
[8] For symbolic interactionists, humans are pragmatic actors who must continually adjust their behaviour
to the actions of others. They can adjust to these actions only because they are able to interpret them,
i.e. to denote them symbolically and treat the actions and those who perform them as symbolic objects
(Goffman, 1959; Blumer, 1969).

constructivism and post-structuralism. While for instance Alexander Wendt is inspired by Goffman's dramaturgy (Wendt 1992; 1999), many of Goffman's most interesting insights are still to be imported into IR. [9]

It is striking that Goffman has not yet been recognised as a theorist of diplomacy. Goffman consistently thought of social life from a diplomatic perspective, i.e. as centred on social skills and the ability to take commanding positions in encounters (see also Burns 1992: 57). He was interested in the relations between e.g. China and Britain and read Sir Harold Nicholson's classic *Diplomacy*, claiming that diplomatic virtues of emotional and physical self-control were central to understanding social interaction more generally (see Goffman 1967: 244). There is, in other words, a double theoretical potential in a meeting between diplomatic studies and Goffman's theory. His reflections on society as highly heterogeneous and his focus on the dramaturgical and strategic aspects of human interaction remain useful to understanding social dynamics in international relations.[10] In this paper, I hope to demonstrate that while diplomacy might appear as conformist and overly focused on protocol, diplomats improvise and engage in strategic face-work and sometimes they violate norms. Diplomats, in other words, inhabit a particular universe, which has implications for the negotiation of hierarchy and status in world politics.

THE TWO MEANINGS OF DIPLOMACY

[9] For few though valuable exceptions, see Barnett (1998) who draws on Goffman to argue that symbolic politics is crucial to explain interstate relations in the Middle East. Moreover, Mor (2009) employs Goffman to analyse impression management in Israeli public diplomacy and Schimmelfennig (2004) builds on Goffman to describe frontstage and backstage logics in the EU enlargement process. Jervis' (1976) landmark volume on perceptions and mis-perceptions in foreign policy also refers sporadically to Goffman. Sofer (1997) uses symbolic interactionism and Goffman to conceptualise "the diplomatic self".

[10] In a sense, my argument picks up on Guzzini's and Leander's suggestion to explore ways to construct a "micro-sociological underpinning of a constructivist theory" (Guzzini and Leander, 2006: 90).

Diplomacy generally takes two (apparently) very different meanings. On the one hand, diplomacy stands for institutionalised negotiations between states. On the other hand, diplomacy is understood as etiquette or tact. Rarely, however, are these two understandings of diplomacy linked.

Traditionally, IR scholars only focus on the first meaning. Here diplomacy is seen as a process whereby states speak with one another as captured in for instance Putnam's (1988) two-level game metaphor. According to this image, diplomacy is always proceeding on two different levels at the same time – the international and domestic levels. During international negotiations, each national leader – or diplomat – must strike acceptable deals with his or her international partners and must ratify such deals in the respective domestic constituencies. This approach reproduces an image of state relations in which the inside and outside of the state are clearly demarcated by diplomacy; or as Moravcsik puts it, "The two-level games metaphor views the relationship between domestic and international politics through the eyes of the statesman" (Moravcsik, 1993: 17). In this view, diplomats are seen as mediators between disparate – and not necessarily directly connected – worlds (Adler-Nissen 2009).

However, diplomacy is also a skill or an "art" of dealing with people effectively. Being diplomatic implies avoid offending others or hurting their feelings. Diplomatic suggests a smoothness and ability to handle others; usually in such a way as to attain one's own ends and yet avoid any unpleasantness or opposition.[11] Someone can even be accused for being too diplomatic, i.e. avoiding saying things as they "really" are. Precisely this element of being tactful is a crucial part of what diplomats see as "professional" behaviour. As Goffman writes in *Interaction Ritual*:

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[11] Polite emphasizes expediency or prudence in looking out for one's own interests, thus knowing how to treat people of different types and on different occasions: a truth, which it is not politic to insist on.

> The members of every social circle may be expected to have some knowledge of face-work and some experience in its use. In our society, this kind of capacity, or savoir-faire, is sometimes known as diplomacy, or social skill (Goffman 1967: 13).

Goffman's social theory is indeed a "diplomatic theory" of society, merging the two understandings of diplomacy.

Feminist scholars have pointed out that IR ignores people's own experiences and see e.g. changes in the polarity structure of the international system as the main driver of world politics. If "the everyday be recognised as political" (Shepherd 2010; Enloe 1999) state-to-state encounters and tact can be seen as more closely related. Then we begin to recognise how diplomacy is performed by people employing particular skills in their everyday encounters.

THE INTERACTION ORDER

Dramaturgical references are abundant in descriptions of diplomacy. We talk of the diplomatic "scene" or "stage" and the "performance" of diplomats (e.g. Buzan, 1981). Yet this metaphor is usually not more than an abstraction, it is not used as an analytical device (for a few, but valuable exceptions, see Cohen, 1987, Cohen, 2004; Constantinou, 1996). What happens if we begin to take the metaphor more seriously? What if we study diplomacy as an interaction order?

Goffman's theory springs from a theoretical ambition to understand how social life is organised (Goffman, 1959: xv). Most social theorists would probably subscribe to such ambition, but what makes Goffman's perspective unique is that it consistently explores and unravels how this social life – i.e. the life where actors engage in relations with other actors – to a large degree concerns the motives that actors have in controlling the impression that he or she gives to other actors (Goffman, 1959: 15). Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) links the way individuals act in everyday life to the way actors performs on a stage.

Goffman's "interaction order" refers to the domain of activity that exists in the face-to-face interactions of everyday life (Goffman, 1983: 5). Within this order, social life can be conceived through a dramaturgical understanding of how humans act, think and feel in the company of other people in the interaction game.[7] A public bus, a family dining table or a school class room all constitute a particular interaction order where certain rituals are performed and sometimes violated. According to Goffman, the interaction order should not be understood as something particularly orderly. Rather, the word "order" indicates "a particular order emerges out of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provision of a traffic code or the rules of syntax of a language" (Goffman, 1983: 5). The conventions help facilitate coordination as well as help uphold normative consensus. As such, the interaction order both promotes and constraints particular behaviour.

An advantage of seeing diplomacy from the perspective of the interaction order is that we may analyse aspects of international politics that are normally ignored or deemed inaccessible. It is for instance well-known that Henry Kissinger used humour to aid negotiation (O'Quin, 1981). Margaret Thatcher played on gender roles when she went to Brussels, slammed her handbag in the table and insisted "I want my money back" and successfully negotiated permanent British rebates on the EU budget (Wall 2008). However, IR scholars lack methodological tools to grasp practices such as joking as ways of facilitating influence. Such moves become comprehensible if we borrow insights from symbolic interactionism. The face-to-face domain – the interaction order – becomes an "analytically viable one" (Goffman, 1983: 2). In the following I will explain what sets diplomacy apart from other interaction orders.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Goffman concluded that the interaction order is distinct from other social structures such as the economic order and political order, but has a "non-exclusive linkage – a "loose coupling" with them (1983: 11). The interaction order – the face-to face encounter – is thus not totally separated from macro-institutions such as the state. Generally, however, Goffman was not interested in the state. Rather, he focused on what he coined "total institutions" (e.g. prisons, monasteries, asylums, hospitals etc.) and in particular what these institutions did to the humans that inhabited them.[12] Such an approach opens up for an analysis that understands diplomacy on its own terms, not as an extension of the state.

Accordingly, to understand how diplomacy is performed, focus ought to be on the state representatives negotiating the international identities of their states. This becomes clearer when considering how the state, as a social construction, is represented in international fora by representatives possessing the authority to speak and act in the name of the state. State representatives and diplomats (to some degree) embody the state in diplomatic negotiations. By representing France to a foreign state or an international organization, a French Diplomat performs as France. This explains the partly merging between the diplomatic self and the state self or identity. When diplomats talk, they instantiate the conduct of the state; they produce "praxiological. instantiations of macro-social phenomena" (Coulter, 2001: 36). However these productions cannot be reduced to state interests, they are individually performed and ritualised.

This is where Goffman's concept of "impression management" becomes relevant. With this notion he understands the ongoing performance we present in interaction with others. Impression management is a play metaphor for how we create, maintain, defend, and often enhance our

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[12] In *Asylums*, Goffman used the term "total institutions" to describe organizations in which conventional separations among spheres of life are absent: A basic social arrangement in modern society is that the individual tends to sleep, play and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an overall rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of life (Goffman, 1961: 17).

social identities (Goffman, 1959: 208) The performing actor, however, is never alone in his or her impression management. The audience plays an important role in helping the performing actor to uphold the show (Goffman, 1959: 213). Face-to-face meetings between diplomats give dramatic form to norms, conventions and the cosmos and our place in it. Hence, costume, gesture and bodily alignment represent certain beliefs and deals regarding social structures. These embodiments are centred in ceremonies and allow participants to affirm their affiliations and commitments to their collectivities and revive their ultimate belief (Goffman, 1983: 9).

In sum, the consequence of seeing diplomacy through the prism of the interaction order is that its self-contained social life becomes visible. It places the codes of conduct at the centre of the analysis. This implies that diplomacy cannot be reduced to a mere reflection of the distribution of material capabilities or fixed national interests. Structurally constrained as they are, diplomats become recognisable as agents in and of themselves.

3. DIPLOMATIC FACE-WORK

Having argued that diplomatic practice can be understood in terms of face-to-face encounters ("a diplomatic interaction order"), this section suggests that diplomats strive to present particular images of themselves. My claim is that much of diplomatic work is pre-emptive; it is centred on the notion of maintaining face. Although social and political structures can change, the interaction order often stubbornly remains static as people work hard to maintain it (Goffman, 1983). There are however different ways of acting within it.

For Goffman, every human interaction builds on visible arrangements, spatial and territorial accommodations organised around the respect for one fundamental principle: saving the face of one another. The notion of face is visible throughout Goffman's work as incontournable in the

understanding of human interaction and is thus closely linked to his understandings of ritual. Face is an image of "self" delineated in terms of approved social attributes (Goffman, 1967: 5). In order to save face, one must be socially perceptive (Goffman, 1983: 13). Face-saving, as mentioned, is not just a process of the social actor, but of the audience as well. There are social protocols for helping someone maintain and save face, most notably avoidance mechanisms, overcompensating and apology. There is a ritual around correcting the way in which face is managed socially - challenge, offering, acceptance and thanks (Goffman, 1983: 22). This helps maintain the interaction order and tact is part of avoiding embarrassing moments of losing face. In this light, diplomacy can be seen as a particular form of impression management, which is focused on face-saving – both of the diplomat and of the nation that s(he) represents.

THE DIPLOMATIC ORDER: FACE, TACT AND THE AVOIDANCE OF EMBARRASSMENT

Mayall claims that the underlying rationale of the diplomatic profession is to facilitate orderly and peaceful relations among states (Mayall, 2007: 6). Indeed, the language of diplomacy is rife with references to the creation of order. Diplomacy has a normative bias; it upholds particular protocols. This is how we can understand deep-rooted expressions such as "normalizing" or "severing" diplomatic ties; the former is a signalling device to signals of approval or recognition, while the latter sends strong signals of dissatisfaction without necessarily any military intentions (Berridge, 1994: 7).

According to Scheff (2006: 33-34) pride and shame are the emotional impulses that regulate the need for impression management. Traditionally, IR scholars have carefully avoided using such concepts. Recently, however, scholars such as Karin Fierke have argued for the importance of asking questions that explicitly address emotional aspects related to e.g. violence (Fierke,

2004; Fattah and Fierke, 2009). Indeed, there seems to be increased awareness in IR that alternative "rationalities" play an important role in international politics (see Baily Mattern, 2011; Sylvester, 2011).

It is difficult to explain the efforts of diplomats (i.e. troublesome respect of formalities, culture of perfectionism and etiquette), if one does not take into account that diplomats see themselves as mediators, they smoothen out and make sure that nothing goes wrong. To uphold norms is imperative not for their own sake, but for what they represent or constitute.

Bull called diplomats "custodians of the idea of international society" (Bull, 1977: 176). The word "custodian" suggests that there is something inherently conformist about diplomacy. Like the Greek god Atlas, diplomats are constituted, and constitute themselves, as responsible for the interaction order where states meet. This is a heavy responsibility. As the former British diplomat Ross notes: "To preserve their own role, and the belief – comforting to us as well to them – their governments are "in charge" of events, they must continually that assert that governments are on top of the pile of agents and must determine what is important and what is to be done, and make and enforce rules" (Ross 2007: 203).[13] The reluctance towards dramatic change is linked to this self-understanding as responsible for the international order and to the importance of saving the nation's face and managing embarrassment.

This is precisely where the other dimension of diplomacy i.e. tactfulness and politeness become crucial. Of course, this other dimension is not likely to hold for all diplomacy in all times and it takes local shapes and forms. We need to historicise our analysis of diplomacy.[14]

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[13] This changes dramatically the meaning of "preventive diplomacy" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) as most diplomacy is by nature preventive – not because it does not allow for actions or pro-active decisions, but because in all those activities face-saving is crucial.

[14] For a discussion of the historical evolution of diplomacy, including rituals and tact, see Jönsson and Hall (2005). Following their argument, Western (now global) diplomacy back to the cities of ancient Greece, where messengers known as "heralds" were the first diplomats. People believed the Greek gods protected these heralds, so no one dared to harm them as they carried messages between warring states. The Greeks were also the first to grant

What I want to stress here, however, is that tact, is more than just form, it is essentially important in and of itself in current diplomacy. Protocol and procedures become a goal in themselves. As Annelise Riles writes in her ethnographic analysis of the drafting of a UN document on women's rights: "[…] one of the most puzzling aspects of intergovernmental documents, from an academic point of view, is the negotiators' lack of interest in their meaning" (Riles, 1998: 388). Riles finds that much of what diplomats do is produce abstract wordings in documents that are circulated between delegations and states for several years before a final consensus can be agreed. The goal of diplomatic work is to produce texts, which respect the aesthetic requirements and are acceptable for all involved. The achievement of the document, the upholding of the process, is what diplomacy centres around. The actual content not to mention its possible policy impact fade into the background. In diplomacy, process and content cannot be separated. This is important in all social interaction, but is particularly strong in diplomacy. It is part of what sets the diplomatic interaction order apart from other orders. Analysing speech-writing in the Norwegian foreign ministry, Neumann argues that the reason "why diplomats never produce anything new" is due to the need for the Ministry to speak with one voice. A speech needs to perform organisational unity and draw together all departments in the Ministry (Neumann 2007). While I agree that diplomacy is status quo oriented, I do not think that the reason is organisational alone. It also has to do with diplomats seeing themselves as "custodians of the international society".

Diplomacy is a *modus vivendi*, which operates in so far as – and only in so far as – national governments and diplomats bother to keep it going (see also Constantinou and Der Derian 2010: 16). In Goffman's reading, however, this obsession with (social) order goes deeper and affects everyday moves of diplomats. More specifically, diplomatic work seeks to prevent a violation of

immunity to diplomatic representatives and their possessions, a practice still used throughout the world.

the interaction order.

I have hitherto described the potential for agency in Goffman's perspective in negative terms: The reason that social actors seek to control their performance through impression management is to avoid a particular situation, i.e. the embarrassing situation where they lose face. However, while diplomats might cherish conventions, they play actively with their conformism. They can more or less deliberately choose to disrupt the interaction order through "inappropriate behaviour". To suppress such possible disruption, embarrassment is used, "but once such embarrassing gestures or remarks have been emitted, tact is employed to treat embarrassing communications as if they had not occurred".

In Schimmelfennig's reading, Goffman understands "the social" as a place or a process, where actors are put in a dialectical relation between strategic manipulation of the situation, on the hand, and effective, social and cultural constraints of such strategic behaviour on the other hand (Schimmelfennig, 2004). Social life, in other words, both gives room for manoeuvre and constraints the individual. For this reason, diplomats, depending on which way the pendulum swings, might appear as both very structurally constrained actors for whom everything is already determined and as a manipulatory and strategic actor (Schimmelfennig, 2004: 421). This opens for an understanding of the diplomat who can attempt to strategically manipulate his or her performance vis-à-vis other diplomats.

Of course, all of this is culturally defined and the relationship between tact and face management may collide when different discourses or practices meet. If tact and face-work are intrinsic elements of diplomatic practice, the question becomes whether there is a universal

understanding of tact shared by all diplomats or whether there are different understandings of what makes a tactful diplomat.[15] I follow Neumann's idea that diplomacy can be seen as a (weak) third culture i.e. a culture for mediation between political entities with diverse cultures (Neumann, 2005: 72). It has established norms about how to behave, including tacit knowledge on the correct use of handshakes, how to use family photos, how to exchange gifts, how to discuss in the margins of the meeting, how to dress etc. However, within that one culture, various faces have to be maintained and defended, sometimes demanding a diplomat to threaten to breach the fragile interaction order in order to defend particular views. It is to the violation of the interaction order that I will now turn.

4. INTERACTION ORDER VIOLATED: POST-COLONIAL EMBARRASMENT

If Goffman is right that much of what goes on in social encounters is oriented towards avoiding embarrassment, it becomes interesting to explore the role of shame and embarrassment in diplomatic interaction. This section argues that in concrete diplomatic encounters, embarrassment can play an important role. The violation of the interaction arrangement, however, is not necessarily problematic. Individuals who systematically violate the norms of the interaction order rely on them most of the time (Goffman, 1983: 3). In the following, I look at two examples of the diplomatic instrumentalisation of I call "post-colonial embarrassment". I focus on the interaction between Greenlandic, Faroese and Danish representatives as they negotiate controversial sealing and whaling practices.

NEGOTATING THE "INUIT EXEMPTION"

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[15] Cf. the English School's account of the expansion of the international society, see Watson and Bull (eds) (1985) and Cohen (2001).

Since the 1970s, Western animal rights groups have attacked a series of indigenous hunting practices, which has led to wide-ranging international regulations and limits on these practices. With effective and visual baby seal campaigns, animal rights activists and NGOs had setting an agenda worldwide to condemn and outlaw seal hunting. In 2005, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) commissioned the Independent Veterinarians Working Group Report. With reference to video evidence, the report states: 'Perception of the seal hunt seems to be based largely on emotion, and on visual images that are often difficult even for experienced observers to interpret with certainty. While a hakapik strike on the skull of a seal appears brutal, it is humane if it achieves rapid, irreversible loss of consciousness leading to death' (Independent Veterinarians' Working Group 2005: 5). As Lene Hansen explains: "a policy response never arises from the image itself" (Hansen 2011: 53). In our case, the image of bloody seal hunt involves a difficult negotiation of postcolonial roles.

Seal hunt represents an icon of Inuit culture. In Greenland, trade with seal skin is subsidised by the Home Rule Government with 30 mills DKK every year. 10 mill DKK go to Great Greenland (the Home Rule owned company exporting seal products), while the remaining 20 mill. DKK are paid directly to the seal hunters. As such the seal skin trade can also function as an important social support system.[16]

In September 2006, the European Parliament, influenced by animal rights groups actively opposing the sealing industry, passed a resolution to ban import and trade with seal products in the EU. At the same time several EU member states were considering, or had already introduced, national legislative measures to ban the import and use of seal skins and seal products. To ensure a harmonised EU approach and to follow up on the Parliament's resolution, the Commission

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[16] Sealskin, arguably, also has importance for the household budgets for a smaller or larger number of individual Greenlanders living off subsistence and/or subsidised hunting and fishing.

proposed a regulation totally banning the trade with seal products in the EU. The Greenlandic

Home Rule government along with other Arctic nations were shocked and protested against the

EU's "neo-colonial" interference:

> In a letter to the presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament the speaker of the Greenlandic home rule parliament warned that Europe was repeating the colonial policies pursued in South America 400 years ago and committing "cultural genocide". Behind the fears for losing an important market was the threat to cultural practices described as essential to Inuit identity posed by Western standards of "humane" treatment of animals" (Gad 2011: 7).

However, the idea of a total ban on trade of seal products had gained tremendous popularity

throughout Europe and especially in the European Parliament and it would be extremely difficult

for Denmark to go against that wave of protests against what the actor-turned-activist Brigitte

Bardot effectively termed "seal massacres". Denmark therefore remained rather soft-voiced and

the European Commission appeared un-interested in Greenland's arguments against the ban,

which were brought up on several occasions in meetings between the Commission and Danish

and Greenlandic representatives.[17] A senior Danish diplomat explains:

> Feelings came up… and the Greenlanders didn't feel they were treated with respect, when the Commission concluded by saying: "We have decided that…". It leads to a number of awkward tensions and the Greenlanders felt the Commission was arrogant. The atmosphere at the meetings was very unpleasant.[18]

Greenlandic representatives felt that the European Commission talked down to them:

> Greenlanders have eaten seal for thousands of years, but now they are no longer allowed to do so because some European fanatics feel sorry for the seals. We call the seals for the rats of the sea because we have too many of them. And then comes the cloying romanticism. Europeans think that reality take place inside your head. Animal welfare for them is something like "oh an animal with big brown eyes". But the seal is a very

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[17] Interview, official, Greenland's Government, 9 Oct 2009. See Hannibal and Holst (2010) for the original interview in Danish. Det kommende års strategi vedrørende indsatsen på sælskinsområdet', Internal note, Danish Foreign Ministry, 20 June 2009.

[18] Interview, Senior Danish Diplomat, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 2009

dangerous predator spreading diseases. But the EU doesn't understand. They crush a small people. So we needed Denmark to help us.[19]

The rejection of the discourse on "animal with big brown eyes" and colonial metaphors were increasingly taken serious by Danish diplomats. In June 2007 the Danish Foreign Ministry noted in an internal strategy paper, "Seal hunt is of huge importance to Greenland, in particular to those areas where there are no other business opportunities […]. The matter is also driven by emotional concerns. Seal hunt is regarded as an expression of national identity. Attacks on or limits to the right to a sustainable hunt of seal may therefore in the end be seen as attack on the right to be Greenlander. The lack of Danish support will, in certain circles, be seen as letting down the Commonwealth of the Danish realm [et svigt imod Rigsfællesskabet]".[20]

From the summer of 2007, the Danish government therefore began to defend the Greenlandic view in the negotiation of the EU Regulation. However, this Danish engagement in the Greenlandic position vis-à-vis the Commission and the other member states did not satisfy Greenlandic representatives. What weapons do the weak have in such a situation? Denmark has an image to protect: Denmark as a small, peaceful, liberal and progressive state. Consequently, Greenlanders may embarrass Danish diplomats by referring to the colonial past if Denmark hinders Greenland in conducting its "own" foreign policy (Kristensen, 2004). This was exactly what happened: "Trouble is caused by a person who cannot be relied upon to play the face-saving game" (Goffman, 1983: 31). It is exactly when we note the laborious work put into saving face that we realise the power hierarchy and different status that are sought to be managed. Macro-institutions such as states have images that are partly produced by (and depend on)

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[19] Interview, Senior diplomat, Greenland's Home Rule Government, 9 Oct 2009. See Hannibal and Holst (2010) for the original interview in Danish.

[20] 'Det kommende års strategi vedrørende indsatsen på sælskinsområdet', Internal note, Danish Foreign Ministry, 20 June 2009. As Ross writes "Dispassionate-operational-factual information is taken as a superior form of information, and as "objective", when presentation of all information, including in such form, represent a choice about what is important to us and what is not, and thus brings into play our emotions, personal prejudices and intuitions (Ross 2007: 23).

impression management, including pride and shame.

To increase the pressure on Denmark, an official from the Greenlandic EU representation violated the interaction order by breaching the post-colonial taboo. The regular OCT meetings in Brussels provided the concrete occasions. In front of representatives from the Commission and other member states, the Greenlandic diplomat reminded Denmark of its colonial past. He knew that his Danish colleague would then have to do the repair work:

> Sometimes if he [the Danish diplomat] talked too much without passing the floor to me, I would interrupt by saying "Well, now it is the colonial power Denmark that speaks". I did it a couple of times during the meetings. Then he immediately blushed. Of course, ha-ha-ha. Then he would usually understand that he had stepped on our feet. Then he would say "Denmark backs Greenland" or simply shut up.[21]

The Greenlandic official deliberately decided to violate the norms of the interaction order.[22] By breaking the post-colonial taboo that inequality is explicated – instead of being "covered up" - it also upholds Greenland as the weak.

The post-colonial embarrassment was successful seen from the perspective of the Greenlandic delegation. Denmark began to push even harder. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs distributed a non-paper on the seal skin bans, explaining the Greenlandic situation and arguing against the national bans on seal skin products. Moreover, it instructed its embassies to take up the Greenlandic case in bilateral discussions with other member states. These efforts were effective. In adopting the final seal trade Regulation in 2009, the EU made a partial exemption for seals hunted by Inuit.[23] This is now known as the "Inuit exemption" which

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[21] Interview, Senior diplomat, Greenland's Home Rule Government, 9 Oct 2009. See Hannibal and Holst (2010) for the original interview in Danish.

[22] This reminds us of ethnomethodology's breaching experiments that seek to examine people's reactions to violations of commonly accepted social rules or norms (Garfinkel 1963).

[23] The ban itself entered into force 9 months after the entry into force of the Regulation (i.e. 20 August 2010)It also contains exceptions for goods derived from seals for personal and non-commercial use and for goods derived from seals hunted for the sole purpose of the sustainable management of marine resources on a not-for profit basis and for non-commercial reasons.

respects the fundamental economic and social interests of Inuit and other indigenous communities. The exemption reads:

> The placing on the market of seal products shall be allowed only where the seal products result from hunts traditionally conducted by Inuit and other indigenous communities and contribute to their subsistence. These conditions shall apply at the time or point of import for imported products (article 3, para 1)

Through face-work and laborious diplomatic pressure – violating the interaction order of OCT meetings between the European Commission, Denmark and Greenland, the official from Greenland successfully pressured Denmark into defending its case much more vigorously than initially planned. Concerted Danish-Greenlandic action led to an exemption for sealskin produced by traditional hunters. The Inuit "loophole" was criticised by animal rights groups such as International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW): "Only a complete ban can prevent products from these large-scale and inherently cruel hunts from entering the European markets" as Robbie Marsland, Director of IFAW UK says.[24] Meanwhile, the Inuit exemption has not removed the fears of the Greenlandic government that seal products will in practice be impossible to sell in Europe (see also Gad 2011: 7).[25]

PILOT WHALING AND THE CONSTITUTION OF FAROESE BARBARISM

Since 1984, pilot whale hunt has been the subject of organised protest by a number of animal protection groups in Europe and North America. In 1992, three of these groups, the Environmental Investigation Agency, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the World Society for the Protection of Animals, formed the Pilot Whale Campaign and started

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[24] http://www.ifaw.org/ifaw_united_states/media_center/press_releases/07_23_2008_41308.php
[25] http://uk.nanoq.gl/Emner/News/News_from_Government/2009/05/sealskin.aspx

targeting importers and retailers of Faroese products in Britain (and later on in Germany) in an attempt to stop the import of Faroese products. So far, the economic impact of these boycotts has been negligible. Politically, however, the effects have been massive. The campaign portrays the pilot whale hunt as a cruel sport and as the largest whale massacre in the world. In a letter to the Pilot Whalers' Association, the 24 animal welfare groups write that they will not be satisfied by any improvements in the animal welfare aspect of the hunt, and that their aim is to stop the hunt altogether. Critics also point out that, in addition to "extreme physical pain, the pilot whales also suffer considerable terror as they swim frantically in the blood of their pod mates and struggle against the hunters' hooks and knives".[26] The hunt is a barbaric medieval ritual that, as Paul Watson from Sea Shepherd has said, has no place in the modern world (see Ginkel 2005: 84).

The Faroese government and an overwhelming proportion of the Faroese population believe that the pilot-whale hunt should be preserved as an institution of traditional Faroese culture. Condemnation of the hunt by foreigners, they maintain, shows disrespect for the Faroese people and amounts to a form of meddling in the territory's internal affairs.[27]

Over the years, Denmark has been heavily criticised for not stopping the whale hunt. Hundreds of emails are send each month to the Prime Minister's office from affected individuals and numerous animal-rights, conservation and environmental groups have condemned the hunt as cruel and unnecessary. The Embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark in Berlin alone received about thousand postcards in May 2001 only from children who spoke out against the slaughter of the pilot whales.[28] Animal rights groups from around the world organize numerous petitions. They call on the Danish government to suspend the block grant to the Faroes until the hunt has

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[26] Faroe Islands Whale Hunt <http://advocacy.britannica.com/blog/advocacy/2010/04/the-faroe-islands-whale-hunt/>

[27] The Japanese government likewise asserts that the dolphin hunt in Taiji is an element of traditional Japanese seafood culture.

[28] http://ecop.info/english/e-faroe.htm

been abolished.

Especially since the Internet, images of hunters thrashing whales in a blood-red surf have been widely circulated. The images convey the impression that the hunt is deeply cruel. In addition, hundreds of amateur websites and individual blogs have been created, not always depicting correct information, but adding to the pressure on the Danish government to bring an end the whale hunt. One blogger simply writes "shame on you Denmark!".

During the International Tourism Exchange in Berlin in March 2002, the European Community on Protection of Marine Life (ECOP) asked people not to visit whaling nations. Therefore, the group approached Danish companies to pressure the government. It was unsuccessful, but wrote on its website: "Lego, one of the largest tax providers in Denmark, doesn't want to engage themselves to end the slaughter of the whales" (ECOP, 2002, not paginated). As a result, ECOP produces an alternative image of Denmark – a reconstructed bloody whale-hunting scene suing Lego toy bricks (Ooi 2002: 118-119).

In addition, the recent discovery of health problems related to the consumption of whale meat has been picked up by the bloggers and activists. In 2008, the Faroese Department of Public and Occupational Health found that the amount of mercury and PCBs in pilot whale meat and blubber was dangerous for human consumption.[29] While many Faroese abstain from eating pilot whales, still today, the average Faroese consumes 6 kg of whale meat per year.

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[29] During the past two decades, research, led by Dr. Pál Weihe of the Faroese Department of Public and Occupational Health, has been undertaken into the impact on the health of Faroese consumers of contaminants including mercury and PCBs, which are found in pilot whale meat and blubber. In August 2008, Dr. Weihe and Faroese Chief Medical Officer Dr. Høgni Debes Joensen issued a statement recommending that pilot whale no longer be used for human consumption due to the significant health threat it poses. The conclusion was based on studies that linked the consumption of pilot whale blubber and meat to neural damage and learning disabilities in Faroese children and to higher incidences of Parkinson's disease. In 2009 the Faroese government issued a statement in which it "noted these conclusions and research findings with concern" and called on the Food and Veterinary Agency to conduct an independent evaluation of the studies. Pending the results of the evaluation, it advised Faroese consumers to continue to observe the 1998 recommendations: "Without all these toxic contaminants, Faroese, who have hunted and eaten pilot whales for hundreds of years, long before the animals were contaminate, would be even smarter — and healthier".

In one private blogger's interpretation, this only adds to the argument against whaling: "Ironically, this practice, called grindadráp, is diminishing the population of 5,000 islanders. Many of them get sick and die from high mercury levels in the whales. Mentally retarded children are reportedly being born at alarmingly high rates."[30] In this way the Faroese are constituted double barbaric. They are barbaric because they engage in these "terrifying" hunts, using old Viking techniques, but they are also barbaric because they do not care about health problems and having mentally disabled children.

Why doesn't the Danish government outlaw pilot whale hunting? As the Faroes are not members of the EU, they are not subject to European legislation that forbids whale hunting. Moreover, the Faroese whale hunt is not subject to international control as it targets small species of whales (mainly pilot whales and some dolphin species) that the International Whaling Commission (IWC) does not currently manage. Therefore, there are no international legal mechanisms currently available to prevent the hunt.

Denmark receives much criticism internationally and whaling in the Faroes (and sealing in Greenland) damage Denmark's image. However, the Danish government nonetheless has not sought to outlaw whale hunting. Instead, shifting Danish governments, and with it the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have defended the Faroes whaling practices. In 2009, it produced a defence letter that were put on the websites of all Danish embassies explaining the "Faroese authorities take the animal welfare aspects of the hunt seriously". One can read on the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website:

> The pilot whale hunt in the Faroes is, by its very nature, a dramatic and bloody sight.
> Entire schools of whales are killed on the shore and in the shallows of bays with knives,
> which are used to sever the major blood supply to the brain. This is the most efficient and

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[30] The blog: The Cult of Death Fish <http://cultofthedeadfish.blogspot.com/2010/05/horrible-whale-and-dolphin-massacre.html>

humane means of killing these animals under the circumstances, but it naturally results in a lot of blood in the water. It is also understandable that there have been many strong reactions to media reports and pictures of the hunt in other countries, especially in urban communities, where most people have never actually been witness to the slaughtering processes from which their own meat derives.[31]

The discourse of the Danish government, however, is ambiguous. The Danish government (along with parts of the Faroese tourist industry) seeks to regulate, circumscribe and civilize the whale hunt. Behind the scenes Copenhagen puts the Faroes under continuous diplomatic pressure. However, the possible subject positions within the Danish realm are crucial. For Denmark to outright criticise the whaling would amount to rejecting Faroese self-rule. Yet by defending the Faroes against the rest of the world, Denmark is exactly taking up its position as the responsible… and colonial power. So the circle is squared. The double move of defending a particular Faroe subjectivity at the same time constitutes the Faroes as inferior and in need for help as well as constituting the Faroes as one single subject. The next section explores how this plays out in diplomatic practice.

DIPLOMATIC USE OF IRONY AND EMBARRASMENT

As a participant observer, I attended one of the half-yearly high-level meetings between Faroese and Danish civil servants on all foreign affairs matters relating to the Faroes.[32] The meeting took place on 11 February 2011. It reveals the complex negotiation of Faroese and Danish subject positions in face-to-face interactions. More specifically, they draw our attention to post-colonial embarrassment.

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[31] See for instance the website of the Danish Embassy in Brazil: http://www.ambbrasilia.um.dk/CMS.Web/Templates/Content%20Pages/DefaultPage.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID=%7B9E6194F8-86E7-43D5-9344-AA7766C7370B%7D&NRORIGINALURL=/en/servicemenu/News/CommentsRegardingProtestsAgainstFaroesePilotWhaling.htm&NRCACHEHINT=NoModifyGuest&printmode=True

[32] I was employed in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1 September 2010-1 September 2011.

The meeting does not take place in an ordinary meeting room, but in the "Executive Dining Room" the ceremonial meeting room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Copenhagen. The issue is pilot whale hunt. We are almost two thirds down the long agenda. 4 hours have already passed and we have reached the dessert. The two main figures in the meeting, the Directors of the Faroese and Danish Foreign Ministries, are seated in front of each other around an oval dining table. The Faroese and the Danish delegations are shouldering their respective leader. Everything is prepared down to the last details. Rituals ensure the smooth running of the meeting despite disagreements.

From the Danish side sits the representative from the Prime Minister's Office at the corner. She is present because general questions about the Home Rule agreements are the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office.[33] The Prime Minister's representative begins by asking whether, in light of the overwhelming media interest that the pilot hunt has received from international media and animal rights group, the Faroese government would "consider perhaps slightly revisiting some of the practices regarding the whale hunt?". The question leaves the room in silence.

We are four from the Danish delegation (including me, the observer) and eight from the Faroese side.[34] The Director of the Faroese Foreign Minister says "we follow international regulation on pilot whale hunting but we will not change because Greenpeace tells us so". He explains that handling the animal-rights organization Sea Shepherd and aggressive journalists are a matter for the police.[35] According to Paul Watson, the founder and leader of Sea Shepherd, who

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[33] The High Commissioners for Greenland and for the Faroe Islands are under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office.

[34] The question of Danish/Faroese balance is delicate and my participation has only been approved after the 6th floor has approved it. "We do not want to be seen as "overwhelming"" as the Danish official responsible for Faroese affairs explains to me before the meeting.

[35] Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) is an international non-profit, marine wildlife conservation organization with a mission "to end the destruction of habitat and slaughter of wildlife in the world's oceans

has visited the Faroes several times, to protest against the whaling, the hunters "literally saw through the animal's spine to kill them. People tend to drink a lot and it's a big party akin to the Roman gladiator games". The Faroese Director continues: "Of course, it is annoying with all the foreign journalists and activists that only come to the islands to take pictures of the bloody whale hunt". Yet the Faroes are not going to change their practices.

The matter is clearly not to be discussed further. However, somewhat unexpectedly, the Director of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs picks up the question. He says he has read – but of course the Faroese Foreign Minister should correct him if he is wrong – that eating pilot whale is bad for your health.

Again there is silence. The Faroe negotiator looks up and smiles: "Yes, that is true. We have found that there is too much mercury in the pilot whale". He pauses and the looks up:
"I have eaten a lot of pilot whale in my life". The chief negotiator from the Faroese delegation looks straight in the eyes of the Director of the Danish Foreign Ministry.

Silence. Then suddenly, the Faroese delegation burst into laughter. This is a sign of relief. The tension has been resolved. Also the Danish negotiator begins to laugh. Tongue in cheek, he says "ah yes… well… that explains something". A discussion breaks out between the eight members of the Faroese delegation (some speak in Danish some turn to Faroese). Who eats most pilot whale? That must be Arnfinn because he comes from that *bygd* (small village), which is known to do lots of pilot whale hunting. "He is also a bit nuts". Arnfinn laughs. The issue is no longer about how to handle the international criticism against the Faroese pilot whale hunt. Or whether Denmark, as the superior political authority and responsible for Faroese foreign relations has the right to question local practices of whale hunt. Through "inappropriate

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[…] Sea Shepherd uses innovative direct-action tactics to investigate, document, and take action when necessary to expose and confront illegal activities on the high seas", see http://www.seashepherd.org/who-we-are/

behaviour" Danish requests for changes to the pilot hunting practice have been rejected, at least at this meeting. Laughter has replaced the request from the former Danish coloniser to change whaling practices in order for the Danish state (and its dependencies) to safeguard their green and animal-friendly image.

The representative from the Prime Minister's Office tries one last time. She repeats that the Prime Minister receives many emails and requests every single day about this issue. However, the atmosphere has changed and the meeting continues. The question of Denmark's international image has been derailed by the effective instrumentalisation of post-colonial embarrassment. First by affirming that this is a question of respect for the Faroes – playing equals to "cover up" in the asymmetrical relationship between Denmark and Faroes, the order is enacted. However, by subsequently breaching the interaction order, using the "force of the weak" – which in the Danish post-colonial configurations means that only the subordinate are allowed to joke about themselves, the Faroese negotiator has steers the discussion away from the problem. By embarrassing himself and saying he is barbaric and brain damaged, prevented Denmark from disciplining the Faroes on the whaling issue.

The complex diplomatic face-work by Greenlandic, Faroese and Danish representatives and the use of postcolonial embarrassment shows that representatives from "weak" post-colonial dependencies can cope strategically with their subordinate position. Face-work is difficult because while the diplomats from Greenland, the Faroes and Denmark play with irony and embarrassment to achieve various goals in the negotiation process, there are limits as to how far one can go. The language of "hint" is critical to protect tact (Goffman, 1967: 30). Greenland's and the Faroes' breach must be a "hint" rather than an outright criticism. Otherwise goodwill is lost and Greenland or the Faroes will be considered "un-professional". At the same time

diplomats are also individuals who seek to control how others view them. Because of the (partial) merger between the national face and the individual face, humiliation and shame matter double in negotiations.

In sum, non-sovereign territories such as Greenland and the Faroes are not merely objects or victims; through diplomatic impression management they negotiate their subjectivity. Indeed, diplomatic interaction provides "weak agents" with greater room for manoeuvre than most existing accounts of inequalities or discriminative practices in international politics usually account for.

CONCLUSION

Diplomatic practices remain largely unchartered territory. Hitherto only a few studies proposing a distinct theoretical framework for diplomacy have been advanced. The aim of this paper has been to show that diplomacy can be analysed as impression management. I have argued for the value of zooming in on the everyday practices of those that represent states and other polities. Diplomacy develops its own social dynamics reflecting particular discourses about what is appropriate.

This paper has not sought to replace a structural reading of IR with a situational one. Structural constraints are crucial for the ways in which international politics take place. Weak actors, which depend heavily on aid from others, such as the self-governing former colonies of Greenland and the Faroes are placed in a subordinate position vis-à-vis others. Yet sometimes resistance is possible through creative face-work. Tracing these logics, I build on Goffman's work on avoidance of embarrassment. Through the instrumentalisation of post-colonial embarrassment vis-à-vis Denmark, Greenlandic representatives successfully managed to achieve an exemption to the EU's ban on seal products and Faroese diplomats were able to derail the

Danish attempt to regulate the controversial pilot whale hunting. While post-colonial embarrassment plays an important, but unrecognised, role in Danish international positions on wildlife, this is not necessarily the case in other situations. It requires that the former coloniser can be constituted as embarrassed. This study suggests, however, that diplomatic impression management may have implications for international politics that we have not fully understood.

I have suggested that face-to-face interaction provides us with insights into important yet neglected aspects of the ongoing diplomatic struggle to keep international order going. Within the diplomatic preference for status quo there is room for innovation. The problem with existing accounts of diplomacy in IR is that diplomats are seen as neutral messengers of the national interest. Accordingly, diplomacy is a medium of communication, not something that constructs and generates the world itself. This underestimates face-to-face interactions and the discrepancy between e.g. discourses of diplomacy they are portrayed in media and how they are enacted in daily practices. Crucially, once we begin to look at diplomacy in terms of social interaction we realise the importance of phenomena such as pride or embarrassment.

Symbolic interactionism offers insight into how hierarchy is socially negotiated and challenged on an everyday basis. Instead of interpreting interactions as a one-way disciplining process of a more powerful West vis-à-vis weaker partners (see Schimmelfennig, 2002), Goffman explores the negotiation of social order as a two-sided process. This interaction is crucial to the success or failure of attempts at enforcing order.[36] A practice approach begins with human exchanges and explores how such exchanges constitute differences and how the diplomat

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[36] Goffman-inspired analysis thus differs from post-structuralist inquiries into the construction of a threatening "other". This other may be constructed as an existential threat, as securitization theory demonstrates (Buzan et al., 1998), but it may also be seen as violating universal principles or merely as being different than the self (Diez, 2005). The "othering" process can be understood as an act of defining and placing the "other" outside the boundaries of the self (Neumann, 1999: 1-37).

manages this difference through situated and often non-textual practices.[37] Consequently, it provides detailed understanding not only of the discursive preconditions for diplomatic practices but also of how social hierarchies are produced and handled strategically.

More generally, I would suggest that a practice approach to diplomacy offers an alternative to orthodoxies about international politics promoted by top-down theories such as realism, liberalism and (much of) constructivism. Without sensibility to social dynamics such as impression management we are unable to demystify airy suprahuman realities in international politics. Seeing diplomacy as impression management does not imply doing away with understanding diplomacy as a (Western) institution or ignoring its epistemic function as a way of knowing and ordering the world. Rather, what I suggest is that the abstract notions need to be supplemented by a view of how diplomacy plays out in practice. Goffman allows us to comprehend the normal, diffuse ubiquity of power while, at the same time, recognising the everyday performances of individuals, groups and other agents.

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[37] The difference may also be conceptualized, albeit in simplified terms, as Ian Hacking has done: "Foucault proposed his various ideas of a structure that determines discourse and action from the top down. Goffman gave us the local incidents and idiosyncrasies that lead us from the bottom up. (Hacking, 2004: 288).

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