



Review

By Rebecka Villanueva Ulfgard*

Antonio Alejo Jaime, *Política global y sociedad civil en las Américas. Nuevas diplomacias en Argentina y México*, Madrid, Catarata, 2017, 320 pp.

The study of diplomacy has principally focused on relations between states and the protocols and conventions that govern the negotiations between them as they support foreign policy. Since the start of this millennium, a new body of literature has been generated focusing on new types of diplomacy called *new diplomacies*. For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Diplomacy*¹ and *The Sage Handbook of Diplomacy*,² academics and former diplomats write about digital, cultural and humanitarian diplomacy, as well as the diplomacy of cities, transnational businesses, NGOs, and celebrities, just to mention a few. There are also strategies for scientific diplomacy and of innovation, and the diplomacy of sports and of gastronomy, and feminist diplomacy, as well as endless others.

However, with this tendency towards the “inflation” of the concept of diplomacy, one can consider that if everything is diplomacy, then diplomacy now means nothing useful, and we might just as well discontinue the use of the term. Indeed, Shaun Riordan, former diplomat of the Unit-

* This review was originally written in Spanish. English translation by Luisa Fernanda Salazar Figueras.

¹ Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine y Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

² Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London, SAGE, 2016.

ed Kingdom and current visiting researcher at the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands, in an article published in 2017, exclaimed, “Stop inventing” new diplomacies.³ Riordan contends that the new diplomacies are being invented with triviality, without taking the term or the concept of diplomacy seriously. This creates a great deal of confusion between agency, the process and the subject. Worrying, he argues, is that diplomacy and diplomatic studies are losing meaning. The debates are moving further away from concerns of “real” diplomats and their daily work. The greatest danger of the new diplomacies, according to Riordan, is that it is believed that they are their own end, without taking into consideration that any form of diplomacy must be part of a broader diplomatic strategy: diplomacy is practiced to achieve political goals that are not narrowly limited to a single cause, either by state or non-state actors. However, Riordan disagrees with the critics that affirm that diplomacy is only what is done by government diplomats; in other words, anyone who does any of the actions covered by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations is a diplomat. Instead, he claims that it deals with adopting a “diplomatic” mentality. In this respect, he indicates that diplomats have a peculiar way of “being” in the world. Diplomats see the world in shades of gray; they act as conciliators that tend to search for an acceptable solution instead of an ideal one. They are extremely good at imagining themselves in the positions of others. Moreover, he concludes that if a non-diplomatic and non-governmental actor acts and “sees” the world in a “diplomatic” manner, then he should be considered a diplomat.

In response to the debate that arose after Riordan’s article was published, Philip Conway, an investigator in the department of International Politics at the University of Aberystwyth, argues, from a different perspective, that: “Within the academy at least, the decolonisation of diplomacy has barely begun”.⁴ He affirms that: “Questioning the varieties of diplo-

³ Shaun Riordan, “Stop Inventing New Diplomacies”, in CPD Blog, June 21, 2017, in <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/stop-inventing-new-diplomacies> (retrieved on April 18, 2018).

⁴ Philip Conway, “Enough of ‘New’ Diplomacies: Reclaiming the Diplomatic Pluriverse”, in *Diplo*, January 22, 2018, in <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/enough-%E2%80%98new%E2%80%99-diplomacies-reclaiming-diplomatic-pluriverse> (retrieved on April 18, 2018).

macy is not just an idle intellectual debate. It is a matter of sovereignty and existential recognition. In other words, we are talking about matters of diplomatic ontology – what kinds of beings can be recognised as legitimate parties to diplomatic engagement?”. Conway points out that, ultimately, it is necessary to understand that the general conception of diplomacy is part of western, state-centric ontology and that it is a product of historical circumstances. Voices from the so-called Global South have argued that during “the expansion of the international society” (that is to say European colonialism), the non-whites and non-westerners could not be agents of diplomacy until “[they] were converted into something recognizable, yet inferior to the European standard”. This author argues that the modes of negotiation relating to commerce and conflict resolution that were not adjusted to established norms not only could not be accepted as legitimate, but also could barely be accepted as existent; thus, as their demands were not recognized as legitimate, a deep questioning of the topic of agency in national and international politics is necessitated.

As Antonio Alejo Jaime explains in his book, paraphrasing the French internationalist Bertrand Badie, the current era is one of *social appropriation of diplomacy*. Other observers, like Costas M. Constantinou, Noé Cornago and Fiona McConnell⁵ hold that, instead of seeing this pluralization of diplomatic actors in negative terms as the deprofessionalization of diplomacy, these tendencies are actually examples of a *transprofessionalization*, meaning, the result of a particular process that reflects the enlarged diplomatic space and an accelerated rhythm of global interconnections and networks, and the new possibilities that are unleashed to practice diplomacy by different actors. Undoubtedly, the current complexity of global politics causes confrontation with the necessity to rethink the diplomacy of the twenty first century, above all, to democratize it. Effectively, many of the actors called *multistakeholders*, the civil society, representatives of regional and international organizations, academics, and the private sector, that figure into the diplomacy of networks (network diplomacy) are precisely examples of transprofessional-

⁵ Costas M. Constantinou; Noé Cornago and Fiona McConnell, “Transprofessional Diplomacy”, in *Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2016, pp. 1-66.

ized agents that maintain their specific professional identities, but have developed their own expertise about some topic in particular by means of learning and a record of the incidents they experience. The exercise of this complementary identity in multilateral forums is just a reflection of trans-professionalization.

In the book *Global Politics and Civil Society in the Americas: New Diplomacies in Argentina and Mexico*, Alejo Jaime makes clear that it is not only valuable, but also an urgent necessity, to promote dialogue with other disciplines to rethink the study, explanations, diagnoses, and possible solutions to contemporary world problems. This book contributes, in the Mexican and foreign context, to opening horizons and confidently crossing the disciplinary barriers in favour of discussions between academics, diplomats, and activists about the new manners of understanding the current interconnections between local and global political processes. Accordingly, this work, that is located at the intersection between theories of International Relations and Sociology (having its focus on collective action), offers “integral, transversal, and complementary perspectives for the analysis of the narrative and organizational practices of the NGOs in the Americas, more so than that which methodological nationalism offers” (p. 13), moving beyond orthodox disciplinarity.

Alejo Jaime places a relevant concern in the study of politics and global politics in focus for rigorous examination when he signals that local-global (inter)actions in distinct scales and rhythms reflect their simultaneity in Argentina and Mexico that intensely experience contemporary globalization, from observing the multiplicity of non-state actors that are involved in regional and global political spaces and processes that were, until recently, exclusive of states. With this understanding, Alejo Jaime identifies and analyzes the “organizational and discursive strategies” (p. 13) of four NGOs: Equipo Pueblo, which is based and operates in Mexico and has a broad focus on human rights; Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB), which is concerned with issues of the indigenous peoples; and Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) and the Organización de Naciones y Pueblos Indígenas en Argentina (ONPIA). The author details the strategies each of these NGOs uses to reach their objectives of furthering a new type of diplomacy, placing foremost the interests of some particular groups of society, and what their practices are, out of

the new types of diplomacies, in multilateral forums/transnational spaces, which are studied in chapter 3 of the book, including: the Meeting of Civil Society of the European Union-Latin America of the summit European Union-Latin America-The Caribbean, The Civic Meeting of the Iberoamerican Summit, and the Social Summit of Mercosur. He simultaneously examines the mechanisms implemented in the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Mexico and the Minister of Foreign Relations and Worship of Argentina in order to incorporate civil society in foreign policy processes.

It would have been interesting to read a discussion with a more critical approach towards what the afore-mentioned NGOs really do during these multilateral summits. Actually, these organizations perform lobbying and actions of social impact, like representing the interests of particular groups, but they do not do diplomacy, in the traditional sense of the term. One could then wonder if the actors that figure in Alejo Jaime's book could make an effort to present themselves as more "legitimate" or "efficient" actors when interacting with diplomats at the national level or in multilateral forums. It might, however, be appropriate to wonder why it "should" be necessary to seek consent, if it is already a fact that the "subjectivization" of diplomacy is part of a general tendency, namely, the individualization of practically all societal spheres. Although it is possible to say that the world is currently undergoing a postnational political era, it is uncertain whether governments will stop playing the "national interest" card in multinational forums. If not, a certain idealism might conflict with *realpolitik*, but this conflict can be "smoothed" by the presence of new diplomacies, above all, citizen diplomacy.

Even though the book is repetitive at times, it presents an enriching reading that allows readers to understand in detail the phenomena and objects of study, such as the diversity of disciplinary focuses that bring a "fresh" and critical view to these topics. Nothing more remains except to congratulate Alejo Jaime for making a unique and valuable contribution to the construction of bridges between different disciplines in the academic world and serving as a basis for the debates between diplomats, officials, activists, experts and academics about the democratization of foreign policy through new diplomacies for regional and global politics.