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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bureaucracy and the everyday practices of contested state diplomacy: The paradigmatic case of Kosovo

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Abstract

The representatives of contested states – that is, territories whose claim to sovereign statehood is not, or is not fully, recognised by the international society of states – often make significant efforts to engage in diplomacy. Two literatures have recently begun to explore these diplomatic activities, one focusing on the 'rebel diplomacy' of insurgents and secessionist movements, the other on 'liminal actors' in global politics. However, these two literatures have defined the phenomenon in very different ways, namely, as either instrumental action or cultural performance, and study it largely without regard to each other's insights. My argument in this article is that contested state diplomacy can be better understood if we appreciate the nature of modern diplomacy as a set of bureaucratic practices. As a routinised process within a bureaucratic organisation, modern diplomacy both gives rise to specific decisions and sustains the reality of the state as the locus of legitimate power. The representatives of contested states therefore have strong reasons to set up more or less rudimentary bureaucracies for their diplomacy. I use the history of Kosovo's foreign policy institutions as a paradigmatic case to demonstrate how everyday bureaucratic practices fuse instrumental action and cultural performance and further theorise the interplay of 'political' and 'technical' conduct in contested state diplomacy.

Keywords: Bureaucracy; Contested States; Cultural Performance; Diplomacy; International Practices; Kosovo; Statehood

Introduction

As the Albanians of Kosovo began struggling for greater autonomy within Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and soon thereafter for their own independent state, they quickly realised that they could achieve their political aims only if they engaged in some form of diplomacy. Ibrahim Rugova's non-violent resistance movement made considerable efforts to 'internationalise' the Kosovo issue, to engage with various governments and to establish a network of unofficial representative offices abroad.[1] Likewise, the Kosovo Liberation Army, which entered the political stage in the mid-1990s, understood that armed resistance without diplomatic negotiations would not deliver independence.[2] Between 1999 to 2008, when the United Nations administered the territory, Kosovo's political leaders continued these diplomatic efforts to steer a process that was intended

[1]Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2000); Alex J. Bellamy, *Kosovo and International Society* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2002); Marc Weller, *Contested Statehood: Kosovo's Struggle for Independence* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2]Henry H. Perritt, *Kosovo Liberation Army: The Inside Story of an Insurgency* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008); James Pettifer, *The Kosova Liberation Army: Underground War to Balkan Insurgency, 1948–2001* (London, UK: Hurst & Company, 2012).

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to shape Kosovo's political status in the direction of independent statehood.[3] When Kosovo ultimately declared independence in 2008, its government not only sought to formalise its political ties to states that were willing to recognise its sovereign statehood, but it also swiftly proceeded to establish a professional diplomatic service. Other groups struggling for independence pursue strikingly similar strategies. The governments of 'contested states',[4] such as Abkhazia, Palestine, Somaliland, South Ossetia, Tibet, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, or Western Sahara, all try to participate in diplomacy in order to represent their polity and its claim to independence and legal recognition on the international stage.[5]

Why exactly do the representatives of contested states like Kosovo make such efforts to engage in diplomacy? Two different and so far largely unconnected literatures in the disciplines of International Relations (IR) and Human Geography give two different answers. One literature is concerned with secessionist movements and insurgencies, their strategies and the causal factors that determine their success or failure.[6] In this literature, 'rebel' or 'insurgent' diplomacy is seen as a strategy used by the representatives of secessionist territories to negotiate the terms of their independence with their 'parent state' and to convince other states to support their struggle politically and materially. The other literature focuses on the practices of 'liminal' actors in international politics and sees the diplomacy of contested states as a cultural performance aimed at gaining recognition, if not as sovereign state, then at least as a legitimate participant in a political process.[7] Prima facie both arguments appear plausible. Both the need to negotiate specific agreements and the desire to assert oneself as a legitimate actor on the world stage appear to provide strong reasons for the representatives of contested states to engage in diplomacy. But how do these two accounts relate to each other? What are the actual reasons that motivate the representatives of contested states to engage in diplomacy? And how can we reconcile the contrasting

[3]James Ker-Lindsay, *Kosovo: The Path to Contested Statehood in the Balkans* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Iain King and Whit Mason, *Peace at Any Price: How the World Failed Kosovo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[4]Various terms like 'de facto state', 'quasi-state', and 'unrecognised state' are used to describe political entities whose representatives aspire to fully recognised sovereign statehood. While acknowledging the analytical value of different vocabularies for different research problems, in this article I opt for the term 'contested state' to avoid judgement on the political, legal, or normative status of the respective claim to statehood and highlight its contested nature. For an extensive discussion of the terminological alternatives, see Deon Geldenhuys, *Contested States in World Politics* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), ch. 1; on the phenomenon generally, see Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Oxford, UK: Polity, 2012); Adrian Florea, 'De facto states: Survival and disappearance (1945–2011)', *International Studies Quarterly*, 61:2 (2017), pp. 337–51.

[5]For an overview, see Gëzim Visoka, John Doyle, and Edward Newman (eds), *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020).

[6]See, for example, Bridget Coggins, 'Friends in high places: International politics and the emergence of states from secessionism', *International Organization*, 65:3 (2011), pp. 433–67; Bridget Coggins, 'Rebel diplomacy: Theorizing violent non-state actors' strategic use of talk', in Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 98–118; Reyko Huang, 'Rebel diplomacy in civil war', *International Security*, 40:4 (2016), pp. 89–126; Morgan L. Kaplan, 'Persuading power: Insurgent diplomacy and the international politics of rebellion' (PhD thesis, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2016).

[7]See, for example, Dimitris Bouris and Irene Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states, hybrid diplomatic practices, and the everyday quest for recognition', *International Political Sociology*, 12:3 (2018), pp. 306–24; Fiona McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics: The subjectivity and spatiality of diplomacy at the margins', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42:1 (2017), pp. 139–52; Fiona McConnell, 'Performing diplomatic decorum: Repertoires of "appropriate" behavior in the margins of international diplomacy', *International Political Sociology*, 12:4 (2018), pp. 362–81; Edward Newman and Gëzim Visoka, 'The foreign policy of state recognition: Kosovo's diplomatic strategy to join international society', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 14:3 (2018), pp. 367–87; Andreas Pacher, 'The diplomacy of post-soviet de facto states: Ontological security under stigma', *International Relations*, 33:4 (2019), pp. 563–85; Gëzim Visoka, *Acting like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018); Gëzim Visoka, 'Metis diplomacy: The everyday politics of becoming a sovereign state', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54:2 (2019), pp. 167–90; Tobias Wille, 'Representation and agency in diplomacy: How Kosovo came to agree to the Rambouillet Accords', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22:4 (2019), pp. 808–31.

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conceptions of the actor that inform the two accounts – namely, fully constituted and rational in the first case, liminal and in a state of becoming in the second?

My argument in this article is that contested state diplomacy cannot be fully understood without appreciating the nature of modern diplomacy as a set of bureaucratic practices. As a routinised process embedded in a bureaucratic organisation, modern diplomacy produces both its own reality, a reality of objective state interest and prudent policymaking, and specific decisions. In this process, instrumental action and cultural performance are always fused from the outset. Every strategic decision reaffirms the reality of the state as a rational actor and every performance of sovereign statehood proceeds through specific acts that are oriented towards particular instrumental goals. The (often very much improvised) everyday administration of the foreign policy of contested states can thus be seen as aspiring to produce both concrete policy as well as the reality of the state: it is instrumental action and cultural performance at once. This insight sheds light on the diplomacy of contested states by relating their specific policy interests to their existential struggle for recognition as a political actor. It also has broader implications for how we should make sense of diplomacy as one of the constitutive practices of international politics.

To elaborate this argument and explore its implications for the study of contested states and their diplomacy, I will proceed as follows. First, I will review the literature on the diplomacy of contested states and distinguish two perspectives; one that understands contested state diplomacy as instrumental action, the other as cultural performance. Second, I will elaborate an account of modern diplomacy that conceives of the latter as a set of bureaucratic practices with a particular history. Within this framework, we can appreciate the struggles of contested states to make their voice heard in diplomacy as both instrumental action and cultural performance. Third, I will use the formation of Kosovo's foreign policy bureaucracy in the years 2008 to 2012, that is, after the territory declared independence, as a paradigmatic case to examine the plausibility of this account and further theorise the interplay of instrumental action and cultural performance in the diplomatic practices of contested states. In the conclusion, I will summarise my findings and discuss some implications for the literatures on contested state diplomacy and the 'regular' diplomacy of established states.

The diplomacy of contested states

Traditionally, IR scholars have understood 'diplomacy' either simply as communication between governments[8] or as an institution that regulates relations within the international society of states.[9] Given this state-centric outlook, it is no surprise that the activities of contested states have received scant attention from IR scholars studying diplomacy.[10] This lack of interest in contested state diplomacy has been mirrored by the scholarly community studying insurgencies and secessionist movements, whose members largely focused on the internal dynamics within contested states, rather than on their diplomatic activities, to explain their success or failure.[11] In recent years, however, two largely unconnected literatures have emerged that address the

[8]See, for example, Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (eds), *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003); Robert D. Putnam, 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: The logic of two-level games', *International Organization*, 42:3 (1988), pp. 427–60.

[9]See, for example, Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (3rd edn, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002); Adam Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States* (London, UK: Eyre Methuen, 1982).

[10]On this point, see Fiona McConnell, Terri Moreau, and Jason Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy: The legitimizing strategies of unofficial diplomacies', *Geoforum*, 43:4 (2012), pp. 804–14 (p. 805); Francis Owtram, 'The foreign policies of unrecognized states', in Nina Caspersen and Gareth R. V. Stansfield (eds), *Unrecognized States in the International System* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 128–43 (pp. 132–5).

[11]See Coggins, 'Friends in high places', p. 435; James Ker-Lindsay, *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 3.

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diplomatic activities of contested states – one focuses on the strategies of secessionist movements and insurgent groups, the other on the performances of liminal actors in global politics.[12] In this section, I will discuss these two literatures and contrast their respective understandings of contested state diplomacy.

The first literature is concerned with the strategies employed by insurgent groups and secessionist movements and the causal factors that determine their success or failure. Viewed from this perspective, contested states use diplomacy to win the support of other state and non-state actors and to negotiate agreements with their 'parent state'. If one embraces such an understanding of contested state diplomacy, however, the differences in power and capabilities between unrecognised and established states may appear unsurmountable. It is thus no surprise that in earlier contributions to this literature, the success or failure of secessionist movements has generally not been attributed to differences in their own diplomatic strategies, but to the interests of great powers.[13] Only recently have some studies begun to highlight how diplomacy may serve secessionist movements and insurgent groups in their struggle for independence and statehood and thus how their diplomatic prowess may contribute to their success or failure.[14] It has also been observed that contested states that establish bureaucratic organisations for their foreign policy have better odds of survival, and of ultimately achieving international recognition, than those that do not.[15]

By conceiving of diplomacy as a means employed by contested states in their struggle for full statehood and universal legal recognition, the contributions to this literature subscribe to a fairly conventional understanding of diplomacy as the strategic use of communication to realise a defined political end. The only way in which its conception departs from the traditional notion of diplomacy in IR is by allowing for a particular kind of non-state actor to engage in it as well. 'Rebel diplomacy' is thus understood as 'a rebel group's conduct of foreign affairs during civil war for the purpose of advancing its military and political objectives'.[16] It is simply the 'strategic use of talk' by which insurgents complement their otherwise mostly violent repertoire of interaction with the outside world.[17] This perspective implies that contested states are stable and already constituted social actors to which we can attribute interests and means-ends calculations. If social construction plays a role in these accounts at all, it is limited to the 'perceived legitimacy' of the insurgent group, which is assumed to be a necessary precondition for their territories to ultimately be recognised by the great powers as a sovereign and independent state.[18]

The second literature is concerned with liminal actors in global politics 'who exist "betwixt and between" state and non-state categories' and occupy spaces at the margins of the state system.[19] It studies how various groups struggle for recognition as actors of international politics and emphasises the performative nature of diplomacy. In the eyes of its authors, mimicking the 'official' diplomacy of established states is a strategy used by contested states to legitimise their political claims and assert their status as participants in the political process in the first place.[20] On this account, diplomacy is 'largely a pre-mediated theatrical performance'[21] that as 'a communicative act … is

[12]While both literatures are interested in roughly the same phenomenon, the groups of actors they study are not identical. The first literature is interested only in those contested states that are involved in armed struggle. The second literature casts its net wider and also includes non-violent movements that aspire to independent statehood.

[13]Coggins, 'Friends in high places'; Mikulas Fabry, *Recognizing States: International Society and the Establishment of New States since 1776* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[14]Coggins, 'Rebel diplomacy'; Huang, 'Rebel diplomacy'; Kaplan, 'Persuading power'.

[15]Florea, 'De facto states', p. 349.

[16]Huang, 'Rebel diplomacy', p. 90.

[17]Coggins, 'Rebel diplomacy', p. 99.

[18]Huang, 'Rebel diplomacy', p. 103; see also Coggins, 'Rebel diplomacy'; Lee J. M. Seymour, 'Legitimacy and the politics of recognition in Kosovo', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28:4–5 (2017), pp. 817–38.

[19]McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics', p. 143.

[20]McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy'.

[21]Visoka, 'Metis diplomacy', p. 179.

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underpinned by codified and uncodified rules of behavior, from set forms of address to elaborate protocols surrounding diplomatic events, and long-established expectations regarding the tone of oral and written exchanges'.[22] With their focus on the interplay of performance and political agency, these studies pay less attention to the particular content of the policies the actors pursue and more to the cultural form of their articulation.

The latter literature on liminal actors makes two important observations. On the one hand, the representatives of contested states acknowledge the explicit and implicit rules of diplomacy as the 'gold standard'[23] and aspire to follow them closely to strengthen their statehood and become 'recognizable entities in world politics'.[24] By engaging in diplomatic practices, they assert their agency[25] and strategically position themselves *vis-à-vis* their 'parent state' and other adversarial actors that want to block their way to sovereign statehood[26] or even seek to reverse the gains already made.[27] On the other hand, studies of liminal actors in diplomacy have shown that their performances also have a creative and possibly even subversive side. The representatives of contested states resourcefully appropriate the practices of diplomacy and blend them with other political repertoires such as activism and advocacy.[28] Diplomatic performances are thus not the exclusive purview of established states; they can also 'be tactically performed by entities that challenge the composition and status of the interstate system'.[29] Insofar as they shift what it means to practice diplomacy, the diplomatic practices of contested states can thus be said to exhibit 'structure-generating properties'.[30]

The growing interest in contested state diplomacy among scholars of IR and Human Geography coincides with the emergence of a larger body of scholarly work that strives for a novel perspective on diplomacy.[31] In the context of the 'practice turn' in IR,[32] over the last decade IR scholars have sought to understand how diplomacy contributes to the making of global order.[33] A number of human geographers have enriched this debate by theorising diplomacy

[22]McConnell, 'Diplomatic decorum', p. 363.

[23]McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy', p. 805.

[24]Visoka, 'Metis diplomacy', p. 173.

[25]Visoka, *Acting like a State*; Visoka, 'Metis diplomacy'; Wille, 'Representation'.

[26]Newman and Visoka, 'State recognition'.

[27]Gëzim Visoka, 'The derecognition of states', in Visoka, Doyle, and Newman (eds), *Handbook of State Recognition*, pp. 316–32.

[28]Bouris and Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states'; Costas M. Constantinou, Noé Cornago, and Fiona McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy', *Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, 1:4 (2016), pp. 1–66; McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics'.

[29]McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy', p. 811.

[30]Bouris and Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states', pp. 309–13.

[31]Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell, 'Introduction: Reconceptualising diplomatic cultures', in Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell (eds), *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics: Translations, Spaces and Alternatives* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–20; Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, 'Introduction', in Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–28.

[32]Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International practices', *International Theory*, 3:1 (2011), pp. 1–36; Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, 'The play of international practice', *International Studies Quarterly*, 59:3 (2015), pp. 449–60.

[33]See, for example, Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Kristin Anabel Eggeling, 'Blended diplomacy: The entanglement and contestation of digital technologies in everyday diplomatic practice', *European Journal of International Relations*, 28:3 (2022), pp. 640–66; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Alena Drieschova, 'Track-change diplomacy: Technology, affordances and the practice of international negotiations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 63:3 (2019), pp. 531–45; Federica Bicchi, 'Communities of practice and what they can do for International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 48:1 (2022), pp. 24–43; Ingvild Bode, 'Reflective practices at the Security Council: Children and armed conflict and the three United Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24:2 (2018), pp. 293–318; Jérémie Cornut, 'Diplomacy, agency, and the logic of improvisation and virtuosity in practice', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24:3 (2018), pp. 712–36; Maren Hofius, 'Community at the border or the boundaries of community? The case of EU field diplomats', *Review of International Studies*, 42:5 (2016), pp. 939–67; Deepak Nair, 'Saving face in diplomacy: A political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 25:3 (2019), pp. 672–97;

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with a special focus on space and spatiality.[34] These scholars have placed particular emphasis on the cultural forms that diplomacy assumes but have also explored its changing functions and rationalities.[35] Studying contested state diplomacy has the potential to advance this larger literature in at least two ways. First, the conduct of contested states itself represents an important and so far understudied set of diplomatic practices. Second, the diplomatic activities of contested states are also relevant for theorising diplomacy as such because the obstacles they face offer a very illuminating perspective on the standards of competent conduct in diplomacy and the relations of power inscribed in them.[36]

Performing rationality through bureaucracy

Notwithstanding the differences between the literatures on rebel diplomacy and on liminal actors in global politics, it is possible to bring them into a productive dialogue. For this purpose, it is helpful to consider the rationalisation process that gave rise to the modern state and with it to modern diplomacy. Against the background of this historical process, it becomes clear that the two literatures articulate consistent but partial accounts of contested state diplomacy. A comprehensive view that incorporates both perspectives can help us better understand why contested states engage in diplomacy, their strategies, and ultimately also the effects of contested state diplomacy on the global political order.

Diplomacy understood as the 'mediation of estrangement' between groups who wish to coexist while remaining separate is as old as human history.[37] In its modern form, however, diplomacy co-evolved with the sovereign nation state.[38] Important steps in this process were the invention of permanent embassies in Renaissance Italy, the emergence of foreign ministries, the increasing professionalisation of what had previously been a pastime of the aristocracy and the merging of diplomatic and the consular services in a single bureaucratic organisation. While rehashing this history in its entirety would go beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that the institutionalisation and professionalisation of diplomacy forms part of a much larger rationalisation process that shaped the modern world.[39] As Costas M. Constantinou et al. incisively argue, the historical process that gave diplomacy its modern form can be comprehended as 'a process of functional differentiation of the modern diplomatic system within the wider social system of global modernity, similar to what happened in other domains such as law, accountancy, education or art'.[40]

Vincent Pouliot, 'Historical institutionalism meets practice theory: Renewing the selection process of the United Nations Secretary-General', *International Organization*, 74:4 (2020), pp. 742–72; see Costas M. Constantinou et al., 'Thinking with diplomacy: Within and beyond practice theory', *International Political Sociology*, 15:4 (2021), pp. 559–87.

[34]See, for example, Jason Dittmer, *Diplomatic Material: Affect, Assemblage, and Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Merje Kuus, 'Political economies of transnational fields: Harmonization and differentiation in European diplomacy', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 6:2 (2018), pp. 222–39; McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics'; McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer, 'State diplomacy'.

[35]There are strong affinities in theoretical outlook and scholarly sensibility between the literature on liminal actors and the practice turn, see, for example, Bouris and Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states', pp. 309–13; McConnell, 'Diplomatic decorum', pp. 365–69. The gulf between the largely neopositivist community studying rebel diplomacy and the postpositivist practice turn is much deeper; in this article I intend to show how it can nonetheless be bridged.

[36]On this research strategy, see McConnell, 'Diplomatic decorum', pp. 377–8.

[37]Costas M. Constantinou, *On the Way to Diplomacy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987); Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[38]Matthew S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London, UK: Longman, 1993); Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy'; Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), ch. 2.

[39]See Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[40]Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy', p. 22.

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Against the backdrop of this historical process of rationalisation, it becomes apparent how diplomacy as state action and as state performance became intertwined. On the one hand, diplomacy was reframed as instrumental action. Governments increasingly came to rely on a bureaucratic process to acquire knowledge about the political views of other governments and of various publics, to become aware of their own geopolitical interests, identify possible courses of action, weigh their prospects, make decisions, and carry them out. Viewed from this perspective, governments use their foreign ministries and other bureaucratic units as 'a set of tools for interaction with their external environments and for the implementation of their international policy objectives'.[41] Diplomats feature in this story as 'knowledge workers' who within the bureaucracies produce and maintain a particular kind of practical knowledge about the views and intentions of their foreign counterparts,[42] but also as professional representatives who communicate and negotiate on behalf of their governments.[43] As members of a profession, diplomats collectively cultivate the knowledge and skills that these tasks require.[44] In doing so, they 'depoliticise' diplomacy, that is, turn it into an activity that is not driven by partisan agendas but is governed by objective standards of professional conduct.[45]

On the other hand, these bureaucratic practices through which states know and act in international politics are themselves cultural performances that produce and reaffirm the reality of the state.[46] A number of studies have demonstrated how diplomats carefully stage their actions.[47] While these studies highlight how diplomacy is conducted as an outward-facing performance, it is important to note that diplomacy generates meaning not only for the various publics that are observing it, but also for those who are participating in it. Foreign ministries and other organisations provide an environment that allows diplomats 'to go on going on'.[48] The bureaucracy offers categories through which they can make sense of their situation and a script that guides them through their everyday life. This also includes rules and expectations about how diplomats are supposed to manage and express their emotions.[49] Just like the heroic act on the international stage,[50] mundane bureaucratic work as a performance, furthermore, has its own aesthetics. It is, however, an aesthetics that rests on repetition more than on the extraordinary and that soothes

[41]Brian Hocking, 'The ministry of foreign affairs and the national diplomatic system', in Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman (eds), *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 123–40 (p. 123).

[42]Neumann, *At Home*, ch. 3; see also Noé Cornago, 'Diplomatic knowledge', in Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr, and Paul Sharp (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy* (London, UK: Sage, 2016), pp. 133–46; Pablo de Orellana, 'Retrieving how diplomacy writes subjects, space and time: A methodological contribution', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26:2 (2020), pp. 469–94; Merje Kuus, 'Diplomacy and audit: Technologies of knowledge in Europe', *Geoforum*, 68 (2016), pp. 39–47.

[43]Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, 'Communication: An essential aspect of diplomacy', *International Studies Perspectives*, 4:2 (2003), pp. 195–210; Neumann, *At Home*, ch. 4.

[44]Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann, 'Introduction'. Diplomacy, however, remains a 'weak' profession, since its members never succeeded in fully insulating their domain of activity from outsiders; see Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy', pp. 20–1.

[45]Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy', pp. 8–10.

[46]I take cultural performance to be 'the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation'; Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy', *Sociological Theory*, 22:4 (2004), pp. 527–73 (p. 529).

[47]See, for example, McConnell, 'Diplomatic decorum'; Nair, 'Saving face'; Erik Ringmar, 'Performing international systems: Two East Asian alternatives to the Westphalian Order', *International Organization*, 66:1 (2012), pp. 1–25.

[48]Neumann, *At Home*, p. 95.

[49]Deepak Nair, 'Emotional labor and the power of international bureaucrats', *International Studies Quarterly*, 64:3 (2020), pp. 573–87.

[50]Diplomacy attracts most attention when it is staged as a spectacular event or saves the day in a situation of crisis; see Corneliu Bjola and Costas M. Constantinou, 'Diplomatic challenges in a crisis world', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 10:1 (2015), pp. 1–3. But even these extraordinary occurrences usually play out within bureaucratic structures and are preceded by extensive bureaucratic preparations; see Iver B. Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending, 'Performing statehood through crises: Citizens, strangers, territory', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6:1 (2021), pp. 1–16.

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rather than excites.[51] As a consequence, in bureaucratic practices what can and should be done and by whom becomes self-evident to the diplomatic actors and observing publics alike.

As Iver B. Neumann has shown through his ethnographic work in the Norwegian foreign ministry, diplomats in their bureaucratic practices perform 'small we's' and 'large we's': the 'we' of the unit in the ministry, the 'we' of the whole ministry, but also the 'we' of their entire state.[52] Because the assessments, recommendations, and decisions of professional diplomats are produced through practices of rational and objective administration, they acquire an aura of authority.[53] In this sense, foreign ministries are 'objectivity machines' that create 'the illusion of even, unmediated, and rational vision',[54] an illusion that then also lends credence to the diplomatic performance. The bureaucratic routines in a foreign ministry are thus among the 'mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation' that on Timothy's Mitchell's account draw a line that separates the state from other structures of power such as society or the economy.[55] What they also do is distinguish the external relations of the state from the diffuse webs of global governance and global civil society. Mundane bureaucratic performances of diplomacy make the state appear on the international stage as an actor with a unique identity and discernable interests.

However, the instrumental and symbolic potential of diplomacy is not equally accessible to any polity. To understand why, it is helpful to consider the literature on statehood and bureaucracy in the Global South.[56] It shows how different techniques of controlling territory and populations, as well as symbolic repertoires for expressing sovereignty, have been diffused, interpreted, and appropriated across the globe.[57] Many of these techniques and repertoires were transposed from the European colonial powers to their colonies and later through practices of 'development' from the north to the Global South.[58] The practices of modern diplomacy are among them. On Neumann's account, the 'practices of European diplomacy have spread to third parties' in other parts of the world and these 'third parties use them for their own interaction'; contemporary diplomacy thus has 'proven itself as a global institution'.[59] Seen from a postcolonial perspective, however, this global institution rests on an 'ideology that perpetuates colonial structures of domination, apprehension and recognition'.[60] In Deep K. Datta-Ray's words, 'to be a diplomat … is to resonate to a tune set by Europe, and the refrain is violence, produced by anarchy, organized binarily and waged both within modernity and by it as it assimilates nonmoderns to realize a

[51]See Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 148–51.

[52]Neumann, *At Home*, p. 69.

[53]Feldman describes this kind of procedural legitimation that, even in the absence of sovereign statehood, empowers bureaucracies to govern as their 'auto-authorisation'; see Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 15.

[54]Colin Hoag, 'Assembling partial perspectives: Thoughts on the anthropology of bureaucracy', *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 34:1 (2011), pp. 81–94 (pp. 81–2).

[55]Timothy Mitchell, 'Society, economy, and the state effect', in George Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 95.

[56]See, for example, Feldman, *Governing Gaza*; Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

[57]Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 'Introduction', in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1–38.

[58]See, for example, James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

[59]Iver B. Neumann, 'Euro-centric diplomacy: Challenging but manageable', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18:2 (2012), pp. 299–321 (p. 316).

[60]Sam Okoth Opondo, 'Decolonizing diplomacy: Reflections on African estrangement and exclusion', in Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian (eds), *Sustainable Diplomacies* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 119.

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unified modern society'.[61] Neumann is thus right to acknowledge that 'contemporary diplomacy is a culturally biased game, and the bias is Western'.[62]

As Sam Okoth Opondo notes, in the history of European diplomacy '"diplomatic" encounters with non-European others were quickly transformed into some form of colonial governance' that came with 'the non-recognition of indigenous diplomatic agents' and 'the conversion of a people and a space into something familiar and governable'.[63] The representatives of contested states face a similar predicament. They barely have a choice but to buy into the existing order, even though it largely denies their agency and positions them at the very margins of the social space of international politics. To them, becoming competent in the practices of diplomacy will appear to be of paramount importance. For, on the one hand, they need to understand the political processes through which their fate is decided and, to the limited extent possible, steer them in the right direction. On the other hand, diplomacy itself can serve as a symbolic expression of their contested claim to independence and legal recognition as a sovereign state. The performance itself promises to make the contested state appear on the international stage as an actor with a unique identity, discernable interests, and a moral or legal claim to recognition.

In the following sections, I will use the case of Kosovo's foreign policy bureaucracy in the years 2008 to 2012, that is, the period immediately after the territory declared independence, to probe the plausibility of this account and further theorise the interplay of instrumental action and cultural performance in the diplomatic practices of contested states. The case was selected since Kosovo has proceeded comparatively far on the continuum towards full statehood and international legal recognition.[64] We can thus plausibly assume that to some extent its diplomatic activities have been successful. Furthermore, Kosovo's diplomacy stands out due to the intense involvement of international actors in its institutional development. Studying it therefore allows us to access the practical understandings not only of the Kosovo government and its bureaucrats, but also of the experienced foreign diplomats and consultants who supported them. The selected period between 2008 and 2012 covers the crucial years in which Kosovo began pursuing official recognition by other states and simultaneously made a strong push to establish bureaucratic structures for its diplomacy.[65] The case was not selected because it is typical for the larger phenomenon of contested state diplomacy, but rather because it prominently displays certain theoretically interesting features. I thus use Kosovo as a paradigmatic case that highlights characteristics that may be less pronounced, albeit present in other cases.[66] Such a case study allows 'a nuanced exploration of otherwise unelaborated phenomena'.[67] The result of such an undertaking is not general empirical knowledge of a whole class of cases; rather, it is a deeper theoretical grasp of a distinct phenomenon. The extent to which the insights gained apply to other cases of contested state diplomacy will have to be explored in future research.

[61]Deep K. Datta-Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 12.

[62]Neumann, 'Euro-centric diplomacy', p. 316.

[63]Sam Okoth Opondo, 'Diplomacy and the colonial encounter', in Constantinou, Kerr, and Sharp (eds), *Handbook of Diplomacy*, p. 45.

[64]More than one hundred states recognise Kosovo's independence; Visoka, 'Derecognition', p. 321.

[65]Kosovo had already declared independence in 1991 but at that time it was not able to gain recognition by a single member of the international society of states; Weller, *Contested Statehood*, p. 39. The efforts to win international recognition as a sovereign state were then suspended during the years of administration by the United Nations between 1999 and 2008.

[66]Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 80–1.

[67]George Pavlich, 'Paradigmatic cases', in Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (eds), *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010), p. 647.

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Background to the case study

The case study presented in this article is based on research that I carried out between 2013 and 2018 and in the course of which I immersed myself in the political scene in Prishtina and conducted fifty formal interviews with politicians, diplomats, civil society representatives, and academics there or in Berlin, New York, and Washington, DC. I also spent nine weeks conducting participant observation of training programmes for diplomats from Kosovo, research that is not presented in this article but informs my interpretation of the case. The aim of my fieldwork was to understand the practices and routines of Kosovo's diplomacy, as well as the processes through which they were first established and then successively transformed. Drawing on methods from practice research, I sought to explore these practices through ethnographic interviews and through the study of documents and other artifacts.[68] I paid particular attention to the implicit normativity of practices, that is, their inherent standards of competence or, as my interlocutors phrased it, of 'doing things properly'.[69] In doing so, I tried to use the tension between the 'gold standard'[70] of professional conduct in diplomacy and what the representatives of newly independent Kosovo actually could achieve with their limited experience and scarce resources to uncover both the practical logic of everyday bureaucratic practices and trace the political processes through which competence and authority were negotiated. Recognising that one can often learn more 'not from what was said but from how it was said: the gestures, the use of euphemisms, and especially the ironic smiles that accompanied the "party line" answers',[71] I treated my interviews as relational encounters in which my interlocutors granted me a glimpse into their complicated professional lives. Presumably, for the Kosovars I interviewed, our interaction also represented an opportunity to perform the reality of Kosovo's statehood to me and the future readers of my research outputs. I do not see this as a bias in the material, but rather as a methodological path to access performances of diplomacy in settings in which formal participant observation is difficult or even impossible. Juxtaposing the accounts of Kosovo's diplomats with the perspectives of international trainers and consultants, as well as with critical voices from within the political scene in Prishtina, then allowed me to gain a fuller understanding of the tensions and conflicts surrounding Kosovo's diplomacy.

When Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008, the question for its government was not whether it would need a foreign policy bureaucracy, but only how it could get one as quickly as possible. This was far from a trivial question, though. Since Serbia had inherited the foreign service of Yugoslavia, including most of its personnel and all of its missions abroad, there was no tradition of official diplomacy that Kosovo's government could draw on.[72] Nonetheless, and somewhat counterintuitively, bureaucratic and mundane organisational issues were highly salient from early on in Kosovo's efforts to enter the international stage. Already in 2004, a first attempt to create a dedicated bureaucracy for Kosovo's foreign policy had been undertaken. At that time, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) administered the territory but shared some control over domestic affairs with Kosovo's so-called Provisional

[68]On methods in IR practice research, see Christian Bueger, 'Pathways to practice: Praxiography and international politics', *European Political Science Review*, 6:3 (2014), pp. 383–406; Vincent Pouliot, 'Practice tracing', in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (eds), *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 237–59.

[69]See Frank Gadinger, 'The normativity of international practices', in Alena Drieschova, Christian Bueger, and Ted Hopf (eds), *Conceptualizing International Practices: Directions for the Practice Turn in International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 100–21; Sebastian Schindler and Tobias Wille, 'How can we criticize international practices?', *International Studies Quarterly*, 63:4 (2019), pp. 1014–24.

[70]McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer, 'Mimicking state diplomacy', p. 805.

[71]Merje Kuus, 'Foreign policy and ethnography: A sceptical intervention', *Geopolitics*, 18:1 (2013), pp. 115–31 (p. 126).

[72]A handful of Kosovars had served in the Yugoslav foreign service in the 1970s and 1980s, but due to the time that had passed since then they played no active role in the founding of the ministry; interview with Petrit Selimi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kosovo, 5 September 2013.

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Institutions of Self-Government. As 'a compromise between Kosovo's ambitions for a ministerial portfolio in foreign affairs and UNMIK's reserved powers and legal limitations' a small bureaucratic unit named the 'Office for Coordination of International Cooperation and Regional Dialogue' was created.[73] According to a former advisor to Kosovo's prime minister, the office received this somewhat unwieldy name 'to prevent obstructions' from Russia and Serbia.[74] But its purpose was nonetheless clear – it was, in the words of its first director Enver Hasani, 'meant to be the skeleton structure of a future foreign ministry'.[75]

The cooperation office placed particular emphasis on training activities. According to Hasani, the main challenge was 'training, knowledge' and 'to get ready for the foreign ministry'. Fitim Gllareva, his successor as director of the office, explained to me that 'the main task of the office went more in the direction of training, not really offering much foreign policy advice'.[76] The members of the office were sent abroad to receive training in different aspects of diplomacy, for example at the diplomatic academies of Albania, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands. For a while, the staff of the office was also mentored by a retired Albanian diplomat whose activities were funded by the UN Development Programme. Furthermore, diplomats from the liaison offices (the *de facto* embassies) and international organisations in Kosovo occasionally gave workshops and lectures for the staff of Kosovo's cooperation office. According to Hasani, it was during this time that Kosovo's public service first acquired basic practical skills such as how to write diplomatic notes.[77]

Less than a month after the declaration of independence, on 13 March 2008, the Kosovo Assembly passed the Law on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diplomatic Service of Kosovo, which laid the legal basis for the establishment of a foreign ministry. Skënder Hyseni, who had been involved in Kosovo's contested state diplomacy since the early 1990s, was nominated to become Kosovo's minister of foreign affairs on 3 April 2008. When the foreign ministry began its work in the same month, it only had a handful of staff and operated out of Kosovo's main government building, a 16-floor high-rise structure from Yugoslav times that now accommodated larger parts of the Kosovo executive. In one of our conversations, Hyseni recalled how he 'started the ministry with a laptop and [a small office] and two advisors'.[78] Initially, the ministry was literally not more than a group of three people in a room on the eighth floor of the central government building. This group, however, quickly grew as more advisors joined the cabinet of the minister and the first career officials of the foreign ministry were recruited from the Office for Coordination of International Cooperation and Regional Dialogue.[79]

To understand how Kosovo's foreign policy bureaucracy took shape, it is also important to recognise the role played by external actors. The largest effort to support Kosovo's nascent foreign ministry was undertaken by the US government at the request of the Kosovo government and through a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project. The Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs Support Project (KMFAS), as it was called, had an overall volume of 4.2 million US dollars, lasted two-and-a-half years, and was carried out by the private company Development Alternatives Incorporated.[80] Its 'overarching objective' was 'to help the Ministry of

[73]Lulzim Peci, *Kosovo's Foreign Policy: Strategic Factors, Objectives and Challenges* (Prishtina: Kosovar Institute for Research and Development, 2007), p. 35.

[74]Interview with Ilir Deda, former Member of the Assembly of Kosovo, 16 June 2015.

[75]Interview with Enver Hasani, former Director of the Office for International Cooperation of Kosovo, 15 June 2015.

[76]Interview with Fitim Gllareva, former Director of the Office for International Cooperation and former Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo, 17 July 2018 (author's translation).

[77]Interview with Hasani.

[78]Interview with Skënder Hyseni, former Foreign Minister of Kosovo, 12 September 2013 and 22 May 2014.

[79]Interviews with Gllareva; and with Bekim Sejdiu, former Ambassador of Kosovo, 26 December 2013 and 11 August 2018 (via email).

[80]Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs Support Project (KMFAS), *Final Report, October, 2008 – June, 2011* (Bethesda, MD: Development Alternatives Incorporated, 2011), pp. 2–3.

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Foreign Affairs become a functioning ministry capable of managing Kosovo's foreign affairs'.[81] For USAID it was 'the first project of its kind'.[82] Never before had the development agency supported the creation of a whole foreign service.[83] In the following case study, I will juxtapose the perspective of the consultants who carried out this project with the views and experiences of Kosovo's diplomats to give a comprehensive account of how the bureaucracy of Kosovo's foreign ministry was set up. I will first focus on efforts that were made to enable Kosovo manage its foreign policy in a rational and efficient way; then I will turn to the mundane performances within the bureaucracy of the foreign ministry that enabled Kosovo to appear as an actor with a unique identity, objective interests, and rational strategies for pursuing them.

Building a modern bureaucracy

Creating a full-scale bureaucracy for its diplomacy posed a number of challenges for Kosovo's government. One was to establish bureaucratic processes to deal with the everyday work of knowledge production and decision-making that would allow Kosovo to formulate and implement a rational foreign policy. Vlora Çitaku, who served as deputy foreign minister from 2008 to 2010 and was responsible for the institutional development of the ministry, explained to me:

> The first day, when I was appointed deputy foreign minister, I literally didn't have an office. And then I got an office, but I didn't have a computer. We had to build everything from scratch. And many things that other countries take for granted, like physical infrastructure, legal infrastructure … we had to do it from scratch, because when you are in the institutions and when you want to do things properly, you realize that it is not only about the ideas. It is also about the infrastructure that is necessary to convey those ideas.[84]

In this section, I will draw on my interviews and an analysis of documents to trace how Çitaku and her colleagues established the foreign ministry with the help of international consultants and unpack what it means to 'do things properly' in diplomacy. Serious efforts were made by Kosovo's first diplomats to adopt the modern model of a rational and efficient foreign policy bureaucracy. However, setting up such a bureaucratic organisation proved difficult. The problems and setbacks, as well as how Kosovo's diplomats and their international supporters dealt with them, offer a lens though which we can study the standards of rational conduct that govern modern diplomacy and that contested states seek to emulate.[85]

In the autumn of 2008, Kosovo opened its first ten embassies in Albania, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Two diplomats were sent to each capital, a head of mission, who initially was accredited as *chargé d'affaires* and later became ambassador, as well as one further officer with the rank of first secretary. Most of these diplomats had some previous experience with the countries to which they were dispatched, for example, as students or diaspora activists.[86] When the KMFAS consultants began their work shortly after the embassies had opened, they found that 'the chief difficulties' faced by the first cohort of diplomats sent abroad were 'a lack of information from Prishtina on local and foreign affairs developments, the inability to open bank accounts, incomplete guidance

[81]Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs Support Project (KMFAS), *Year 1 Workplan* (Bethesda, MD: Development Alternatives Incorporated, 2009), pp. 12, 20, 39.

[82]KMFAS, *Final Report*, p. 3.

[83]A flexible contract was offered to Development Alternatives Incorporated so that the project could be continuously adjusted to the needs of the Kosovo government; interview with Jeton Cana, Project Officer USAID Kosovo, 12 June 2015.

[84]Interview with Vlora Çitaku, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Kosovo, 26 February 2015.

[85]My methodological strategy is thus to use instances of friction or even crisis diagnostically as moments in which implicit knowledge is made explicit; see Bueger, 'Pathways to practice', pp. 395–7.

[86]Interview with Sejdiu.

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on leasing and procurement, a lack of standardised procedures and irregular communications with the ministry and others in Prishtina'.[87] What was missing in the eye of the experienced practitioners were bureaucratic processes that could effectively deal with the mundane tasks of diplomatic knowledge work and communication.

The KMFAS consultants thus set about bringing the operations of the ministry under orderly bureaucratic control. From one of their documents, we learn that 'by its very nature, a foreign ministry is distinct in that part of its operation takes place outside of the boundaries of the state, which creates needs that other ministries do not have'.[88] Therefore, its organisation and operational procedures will have to diverge from the standard blueprint of the regular ministry. Kosovo's new law on procurement, which was in the process of being passed in parliament when the KMFAS project began its work, however, did not foresee the need of the foreign ministry to purchase goods and services in other countries. Consequently, 'the legal advisors of the KMFAS project found themselves involved in redrafting major portions of the procurement law in order to avoid paralysis of the missions abroad'.[89] Vlora Çitaku recalled:

> I remember we had so many problems with procurement, for example when we opened the embassies, because our law did not foresee procurement outside the country, and our law did not foresee procurement to be handled by people who are not certified procurement officers. So in the beginning, we had diplomats doing procurement operations until we established our own department in the ministry.[90]

Çitaku's concern with these organisational and legal arrangements highlights that 'infrastructures matter' since they 'enable, sustain or change what people do'.[91] Kosovo's diplomats were keenly aware that certain physical and organisational arrangements were required so that they could 'do things properly', that is, perform everyday diplomatic tasks in a competent way.

The KMFAS consultants, who had established a project office close to the ministry, not only helped to design the processes in the abstract, but they also fine-tuned their actual execution in the everyday work of Kosovo's diplomats. Daniel Santos, a former US diplomat who worked as senior diplomatic advisor for KMFAS, described to me a regular working day as follows:

> Due to the ministry's changing requirements and unusual hours, we opened each day with an internal meeting to determine whether and how each requirement had changed. Following that, each sub-team went out to visit the section or sections which needed our assistance. The chief of party [of the KMFAS project] and I would usually meet every morning with the secretary general and, at his discretion with the minister, the vice minister, and other staff. The rest of the day would be spent implementing training requirements and problem solving.[92]

[87]KMFAS, *Year 1 Work Plan*, p. 6; some of Kosovo's first ambassadors described similar challenges to me; see interviews with Muhamed Hamiti, former Ambassador of Kosovo, 1 October 2015; with Sabri Kiqmari, Ambassador of Kosovo, 17 May 2014; with Lulzim Peci, former Ambassador of Kosovo, 8 May 2014; and with Sejdiu.

[88]KMFAS, *Year 1 Work Plan*, p. 20.

[89]KMFAS, *Final Report*, p. 5.

[90]Interview with Çitaku. Other examples of adjustments that were made to the ministry's bureaucracy are the implementation of a duty officer system and the drafting of an around-the-clock emergency plan enabling the ministry to respond to urgent requests from the missions at all times; KMFAS, *Year 1 Work Plan*, p. 27.

[91]Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Matt Watson, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Shove and Frank Trentmann (eds), *Infrastructures in Practice: The Dynamics of Demand in Networked Societies* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), p. 3. Bureaucratic infrastructures have not been a focus of practice research on diplomacy; notable exceptions are Christian Bueger, 'Making things known: Epistemic practices, the United Nations, and the translation of piracy', *International Political Sociology*, 9:1 (2015), pp. 1–18; Neumann, *At Home*, ch. 3.

[92]Interview (via email) with Daniel Santos, former United States diplomat and consultant, 18 February 2015.

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Fitim Gllareva, the ministry's general secretary at the time, recalled an instance when 'Dan Santos, who was a very experienced man, sat in the office with me for two or three days, just watching me talk to people, and at the end of the day he gave me advice what to do differently or how certain things could be done more efficiently'.[93] According to one of the KMFAS project reports such mentoring sessions helped 'to identify issues before they developed into crises' and 'to provide real-time advice that could be used to solve unfolding problems'.[94] In doing so, they also helped make the everyday conduct of diplomacy in the ministry more rational and efficient.

Another challenge the leadership of Kosovo's foreign ministry faced was to populate the bureaucracy with bureaucrats. Soon after the ministry had been created, the hiring of staff had begun and by April 2009 the number of employees had risen to about one hundred.[95] The KMFAS consultants noted that 'as Kosovo had few senior civil servants and diplomats under the government of the former Yugoslavia, the national experience base is thin'.[96] Nonetheless, they observed approvingly that many of the newly recruited officials had 'obtained on-the-job experience and training under the [UN Provisional Institutions of Self-Governance] in general administration, development assistance coordination, economic affairs, international political affairs, multilateral organizations and press and public affairs' or had 'worked for international organizations in Kosovo, such as the United Nations, OSCE and EU, bilateral aid donors and NGOs'.[97] The ministry, in other words, had hired professionals who had worked as local staff for international organisations, national liaison offices, or NGOs in Kosovo. While most of them had no experience in diplomacy, they at least knew how to maneuver the mundane worlds of bureaucratic administration.

To further prepare the newly recruited diplomats for their tasks, the KMFAS project conducted formal trainings. Among others, a weekly seminar series was established.[98] The largest training effort, however, was a four-week course in October 2009 for the second cohort of diplomats to be dispatched abroad, during which 'fifty-three new MFA employees were trained in the best practices and skills to effectively represent Kosovo's interests abroad'.[99] The topics covered included international law, consular affairs, procurement and post management, crisis response, negotiation, the writing of diplomatic notes, diplomatic reporting, ethics, and leadership. While most training sessions were taught by KMFAS staff, briefings were also held by the ambassadors of the United States, Germany, Switzerland, and Albania to Kosovo, as well as by representatives of various international organisations in Pristina. The KMFAS final report notes that with few exceptions the participants had not received any previous training in the 'diplomatic arts and practice' and that therefore the seminar was 'critical to strengthening the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.[100] Recent research has emphasised the role inter- and transnational diplomatic training programmes play in the reproduction and transformation of the diplomatic profession.[101] The case of Kosovo shows that such programmes also are an important channel through which institutional designs and bureaucratic routines are diffused.[102]

[93]Interview with Gllareva, author's translation.

[94]KMFAS, *Final Report*, p. 8.

[95]KMFAS, *Year 1 Work Plan*, p. 5.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Ibid.

[98]Interview with Gllareva.

[99]Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs Support Project (KMFAS), *Quarterly Report, October – December 2008* (Bethesda, MD: Development Alternatives Incorporated, 2009), p. 3.

[100]KMFAS, *Final Report*, p. 4.

[101]Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, 'Transprofessional diplomacy'; Kuus, 'Political economies'.

[102]While the seminars organised by the KMFAS project represent the largest effort to provide training to Kosovo's newly recruited diplomats, the US was far from being the only international actor offering assistance. Trainings were also provided by the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations in Clingendael, the Croatian Diplomatic Academy in Zagreb, the Turkish Diplomatic Academy in Ankara, at the Estonian School of Diplomacy, and other national diplomatic academies. Furthermore, Kosovo has received support from entrepreneurial individuals with experience in diplomacy, of consultancies, and of NGOs; Carne Ross, *Independent Diplomat:*

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In this section, I have discussed some of the efforts undertaken by the Kosovo government and the KMFAS project to build a rational and efficient foreign policy bureaucracy and to populate it with professional diplomats. As we have seen, Kosovo's diplomats understood that they needed to 'do things properly' if they wanted to produce reasonable foreign policy decisions and pursue Kosovo's interests objectively and efficiently. Tracing their efforts thus also provided us with a window on the often implicit standards of competent conduct in a foreign ministry. In the next section, I will address how the same practices of rational administration also perform the reality of Kosovo as a normal state with objective interests. For this purpose, I will further investigate the everyday working routines in the ministry. This will allow me to unpack how instrumental action and cultural performance are always already fused in the practices of contested state diplomacy.

Performing the rational state

Diplomacy, on a commonsense view, is at its core a political activity. The building of a professional foreign service, however, requires carving out a different, non-political space for diplomacy. For Max Weber, 'the particular strength of bureaucratic administration is due, among other factors, to the fact that those who operate the administrative machinery and those who own it are kept rigorously apart'.[103] Drawing on Mitchell's insight that mundane practices perform the state as a distinct entity, we can see why this is so.[104] By separating the 'technical' work from the 'political' process, bureaucracies create a semi-autonomous sphere in which the interests and policies of the state are determined through rational procedures and thereby acquire the status of objective facts. In this section, I will trace how Kosovo's diplomats tried to insulate the 'technical' aspects of diplomacy from 'politics' to elaborate how, for contested states, instrumental action is at the same time a cultural performance. As I will demonstrate, the everyday practices of administration in a foreign ministry at once produce rational decisions and the reality of the state as a normal actor of international politics.

How difficult it would be to protect the nascent foreign ministry from undue 'political' influences became immediately apparent when Kosovo's newly appointed foreign minister, Skënder Hyseni, and his advisors proceeded to fill the organisaational chart of the ministry with actual bureaucrats. For Weber, it is a hallmark of a rational bureaucracy that its member are 'selected on the basis of technical qualifications', which ideally are 'tested by examination or guaranteed by diplomas certifying technical training, or both'.[105] However, realising this ideal proved difficult in a political context in which positions in the civil service are commonly assigned by a logic of patronage. This is how Skënder Hyseni described recruiting practices in the early days of the ministry:

> First we advertised a number of key positions in the foreign ministry. People would apply. An interview and test panel was established to select possibly the best. It was not always the case. I'm not so idealistic. Because we live in a real … in a troubled world. But in most of the cases, I think, we got the best of those who would apply.[106]

Dispatches from an Unaccountable Elite (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Leonard Seabrooke, 'Diplomacy as economic consultancy', in Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann (eds), *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*, pp. 195–219; Wille, 'Representation'.

[103] Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 113.

[104] Mitchell, 'State effect'.

[105] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 220.

[106] Interview with Hyseni.

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That the world of Kosovo's civil service is troubled by nepotism and corruption is an open secret.[107] The Speaker of the Kosovo Assembly Kadri Veseli admitted to journalists in August 2016 that 'the issue of nepotism and the employment issue which often is not based on merits' is still 'a reality' in Kosovo, to which the British ambassador to Kosovo added that 'no one believes that employments are conducted on the basis of merit and qualifications, so we need to crack this practice and should restore people's trust in the institutions of Kosovo'.[108]

The difficulties of keeping 'politics' out of the hiring process of Kosovo's first diplomats can also be nicely illustrated with a particular measure proposed by the KMFAS consultants. They observed that 'the appointment of high government officials is likely to be beset with political considerations'.[109] As a corrective they therefore developed a 'Hiring Decision Tool' (HDT) to assess candidates for entrance into the foreign service.

> The HDT was an attempt to provide a transparent process and an objective set of measurements that would allow applicants to be compared to one another, to be better evaluated for particular positions, and which would tend to *reduce the effects of politics* in the hiring decision process. … Thus, the HDT made the political hiring process less arbitrary and served as a qualifying process for those who would otherwise have entered the appointment competition solely based on their political ties.[110]

What the consultants proposed was therefore to recalibrate the balance between 'professional' and 'political' considerations. This was to be achieved by 'reducing the effect of politics', which without the objective and disinterested tool – and a proper bureaucracy more general – would be all pervasive.

Another, closely related aspect is the remuneration of Kosovo's bureaucrats. Ideal-typically speaking, the salary has to be generous enough so that the public servants can rely on it as their only source of income and still maintain a lifestyle that corresponds to their social status. For the smooth functioning of a rational bureaucracy, such an arrangement is important since 'entrance into an office … is considered an acceptance of a specific duty of fealty to the purpose of the office … in return for the grant of a secure existence'.[111] However, according to a member of the cabinet of the minister of foreign affairs, 'there is a constraint here, because people who can contribute a lot in diplomacy are also discouraged by the level of salaries in the ministry'.[112] In response to this problem, the salaries of the bureaucrats in the ministry were raised after the change of government in 2011. Minister of Foreign Affairs Enver Hoxhaj explained to me: 'If you have a well-paid, well-trained diplomat, the service also works very well. That is why I have increased the salaries of the ambassadors and all others in the diplomatic service by 50 per cent'.[113]

A further theme that relates to the professional dignity of the diplomats is the physical site of the ministry. As we have seen above, the ministry was initially located on the eighth floor of the central government building. As their number grew, many of Kosovo's diplomats had to be

[107]Katarina Tadić and Arolda Elbasani, 'State-building and patronage networks: How political parties embezzled the bureaucracy in post-war Kosovo', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18:2 (2018), pp. 185–202.

[108]The statements were made during the launch of a project that aims to outsource hiring decisions for the public service to an international consultancy firm; Die Morina, 'Kosovo outsources employment bids amid nepotism wiretaps', *Balkan Insight* (15 August 2016), available at: {https://balkaninsight.com/2016/08/15/kosovo-outsources-employment-bids-amid-nepotism-wiretaps-08-15-2016/} accessed 2 December 2022.

[109]KMFAS, *Final Report*, p. 7.

[110]Ibid., emphasis added.

[111]Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 959.

[112]Interview with Pëllumb Kallaba, Chief of Staff in the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo, 13 May 2014.

[113]Interview with Enver Hoxhaj, former Foreign Minister of Kosovo, 16 June 2015 and 8 December 2015, author's translation.

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accommodated in other buildings. Hoxhaj recalled: 'When I became [foreign minister in 2011], I was shocked that many of the staff were still working in the basement of some public building'; and so he had to find premises that 'would respect the dignity of my staff, that would make it clear to them that this is a very important ministry'.[114] The audience for the mundane diplomatic performances in the environment of the ministry thus appears to be primarily the diplomats themselves. They are the first who have to be convinced of the dignity and importance of their work. In summer 2012, the ministry moved into a new building, an office tower that forms part of a complex which had accommodated the headquarters of the Yugoslav army until 1999, during the years of international administration had housed the United Nations mission in Kosovo, and after the declaration of independence in 2008 was taken over by the EU rule of law mission EULEX. One of the diplomats working in the ministry explained to me that before the move, with the staff spread out over several buildings, 'these were not the best circumstances from a technical point of view, frankly speaking. But now, we are satisfied. We are operating in a proper way'.[115] This concern of Kosovo's diplomats that the location of the ministry should be both dignified and practical also resonates with recent calls by political geographers to recognise the spatial situatedness of diplomatic practices.[116]

However, separating technical administration from politics alone was not enough. To be able to perform diplomacy in a way that both generates rational decisions and a convincing image of the state, the two also needed to be placed in relation to each other. When Kosovo declared independence in February 2008, the situation required immediate action. In the face of challenges to its statehood from Serbia, Russia, and a number of other states, Kosovo's foreign minister could not wait for the bureaucracy to be set up before he took action.[117] As one official explained to me: 'When it comes to policy development, the circumstances which were occurring in Kosovo were quite rapid and dynamic and we had no time to wait for an institution to be developed in order to adapt to these circumstances'.[118] In the beginning, Kosovo's foreign policy was thus primarily formulated and carried out by the minister and his cabinet of political advisors.[119] The fact that 'policy action has relied on the personal agency of political leaders rather than on the continuity and stability of the diplomatic bureaucracy' in the assessment of Edward Newman and Gëzim Visoka has however 'undermined Kosovo's campaign for securing diplomatic recognition'.[120] It also made Kosovo's diplomacy appear more partisan and less rational than it would otherwise have appeared.

This problem was recognised by the consultants of the KMFAS project. They noted that 'the policy offices within the MFA are still developing and they do not yet appear to have a clear grasp of the full range of issues within their areas of responsibility. The process for handling important day-to-day issues and providing advice to the Minister should be improved'.[121] As specific measures they therefore proposed that

> the minister and deputy minister should ensure … that line officers … are included in relevant meetings, especially with ambassadors and visiting delegations, ideally as note takers so

[114]Interview with Hoxhaj, author's translation.

[115]Interview with Albert Prenkaj, Director General of the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo, 16 May 2014.

[116]Dittmer, *Diplomatic Material*; Kuus, 'Political economies'; McConnell, 'Liminal geopolitics'; McConnell, 'Diplomatic decorum'.

[117]On Kosovo's foreign policy after 2008, see Gëzim Krasniqi, 'Foreign policy as a constitutive element of statehood and statehood prerogative: The case of Kosovo', in Soeren Keil and Bernhard Stahl (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Post-Yugoslav States: From Yugoslavia to Europe* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 198–220; Newman and Visoka, 'State recognition'; Visoka, *Acting like a State*; on Serbia's foreign policy strategy *vis-à-vis* Kosovo, see Ker-Lindsay, *Counter Secession*.

[118]Interview with Kallaba.

[119]Interview with Sejdiu.

[120]Newman and Visoka, 'State recognition', p. 382.

[121]KMFAS, *Year 1 Work Plan*, p. 38.

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> that the information flow to the professional level can be improved. Policy office directors should be included in foreign visits of the ministers and other senior government officials as resource and support officers. There should also be consultation and discussions between the political advisors and the line officers to ensure that the career officers are given an opportunity to advise or provide information on policy matters.[122]

To make Kosovo's diplomacy both efficient and convincing, the mundane bureaucratic processes of knowledge work needed to be linked to the ostensibly political conduct of the minister and their cabinet. Weber's 'bureaucratic machinery' is constituted through its differentiation from politics. But to be able to operate the state, the political leaders need to sit at the levers of the machinery and, for this, mundane processes of organisation and control had to be established.

When Enver Hoxhaj took over the leadership of the ministry in 2011, he initiated a structural reform. With the help of a retired US diplomat, whose involvement was facilitated through a ten-week extension of the KMFAS project, an organigram was drafted that created new departments and strengthened their role in the formulation of policy. Political director Albert Prenkaj explained to me:

> We have rearranged the organigram. The minister wanted – and I really appreciate that – he wanted to give more space to the political departments, because till then we had only very few political departments and we depended on the cabinet. Now we have political departments and we are doing analyses there. And we are feeding the minister and his cabinet with documents.[123]

With the help of international experts, a sustained effort was thus undertaken to establish routine processes through which analyses and policy proposals would be formulated by the professional foreign service and handed 'up' to the political leadership. The bureaucratic work in the ministry was thus both separated from and linked to politics. Only in this way could the foreign policy bureaucracy become part of the state writ large.

With the methods I employed to study the early days of Kosovo's foreign ministry, it is difficult to determine how successful the attempts to curb the excesses of politics and create a service of professional and politically neutral diplomats ultimately were. The officials with whom I spoke generally painted a positive picture of Kosovo's young foreign service, even though they did not shy away from also pointing out some problems. Other informants were more critical. Members of parliament from the opposition party Vetëvendosje! harshly criticised the ministry of foreign affairs for its lack of professionalism.[124] Similar concerns were voiced by some civil society representatives and researchers working on Kosovo's diplomacy. They shared the assessment of political scientist Gëzim Krasniqi, who in an opinion piece wrote that 'the ruling parties have gradually but steadily managed to *politicize* the foreign service by appointing party people at all levels as well as failing to improve the system when it comes to its day-to-day functioning'.[125] In their view, the governing parties had politicised what should be handled professionally. While I cannot adjudicate here whose assertions have greater merit, the important point for my argument is that the issue of how to organise Kosovo's diplomacy was highly salient. The government and its critics agreed that for Kosovo's diplomacy to negotiate the desired agreements and to sway a global audience, it needed to be grounded in the everyday work of a professional foreign policy bureaucracy.

[122]Ibid.

[123]Interview with Prenkaj.

[124]Interviews with Deda; with Albin Kurti, Member of the Assembly of Kosovo, 21 April 2014.

[125]Gëzim Krasniqi, 'Rising up in the world: Kosovo's quest for international recognition', *Prishtina Insight* (22 November 2016), emphasis added, available at: {http://prishtinainsight.com/rising-up-world-kosovo-quest-international-recognition-mag/} accessed 2 December 2022.

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Conclusion

The case of Kosovo's diplomacy demonstrates the twofold importance of bureaucracy as a precondition for rational decision-making and as a performance that asserts a contested state's claim to recognition as a sovereign member of the international society of states. Tracing how the organisational structures and everyday working routines in the foreign ministry were set up, and how different actors struggled over these arrangements, we could see, furthermore, how deep-seated the link is between instrumental action and performance. Viewed in light of the genealogy of modern diplomacy as a rationalised practice of statecraft, the everyday administration of Kosovo's foreign policy appears as both instrumental action to realise certain specific political ends and as a mundane performance that asserts the reality of Kosovo as an actor of international politics. Furthermore, the case study highlights the delicate balance between 'political' and 'technical' aspects of diplomacy that needs to be struck for the activities within a foreign policy bureaucracy to be both instrumentally effective and symbolically convincing. While the representatives of other contested states may choose different strategies to pursue their aim of political independence, they are still facing very similar material and social constraints to those faced by Kosovo. The fact that many of them are entertaining more or less improvised bureaucratic structures indicates that they also appreciate the instrumental and symbolic importance of a well-administered diplomacy. Comparative case studies such as the one by Dimitris Bouris and Irene Fernández-Molina[126] have the potential to shed further light on the factors that shape a contested state's diplomacy and determine its success or failure. The present study indicates that the mundane practices of bureaucratic administration should receive ample attention in this research.

How Kosovo and other contested states engage in diplomacy also opens up a fresh perspective on the diplomatic practices of established states. Since the sovereignty and independence of such states is not contested, the performative dimension of their diplomacy is often less obvious. Nonetheless, and as noted above, the diplomats of established states in their everyday practices perform the 'we' of their ministry as well as the 'we' of their entire state. The present study sheds additional light on how exactly these 'we's' take shape, namely, through the bureaucratic production of particular policies and decisions. In conjuncture with Merje Kuus's observations that novel modes of management such as an 'audit culture' are adopted in many foreign ministries and that a new transnational field of bureaucratic practice is forming in European diplomacy,[127] the present study on Kosovo raises further interesting questions: Do different bureaucratic practices produce different rationales of action and different decisions? Do they enact different kinds of states or non-state subjects of international politics? Contrasting contested and established states can shed light on these questions by revealing mechanisms and pathways that link the concrete everyday practices of diplomacy to abstract dynamics and outcomes of international politics.

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[126] Bouris and Fernández-Molina, 'Contested states'.

[127] Kuus, 'Diplomacy and audit'; Kuus, 'Political economies'.

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