

*Western Diplomacy's Ineffective Iconoclasm: Conflict Resolution With China and the West's Forgotten Rhetorical Tools*

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**Abstract**

The Alaskan talks of China and America point to the need for a new style of Western diplomacy. The limitations of a bland diplomacy, without pomp and spectacle, become apparent when faced with a party unwilling to display fealty to the current World Order. The renunciation of pageantry points towards a deeper issue of the disavowing of old cultural beliefs. The wager here is that conflicts can only be resolved in these seemingly outdated rituals of excess dependent on cultural symbolic relics. Despite Western diplomats' beliefs, they like others around the World, must rely on symbolic relics (fetish-idols) in patching together peace in times of intractable conflict. The failure of many programmes of peace (e.g. TRANSCEND, ARIA) can be partly blamed on a dismissal of the value of beliefs in idols, and the inherent value of idols to expose and work with antagonisms to enact positive change. This article relies on homologous theories in Burkean rhetoric, Durkheimian anthropology, Hegelian metaphysics, Ramsbotham's conflict resolution ideas and Lacanian psychoanalysis, to pave the way for an acceptance of the derided tools of the old for a fresh perspective on finding peace. Broadly, this is a rejection of a popular but vulgar postmodernism warned about by Kenneth Burke in 1945, with a more nuanced post-foundationalism of the transhistorical, transsubjective and the transsubstantive.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Rhetoric, Conflict Resolution, Nation-Thing, Psychoanalysis, Factish, China-USA, Alaska Talks

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## Introduction

The Western diplomats perceive the ‘undiplomatic’, showboating Chinese outburst in Alaska in March 2021 (McCurry, 2021) as an outdated acting-out. In the acrimonious Anchorage Summit, China theatrically spoke beyond its allotted time. Western diplomats feel they possess the ideal know-how of good negotiation technique exemplified in a calm, clinical, undramatic disposition; they have removed the rhetorical distortions of Old-World thinking,<sup>1</sup> and found the universal, rational conditions for good argument. The conventional Peace Studies scholarship<sup>2</sup> similarly believes the way ahead is to ‘overcome’ conflict by seeking mutual agreements through deflationary criticism of any rhetoric, attitudes or posturing. The problem for these techniques of diplomats and peace negotiators is that in conflicts of truth-regimes, the sophistry cannot be overcome: it both dupes the naïve as well as the sophisticated master of hermeneutics. Yet when correctly understood, this apparent obstacle of posturing is not only not an obstacle but is a valuable productive force.

The Western<sup>3</sup> diplomat’s stance against sophistic posturing is all the more perplexing given that The Diplomat, as the successor to a long line of sophists, has acted as history’s sophist (Zizek, 2008, p.185; Burke, 1984, ‘Dict. of Pivotal Terms’), out to prolong the rich, fantastical narrative history of Nations. Typically, the modern Western diplomat laments this unnecessary emotional flag-waving, yet the wager of this article is the dangerous fantasy is not the rhetorical sophistry insisted upon by China’s diplomat obsessively speaking of love of China/nation, but the idea of a purified rational communication outside of the theatre of language. The science of oratory reveals the crucial role of language-games in reality construction<sup>4</sup>; the claim to speak plainly and honestly is the very moment of pure sophistry.

Western diplomats, despite typically leading off at conferences with a utilitarian view of democratic cosmopolitanism (Mathews, 2020, p.155), sneak in a hierarchical worldview with the West on top: the West arrives bearing what it understands the other will want... it expects the other to submit.<sup>5</sup> By taking on the role of universal rationality it becomes the disavowing universal Master.<sup>6</sup> The human rights and equality rhetoric preached by the Western diplomat disavows its hidden power (Kao, 2011, p.2). Kenneth Burke saw this in his analysis of human rights as powerful rhetorical motivations for acts,<sup>7</sup> as opposed to actual real things in themselves; the West’s gift of cosmopolitanism arrives adulterated with sophistry.

The West seeks mastery now the old-style Masters (i.e. ideologies of nation, religion, race and hierarchy) have been dethroned in the West. The traditional Master was in the position of a ‘subject-supposed-to-know’<sup>8</sup> but who, despite appearances of total authority, was all bluff.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is illustrated in the post-Second-Generation peacekeeping methods; see (Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The paradigmatic example is Galtung: (Galtung, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The ‘Westerner’ should be understood as a stand-in for Latour’s ‘Modern’, (Latour, 2010, p.2), a group who feel they have overcome the old fetishes of nation, religion and so on. For the notion of the fetish more generally see: (Pietz, 1993) and (Pietz, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Reality is a noble/polite lie since, ‘every truth has a structure of fiction’ (Lacan, 1992, p 12).

<sup>5</sup> See Copjec in her reference to French colonialism: (Copjec, 2015, p.87).

<sup>6</sup> To take themselves as paradigmatic of their beliefs but also to disavow any superiority: a culturally conditioned claim of universality.

<sup>7</sup> See the situational contingencies of rights for Burke: (Wolin, 2001, p.164).

<sup>8</sup> That is, they are assumed to know simply from their position, not from any accounting of their actual knowledge. See Lacan’s Seminar XI (Lacan et al., 2018).

<sup>9</sup> The Master relies on an ‘authority [which] is always a deceit that only succeeds when we fall for the would-be master’s bluff’ (Mathews, 2020, p211).

The dethroned ignorant Master is now replaced by the ‘Master-y of Knowledge’: power disguised as a search for knowledge (i.e. expert-worship),<sup>10</sup> a power which resides in its claim to not be a bluff, to be a rejection of sophistry. The sophistry is doubled down on. The gift of expertise is tainted by hierarchical power assumptions after all.

As it stands, the Western diplomats are actors on a stage, but because of their efforts to undercut the symbolic efficacy of their own (role of diplomacy) position and the old Master (the Nation-State) they represent, they have renounced their own act, but act anyway; this is the very essence of a fetish (Mannoni, 2003). They disavow the fetishistic attachment to old ideas of Nation-States, creating a ‘factish-object.’<sup>11</sup> The diplomat has perhaps not yet accepted that since all diplomacy is on the stage of the old-Masters of the Social Order of Nations, to act out diplomacy they must bluff loyalty to the old ideas. They seemingly cannot decide if they want to finally ‘destroy’ (deconstruct) the old-Masters or keep them running and prefer to (fetishistically) isolate technical trade/technology wars from these grander ideas.

A possible resolution to the deadlock within diplomatic sterility is to embrace the role of the Shaman figure, a figure who openly flaunts his charlatanism,<sup>12</sup> accepts the truth of trickery, recognises the new claims to universal rights and equality are necessarily enmeshed with the same hidden trickery as the old appeals<sup>13</sup>: the ‘knower-that-all-authority-is deceit’. This figure, if embraced by diplomats and peacemakers in their way of thinking, provides a clearer menu of options for peace.

## Literature Review

This article is multi-disciplinary in encompassing Conflict Resolution, German Idealism, anthropology,<sup>14</sup> rhetoric and psychoanalysis.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, this article is the psycho-philosophical anthropology of peace diplomacy and the means to peace in the era of the Modern Subject. Conflict Resolution as a discipline emerged as the Modern Subject felt ‘alienated’ from the need for wars over grand ideas (an awareness of the fetish). German Idealism arose from the alienation of the Subject from society,<sup>16</sup> with a discomfort in the rhetorical-idols of society. Psychoanalysis emerged as the Subject was alienated even from itself (Verhaeghe, 1999), aware of its own attachments to collective idols. Finally, Ramsbotham’s Conflict Resolution agonistic dialogue model calls for parties to not ignore the alienating beliefs of intractable conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Note a crucial distinction made apparent between science-worship and science’s contingent construction of truth in the lab: (Latour et al., 2013). In rhetorical studies, see: (Thames, 1998, p.19).

<sup>11</sup> Taken from Latour’s notion of ‘factish’: (Latour, 2010, Ch.1). The Western position falsely believes in a distinction that others naively believe in the Idols (possess fetishes), whilst the West is able to critically see through them.

<sup>12</sup> Borch-Jacobsen (disapprovingly) characterises the methodology of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a flaunting charlatanism: (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Latour usefully distinguishes the universalist ontological position as ‘mononaturalism’ and the particular as ‘multinaturalist’ (Latour, 2002). This should be contrasted with mere ‘multiculturalism’, a position Western diplomats celebrate, as it successfully hides the deeper ontological claims of their new idols.

<sup>14</sup> Durkheim (see (Rawls, 2004)) broadly initiates the study of ‘excess’, an alienating effect linked to fetishes, ultimately homologous to an accessing of Lacan’s Real (Scubla, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Particularly the Slovenian School of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this post-foundationalism: (Marchart, 2007, Intro.).

<sup>17</sup> Ramsbotham’s book (Ramsbotham, 2010, Ch.3) identifies that all the most common models for finding peace fail to take seriously the parties’ beliefs and claims about a conflict, perceiving it as mere rancour.

Diplomatic Studies for a long time limited itself to discussions on history and protocol.<sup>18</sup> It took on new vigour as it questioned the diplomat's role as the alienation from ideologies of nationalism emerged. Its interest in 'relationism' (units made in the process of interaction) over 'substantialism' (isolated units acting autonomously) points the way towards the dialectical thinkers here. Most clearly, Der Derian, a third-generation member of the 'English School', by viewing diplomacy through mutual estrangement developed the immanently flawed Subject frame (Derian, 1987, p.114), in other words, the alienating impossibility of unicity.<sup>19</sup> In other fields, Hegel,<sup>20</sup> Lacan,<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Burke and Oliver Ramsbotham argue that reality is 'incompatibility-embodied', that it is antagonisms all the way down. This ontological wager ties back to the notion of 'relationism', of the constant and impossible need to rhetorically unify life, the ritualistic blending of collective belief and emotions into facts on the ground through the 'buoys' of rhetoric/fetish-idols. This contrasts sharply with most diplomacy literature which generally views diplomacy as negotiation, as a process using 'reason' and 'understanding' where, if given enough time, a harmonious, shared understanding of substantive parties can arise (Rieker & Thune, 2015, p.20).

The insight of the diplomat-as-Stranger in Der Derian (Derian, 1987) with its proto-Hegelian grasp of the need for recognition points to the actions of the State inscribing itself, making itself exist; it is the ritual which makes The Nation and its actions a fact. A diplomat invested in the Western ideal of scrubbing away the old rituals of pageantry and nationalism, endangers the efficacy of ascription as 'fact-making'. A concern for unicity is more noticeable in the Conflict Resolution literature using the rhetorical ideas of Burke. The focus there is on the strategies to prevent scapegoating mechanisms<sup>22</sup> or utilise self-mortification. Within these discussions is an awareness of the natural need for (impossible) unicity when the hierarchy and social order is threatened by heretical insider parties.

### **Worship of the Idols**

The game of modern diplomacy is the soothing of inevitable storms, so signals are not misread, so catastrophe is avoided. This purifying of antagonisms until an ideal state of communication is reached seems a noble goal of modernism (e.g. Habermas' communicative model). The exaggerated promise of science-- scientism<sup>23</sup>-- was the West's first attempt at a solution to ambiguity and lack. This vision lives on in the stripped down, sterilized diplomatic meetings of today.

The Chinese-USA spat suggests, despite efforts at sterilizing, diplomacy is haunted by its past. In truth, language is always compromised by the 'ambiguity of immanence', the inevitable chronic uncertainty in a world without total knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Diplomats understand this as their role of protecting an idea/idol, the 'Nation-Thing' (Zizek, 1993, Ch.6), a spectral object created in the 'torture house of language'. The danger with the 'professionalization' of diplomacy is that it may have the opposite effect of that intended, leaving the antagonisms

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<sup>18</sup> See (Johnsson & Hall, 2005, Ch.1), which starts revealingly, 'The lack of theoretical interest in diplomacy [studies]...'. See also (Neumann, 2012) for a broad sweep on theory in Diplomacy Studies.

<sup>19</sup> 'Unicity' here is used in the (Lundberg, 2012, p.2) sense of a coherent totality.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Hegel of irretrievable antagonism' is exemplified by (McGowan, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> The Lacanian 'Symbolic Order' is an individual's reification of the symbolic fictions of which all individuals relate to know themselves and others; the delusions deposited keep everyday life sane.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, (Ivie & Giner, 2007). Ivie *et al*'s psychoanalytic word of 'projecting' points to the overwhelming desire for a sense of unicity by 'eradicating' inconsistency within.

<sup>23</sup> Taking the promise of possible unicity through science leads to scientism (Burke, 1969, XXiii).

<sup>24</sup> This ambiguity 'arise[s] out of the nature of language and meaning' (Wolin, 2001, p.64) itself.

without ways to dissipate, as its stripping of stimulus undermines diplomats' agency in creating change; the diplomacy becomes a 'dialogue of the deaf.'<sup>25</sup>

### **The Protectors of the Idols**

Diplomats are protectors and producers of the vulnerable Fantasy 'Nation-Thing'; their performance is as representatives of the attitude of their Nation-Thing (they perform its 'symbolic act'). With the rise of new threats, more than ever Western diplomats 'cling with a new intensity to [their new] idols, to [their] fetishes' (Latour, 2010, p.97). The diplomat is daily exposed to the possibility that the West's idols of human rights, modern science, individualism and the American Way were 'magic' (Burke, 1984, p.44ft), mere rationalizing bluff with rhetorical power.

The modern diplomat as vandals of old pageantry, set up a rational world of banal protocol (Shapin, 1994, p.410), but they did not 'free people of idolatry... but simply deprived them of a means to worship' (Latour, 2010, p.89). The Nation-Thing, if the anthropological claim of the importance of ritual is right, was starved of its (obscene) excess, of the play-element of performance: the very tools of sacred truth-regime construction.<sup>26</sup>

The ritually-created Cultus (Zondervan, 2005, p.69) of each country, the sacred-technic equipment for living, is ultimately a mystery even to that country. Every political move depends on motivations authorized by a nod to the constitutive power of the Cultus. The moves, according to Burke (Wess, 1996, p.31), are the rhetorical ploys which incite and seduce and induce. When embedded in the process, the subjects are engulfed by it, masking its changes and its artifice from them, generating a (failed) unicity (Lundberg, 2012, p.2) in its Fantasy ('We are One!').

The necessary concealment of a Nation's trauma is generated by a Fantasy.<sup>27</sup> Protection of the Fantasy is, in the obfuscatory, filler language of diplomacy, centred around a 'national interest' (the phlogiston of diplomacy). The Fantasy plays out with arguments between rival breakable orthodoxies until one takes control for a time by striking the right chord. In this, there is no ideal utopian Habermasian communication of rational individuals, but cultural animals, trapped into a conversation started generations ago, using ideas from the past which resonate in the present, which appeal today for reasons distinct from earlier conversants in the discussion (Burke, 1984c, p.110). This is the transhistorical, where there can never be an impartial observer umpiring.<sup>28</sup> This is why 'dirty' rhetorical tricks under a tranquil surface are so important: bridging devices,<sup>29</sup> laundering values with eulogistic coverings; the casuistic stretching of a court jester<sup>30</sup>; the 'corporate boasting' of enjoying identification with the

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<sup>25</sup> After the showboating in Anchorage, by contrast, experts (Tiezzi, 2021) claim America will be forced to change its behaviour.

<sup>26</sup> The passion of the ritual sets up the production of the Symbolic Order's shared belief as understood by Durkheim: (Rawls, 2004). The universal lie of the truth-regime is only revealed in the rare revelatory moments (Zizek, 2008, p.196).

<sup>27</sup> A Fantasy fills in the gaps of ideology with the impossible promise of unicity, of fully belonging.

<sup>28</sup> 'Every time there is a metalanguage, underneath lies a canaillerie [scoundrel], a dirty trick, a swindle, a cheat.' (Lacan, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> The transcending of a conflict with a symbolic merging device, typically a 'glitter word', such as 'freedom': (Burke, 1984, p.224).

<sup>30</sup> The (rhetorical) move of adjusting the principle to the particular case as if no rhetoric is involved; see (Burke, 1984, p.229).

group, and the relying on latent deviations.<sup>31</sup> These devices for hidden changes rely on what resonates to those engulfed in their Cultus.

It can be seen that a Hegel-Lacanian-Burkean view of diplomacy draws awareness<sup>32</sup> to the transhistorical (eternal rules for reality creation), the transsubjective (collective nature of beliefs)<sup>33</sup> and transsubstantive (the ambiguity of the meaning of the object), of difference and contingency. The diplomats are subjected to these meta-rules of reality, their vocabulary must reflect with this reality, must be selected from it and must be able to deflect from it. The magic of languages is their fertile field of tropes from the metaphors (Freud's 'condensations') to the metonymies (Freud's 'displacements').<sup>34</sup> This is a persuasive language which can only shine in the moment (Wess, 1996, p.119), but these rules for resonating to the audience (Lundberg, 2012, p.107) remain eternally the same, only the content changing.

What resonates is precisely the rhetoric/fetish-idols of that nation, these incite (Wess, 1996, p.31) action. Generally, China's diplomats rely on call-backs to the 'century of humiliation' to centre their persuasive techniques at home (Wu, 2014), and rely on Western guilt when seeking to persuade the West. At Alaska specifically, China relied on the inherent ambiguity of the other side's glittering idols to persuade: 'The United States has its United States-style democracy and China has Chinese-style democracy' (Anon, 2021). This simple sentence plays to the West's guilt found in its loyalty to multiculturalism (each nation has their own way) to prepare for an undermining by casuistic stretching of what is seen by the West as a factish-object (democracy), a universal truth; that is, relying on multiculturalism to derail the West's hidden/assumed mononaturalism (background 'Master-y'). China is not raising the conversation of whether there can only be one form of democracy, but smuggling it in through the rhetorical back door.

### **The West's Controlling Fetish**

The very rules for the argument were raised at Alaska. These rules are the Regime of International Law. It is the Western Cultus universalized.<sup>35</sup> Custom determines the Law unless active steps are taken for a consensus to form against it. This favours the pioneers of the Law: the West. When put in the spotlight, judges 'discover' what-always-was by interpreting phrases from the past: acts of States to glue together a fresh-always-was<sup>36</sup> of the Law. A revolutionary iconoclast-- like China-- newly on the scene has to convince the West that the West have their own naïve (fetish) beliefs after all (Latour, 2010, p.84). In Alaska, the Chinese senior diplomat, in line with this, dismissed the Law as 'so-called 'rules-based' international order' (Tiezzi, 2021).

In this struggle, neither side believes their beliefs are anything but reality; these incommensurate views are the 'dueling fundamentalisms' (Lundberg, 2007) which cannot see their own rhetoric as rhetoric in their search for (a sophistic) unicity. The 'lies'/blindness of rhetoric should not be judged for their dissimulation but used to find a deeper truth in the

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<sup>31</sup> The acceptable routes of deviation that are otherwise not readily recognised; see (Burke, 1984, p.234).

<sup>32</sup> Distinct from debunking or historicism.

<sup>33</sup> Note this not the same as 'intersubjective'.

<sup>34</sup> See Burke's (Burke, 1984c) and Freud's (Marcus, 1999, p.75).

<sup>35</sup> A Latourian 'mononaturalist' assertion.

<sup>36</sup> '[ratio decidendi', (rationale for the decision is)] outlawed as heresy until the law when [the sect of lawmakers] are strong enough' (Burke, 1984, p.292).

foundationalist antagonism revealed in the need to ‘lie’<sup>37</sup> as this will prove useful in resolving conflicts.

### **Naïve Iconoclasts**

The West believes it has surpassed the old idols and found universalism. Indeed, the creation of today’s plucky democracies was a period with the destruction of old idols of pure unquestionable legitimacy, such as Pharaohs and God-Emperors. Their new beliefs look universal on first blush. But even in the West there is no consensus<sup>38</sup> (Kao, 2011, p.26); and, even many Asians accept the West’s ideas of rights. Underneath the glitter of claims of universality, the ideas are compromised.

Because of its attachment to its factish-objects and the genuine sense of the truth in these new idols, the West will view the Chinese ‘Wolf Warrior’ attacks on the ‘universal’ ideas as cynical power games and not true beliefs. But motive attribution is, after all, simply a reversal of their own understanding of the situation (Burke, 1984b, p.221); the skewed selection of motive-mongering depends on the misperception of the viewer, that is, reliance on its rhetorical-idols.

In the Alaskan talks, both sides played the game of soft debunking (‘muckraking’ in the 1930s language of Burke), a game which seeks victory by searching for ‘eulogistic coverings’ (Burke, 1984, p.168) of grand old ideas, the void of their foundations. The debunker, having ripped apart the history and myths of the other nation, necessarily smuggles back in their own normative values, as some fetish-object.<sup>39</sup> China denounces the glittering ‘so-called-‘rules-based’-international-order-object of the West, alluding to its own glittering object, only for the West to invert the rhetoric in response.

Why the keenness on destroying the fetish of the Other? The clear excuse for the Chinese diplomats is for their ‘truth’ they need to comply with the infallible Party (CCP) position. In contrast, the Western diplomats are, rather paradoxically, blinded by their insight. So keen on self-debunking (‘a nation is just socially constructed!’) they learn to just play along as representatives of the old pageantry of Nation. But whether a true believer or simply playing along, it still ‘works’, even offering them an enjoyable cynical distance as they participate (Johnston, 2004, p.264).

The more they tone things down, the more uncontrollable of an effect there is<sup>40</sup>; the diplomats, whatever pageantry they participate in, are part of a (Symbolic Order) social web which positions them as the Subjects-supposed-to-know, providing their words with ‘magic’ (efficacy). Even ‘mere’ meetings contain a symbolic weight revealed in the press breathlessly commentating on routine phone calls between leaders. The sterilizing institutional removal of excess does not remove the uncanny sacred element giving the event its excess. The

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<sup>37</sup> (Levine, 2014, Sec. ‘Psychoanalysis’, p.784): this points to the particular lie as a truth exposing the universal lie.

<sup>38</sup> ‘The pervasive characterization of rights talk as Western further glosses over real differences...’ (Kao, 2011, p.26).

<sup>39</sup> A fetish-object because the sophistry and rationalizations will be hidden in the rhetorical assertions of purist debunking techniques.

<sup>40</sup> A parallel can be seen with modern monarchies. The more they effect to be normal (no smoke and mirrors), the more mysterious. (Zizek, 2016, p.262)

misattributing to style (pageantry) is precisely a fetish; it is not them but their structural position, their relations to others, which generates the sacredness and the efficacy.

### **Carving the New Icons**

The diplomat plays the crucial game of carving idols. The game for life itself is in the rituals which create the sacred centre-- the Cultus-- of Society. Rites create beliefs of what matters,<sup>41</sup> what is sacred. These games constantly attempt to produce the social consensus of Truth, healing divisions, and generating belief representations (belief as vicariously produced). But the sacred excess of life (its heretical non-unicity) can never be successfully purged. The ritual of Diplomacy is a core part of the endless, failing unitizing efforts to create unicity.

The Western diplomat who purges the ritual pageantry and purifies diplomacy creates an unintended stasis in the Symbolic Order, preventing healing and change. How can a diplomat persuade the status quo figures that she really means it? How to mark a change at the Symbolic level? The 'ritual-value' (Lacan, 1982, p.40) of an act creates an extra meaning which becomes entrenched onto an object by the exuberant excess, such as the half hour soliloquy at the Alaskan summit.<sup>42</sup> They can express that they really mean to mean it. In contrast to the banality of modern diplomacy, the all-out pageantry of old-style diplomacy mimics the use-value of old ritual, in that it draws attention to itself thereby creating an effect, a clear signal, a fact.

The Western diplomat is still stuck with the modern dogma that beliefs should be discounted,<sup>43</sup> that harmony is only possible if subjective postures ('positions', mere reflexes) are put aside and the real, reasonable positions (read: objective, measurable) can be aired (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.45). But this ignores the value of an absurd, dramatic diplomatic action. The indignation, revealed in an excessive dramatic display at the diplomatic function creates the fact of a fused fact/value complex: The Fact of an outrage,<sup>44</sup> which demarcates a conflict as a conflict, as an event, as symbolically efficacious. This frames reality and creates the facts on the ground. In contrast, the traditional effort in the anti-rhetoric methodology of Peace Studies<sup>45</sup>, of marking out the boundaries of what is mere attitude, belief, or emotion, and set against them what should 'really matter', was long ago captured by sophistic stratagems of PR displays of peace-seeking (Biletzki, 2007).

In conflict, the emotion and beliefs necessarily order the deceptively factual framing of the conflict. The emotions stir the parties to 'steelman' their positions and gain resonance from allies (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.181), adding to their truth. Dismissing it as mere bluster, is part of the overall conflict negotiations, and is not a distraction from finding peace, but is the very way to peace. Ideological posturing isn't the covering over of a true reality, but the 'becoming-true of a fake beginning' (Zizek, 2016, p.79), since the factual reality on the ground is nothing more than some old forgotten act of sophistry. The eulogistic covering and casuistry stretching are part of the forming of 'realness': the forming of a new (ideological)

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<sup>41</sup> A Durkheimian argument: (Rawls, 2004, p.116).

<sup>42</sup> Notably, the Chinese at Alaska 'created' the facts on the ground by showboating, consequently this event was memorialized with a Wikipedia entry. And, as noted earlier (Tiezzi, 2021), created change, i.e. was efficacious.

<sup>43</sup> This is revealed in the lack of conflict resolution strategies that take beliefs as anything but an obstacle (Ramsbotham, 2010, p. 66). Note the odd decision to make 'beliefs' a sub-category of mere 'attitudes' in Galtung's 'Conflict Triangle': (Galtung, 1975).

<sup>44</sup> The 'fact' of conflict is the indignation felt (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.126). That is, a fact of a conflict is beliefs, attitudes.

<sup>45</sup> See the TRANSCEND model: (Galtung, 2004).

consensus, using tools of linguistic eliding in the internal economy of belief in a seemingly intractable conflict. This sophistry-magic will creep in whatever the best intentions of Western diplomats.

### **Conclusion: Peace Through Excess**

The best hope for intractable conflict is not simply sophistic covering over of differences (a reinforcing through convenient if unstable fetishes), but in finding hidden diversity (by uncovering the ambiguity hidden in false appearance of unicity). The aim is to ‘purify’ (interrogate the nature of the conflict’s idols, as ambiguous, symbolic-guiding rhetorical constructs in specific contexts) until the ambiguity of reality stands visible; the key is to remove the malign violent element and leave just the (ineradicable) ‘war of words’ in a world of always-already antagonisms. This may mean even conflictual, emotional, antagonizing discourses may need promoting by peacemakers, such as when there are power asymmetries which damage the ability to dig for disunity.<sup>46</sup>

Ramsbotham calls this procedure ‘Clausewitz-in-reverse’ (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.211). Similarly, Hegel understood that the resolution to seemingly intractable conflict is not a (false, clinical) reconciliation. The fact-creating emotional tools of beliefs need centre stage. A soft-debunking (picking apart of unity) by encouraging real argument, under stress, done right, acts as a ‘programme of socialization’ (Wess, 1996, p.85), finding commonalities for potential unities by inducing a transparency of issues through, not despite, conflict. Calls for harmony (to overlook differences) would undermine this strategy. These tentative unities will themselves create deeper, more complex conflicts, which again must be truly exposed to ‘resolve’ them.

The answer then is not the commonsense Peace Studies view of slowly correcting until finally reaching the truth-in-itself of freedom and peace. Instead, it is to correct the view of ‘peace equals harmony’ with a hardnosed grasp of the chaotic lab of life; eulogised ideas of ‘peace’ can even be inconsistent and dangerous in the World.<sup>47</sup> At the broadest level, even the diplomat’s ‘mega’-narrative of the notion of the shared imaginary of the ‘Nation-Thing’ is inconsistent with the brute political reality (Machin, 2015) of divisions within nations. Without facing these realities, scapegoating and violence seem inevitable (Carter, 1996) as calls for peace are easily co-opted into pious calls to protect the harmony of culture.

Tactically, the key is to ‘cut across’ the typical ‘kumbaya’ soothing of the hothouse of language (and all too easily accepted in traditional methodologies) for finding peace. Burke uses the term ‘perspective by incongruity’ to point to this, to point to the need to see things awry.<sup>48</sup> Opposed to this move are Burke’s ‘pious’, the deep believers; they have an organizing ‘sense of what goes with what’ (Burke, 1984b, p.76), desiring the group unicity which encourages a dichotomous fight (the out-group versus the in-group). They will resist attacks on their piety (Burke, 1984b, p.69) as the cultural sedimentation keeps them socially inert, and prepares them to resist direct attacks.

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<sup>46</sup> ‘The enemies of the discourse of peace are not discourses of conflict’ (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.218).

<sup>47</sup> As an example, eulogized ‘human rights’ could be seen by parties as not an ideal tool of peace but a Western Master’s ploy, as their ‘occupational psychosis’ (an excessive emphasis on one way of doing things by a particular sect) of those in control of peace-seeking and a danger to the negotiating parties.

<sup>48</sup> Ramsbotham has the similar idea of ‘Strategic Engagement of Discourses’ (Ramsbotham, 2010, p.254).

Diplomats have the indirect tools of idolatry and sophistry to cut across and create new (albeit failing) unicities, and should have a savviness to 'heighten tension and reject purgation' (Thames, 2021), to find peace despite the pious. If they avowedly take on this Shaman role (the Master-Charlatan) by daring to actively pull apart and re-mold identities of the inter-party, intra-party and third-party groups, they will create a loud babble (Babel) of language to move away from old flat-footed peacemaking formulas, now easily evaded by the 'industrialised' (Biletzki, 2007) and complacent peace platitudes of the conflict parties, and seek deeper resonances among the parties no matter how impious the discussions.

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