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Edges of Diplomacy: Literary Representations of the (Honorary) Consul and the Public-Private Divide in Diplomatic Studies

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Abstract: This article investigates the relevance of consular positions, and particularly the honorary consul, through their representations in modern literature and the arts. Although the honorary consul's official status is codified in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963, this document clearly identifies the limits to diplomatic immunity for this position, such that the honorary consul occupies a hybrid space on the boundary between the public and the private. This hybridity opens up the possibility for ambiguity in terms of conflicts of interest and divided loyalties. Acknowledging this hybridity requires re-examining the position of honorary consul beyond formal descriptions in mainstream diplomatic studies which are often evasive on the position's actual status. In contrast, their representation in modern literature and the arts offers a more candid insight into the ontology and practice of consuls and consular work. As a result, the article makes the claim that the honorary consul illustrates that the public/private divide in contemporary diplomacy is less stable than is generally presented, and that the rise of private entities as diplomatic actors is therefore more a question of intensity than the emergence of something entirely new.

Keywords: honorary consul, consul, Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, proxenos, privatization of diplomacy

This article investigates the figure of the consul, and specifically the honorary consul, as a way to question public-private identities in diplomacy and to open up the possibility for new research fields in both diplomatic studies and diplomatic history.[1] It sees the consul as a figure who, in the modern era, occupies a

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relatively undefined space as both a recognised diplomat and a private citizen. Although the consul /honorary consul's official status is codified in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963, this document identifies the *limits* to diplomatic immunity for these figures very clearly, bringing to the fore their hybrid public-private status. While other members of diplomatic missions also lack full immunity, consuls are official representatives with the outside world and therefore occupy a unique position in this regard. The practice of diplomacy (and diplomatic studies) elides this in-between space because admitting to it would expose the legal vulnerabilities of the consular position, and that would be unacceptable both ethically and professionally. Despite their codification in the Vienna Convention, consuls are widely regarded as a "historically amorphous group" for whom "writers have a hard time figuring out the character … and their activities" (Leira and Neumann 2013: 162, 168). Writing as late as 2011, Jan Melissen remarked that the "academic literature on consular affairs is rather thinly scattered", and while key texts do exist, this enhances the sense of the consul as being at the margins of diplomatic concern both in scholarly and practical terms (Melissen 2011: 1). Yet by 2013 there were over 20,000 registered honorary consuls worldwide (Economist 2013). Berridge notes that Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul* "has probably done nothing for the reputation of the institution" (Berridge 2010: 137). Yet perhaps Greene exactly encapsulated the double nature of the position in a way that mainstream diplomatic studies to date has not? After reflecting on the significance of the double identity of consular positions, the article utilises literary representations of the consul in order to explore these 'edges of diplomacy' further. The argument is therefore made that it is only through literature that the marginal vulnerability of the (honorary) consul can be fully appreciated.

Introducing the Consul: An Exercise in Ambiguity

To investigate the consul in this way, an apt starting point is the etymology of the word diplomacy itself, as this already gives a clue to the hybrid nature of the consular profession. Diplomacy derives from the Greek verb *diploun*, meaning 'to double', and the Greek (and subsequently Latin) noun *diploma*, 'a double document'. This literally refers to the official certificates – diplomas – issued by Roman authorities, which were folded in a certain way (Numelin 1950: 125). The etymology can therefore be used to approach diplomacy as 'double', here taken to mean 'double identity', or, in the context of the (honorary) consul, simultaneously public and private, official and unofficial, formal and informal, local citizen and temporary resident, diplomat and member of the public. In this way

we can talk of a kind of 'double ontology' that resides in the diplomatic network, in the person of the consul. The honorary consul without question exemplifies this hybrid position more than any other in the diplomatic pantheon.

A consul is an individual appointed by a state to represent a specific set of interests in a foreign country, with particular reference to commercial relations and visa issues. Early studies of the origin of the consular position acknowledged this intermingling of interests, since the consul was originally appointed to represent in diplomatic fashion commercial interests in foreign ports (Warden 1813; Borel 1831: 1–7). The position does not hold full diplomatic status, and someone may only assume such a position once permission – termed *exequatur* – has been granted by the host state. This can be revoked at any time at the host government's discretion. The granting of these privileges stretches back in time much further than the existence of established nation-states, and the position and privileges of consuls has likewise changed over time. The Greeks first recognized this position under the titles of *Proxenos* and *Prostatai*, whereby the former was a citizen from the host community chosen to be the legal representative for a designated community of foreigners and the latter were chosen by the foreigners themselves to act as intermediaries. Harold Nicolson noticed that the *Proxenos* from the beginning had a dual status, being "a native of the city in which he resided and … expected there to further and protect the interests of the citizens of the State by which he was appointed" (Nicolson 1962: 17–18). This also involved a dual role of law and commerce, which opened up the position to intrigue, subterfuge, and the demands of intelligence gathering from both sides. An awareness of risk, an eye for profit, and a need for resourcefulness were therefore constants at the center of the consular profession from the beginning. Some have argued for the re-instatement of the status of *proxenos* in recognition of the increasing presence of private or citizens diplomacy and consular-like activity in contemporary (and not only economic) cross-border interactions (Kopper 2015).

Modern diplomacy is generally dated from the fifteenth century when resident ambassadors became a feature of inter-state relations, a move first implemented in northern Italy and then gradually adopted by other European powers. It is worth noting that consuls had been active as representatives for Italian merchant communities in the Mediterranean already since the twelfth century (Ulbert and Le Bouedec 2006: 12).[2] Trading communities gradually assumed the role of electing their own consuls as representatives, and the legal

2 According to Ulbert, the first reference to a consul has been dated to 1117. Borel (1831: 3) referred to the appointment of two consuls in the port of Medina by Roger, King of Sicily, in 1128.

responsibilities of the consul expanded such that in the Ottoman Empire, the wider Muslim world, and in parts of Asia, they functioned as jurisdictional powers separate from the host authorities. Whereas statist diplomacy has always had a fear of the 'gone native' syndrome, consuls were already partly native at the time of their appointment, this being an essential aspect of their ability to function between different communities. Operating as mediators and judicial go-betweens in order to ensure the free flow of trade and the protection of commercial interests, the consul (or *baglio*) was gradually granted a form of official status by both the host and home authorities. Yet this status always had limits, as Mattingly makes clear:

> Strictly speaking, consuls were not diplomats. Their status depended not on the general principles of international law but on special treaties with the powers on whose territory they were. But they did in fact perform some of the services later performed by resident ambassadors. (Mattingly 1955: 63–64)[3]

Legally, consuls were therefore at the mercy of local custom, and as a result they needed tact, skill and local knowledge to negotiate the rapids of harbor politics, with its inherent competition and corruption. Consuls needed to maintain both the interests of the trading community as well as their own, but they did so without any formal responsibilities towards their home state – they were diplomatic part-timers, receiving no official income, following no 'national interest', and benefiting only by charging a 'consulage' payment for goods moving through their patch. Financially they were therefore also dependent on their own resourcefulness. Yet this set-up could not last once the nation-state began to establish itself as the prime unit of political organization from the seventeenth century onwards. While the sending states sought to both utilize and limit the consul's role in order to further the 'national interest', so too did host states look to secure their sovereignty by restricting consular activities. Nevertheless, as Leira and Neumann point out, the transition from 'personality of the law' (where law follows the person regardless of territory) to territorial law (based on the nation-state) was gradual and irregular, allowing for the continuation of a whole variety of consular practices over time and across space. It was in this period that a distinction opened up between 'career consuls' appointed and sent out by the sending state, and 'honorary consuls' who were often citizens appointed

3 The analysis here opposes the reductionist view that prior to the arrival of the nation-state consuls could not be termed diplomats, since this would restrict diplomacy *per se* to being purely an inter-state activity. Recent scholarship has also questioned Mattingly's neat transition from pre-modern to modern (statist) diplomatic structures, practices, and norms. The transition was less straightforward than previously assumed (Watkins 2008).

from the host state itself (Leira and Neumann 2013: 165). By the nineteenth century nation-states were gradually absorbing consular functions into their diplomatic portfolios, as commerce became an added form of inter-state competition for the European state system (Platt 1971; Dickie 2007). Consular networks therefore expanded despite the fact that the actual status of the consul remained ill-defined and differed greatly from location to location. Diplomatic and consular activities were merging, yet the expansion of the consul's tasks and responsibilities was in stark contrast to the continuing lack of official recognition, and eventually this incongruity had to be addressed (Berridge 2010: 125–128). Yet as discussed below, the resulting Vienna Convention of 1963 did not succeed in ironing out all of the ambiguities of the consular profession. On the contrary, in many ways the effort to codify the position for the good of diplomatic practice in general only succeeded in highlighting exactly the proportion of legal vulnerability and risk that existed, and that necessarily had to exist so long as diplomatic privileges were not fully extended. The essentially 'double' nature of the consular profession on the borderline between public and private ensured that full diplomatic privileges could never be granted. As a result consuls – and the honorary consul in particular – would continue to occupy a unique semi-protected space in the legion of diplomatic representatives.

The honorary consul can therefore be seen as a kind of bridge or link between the traditional focus of diplomatic studies and the broader, more diffuse terrain that is covered by terms such as citizen diplomacy, private diplomacy, informal or unofficial diplomacy. These terms generally refer to individuals and activities operating outside of the official diplomatic apparatus, yet increasingly fulfilling important roles for achieving foreign policy objectives. Recent scholarship has identified this as the 'privatization of diplomacy', involving consultancy, advocacy, and pr firms "to construct diplomatic strategies of representation and image management" for both nation-states and 'non-state diplomatic actors' (NDAs) in international affairs (Pigman and Deos 2008: 85; Hocking 2004; Seabrooke 2015). As a result of this shift towards privatization, the legal foundations of diplomacy itself are being altered (Cornago 2013c). The central role of the state as the prime operator is being undermined, bypassed, and shaken. While Weber's claim for the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence may have taken a few hits with the rise of Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs), so the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of diplomacy is now being questioned. John Kelley talks of a noticeable shift from a diplomacy of status (old-style) to a diplomacy of capabilities (new style), where the mobilising of problem-solving coalitions is the focus of attention, not the perpetuation of (national) interests, hierarchies, and representations. Kelley points out that "a person who self-identifies as a diplomat does not exactly become one by

virtue of that." Since the 1970s and the emergence of transnational history as a distinct field of study, several studies have examined the interventions of citizens in international affairs, their personal access or commercial clout opening up otherwise closed diplomatic spaces. Kelley's view is that by utilising skill-sets, leveraging networks, and focusing on specific issues, "the diplomat is actually dispersing across the niches and contours of the public sphere" (Kelley 2014: 26. See also; Berman and Johnson 1977). Despite the best interests of foreign ministries to adapt and co-opt the private sector for mutually advantageous ends, diplomacy is escaping from its ceremonial box, and the designation of 'diplomat' is becoming more fluid – perhaps not in the official eye, but certainly in the public eye (Langhorne 1997; Hocking 1999). It is increasingly recognized how private citizens have long adopted the trappings and often wielded the influence of diplomats, even if the designation of these activites as 'diplomacy' is still problematic (Scott-Smith 2014). For diplomatic studies, its field of enquiry changing before its eyes, the fact that the "exclusive jurisdiction of states is questioned in some quarters" means that a clear distinction is needed "between the superficial and the essential" (Cohen 1999: 1–2). Only then can the exclusive terrain of diplomacy be marked out against the interlopers from the non-state world.

Contested Legal Space: The Partial Immunity of the Honorary Consul

As Kishan Rana has pointed out (but not explored), "Consular activity takes place at the margins of the encounter between sovereign states" (Rana 2011: 212). While the functions of the consular service were professionalized in the twentieth century, this did not result in the full incorporation of the consul into the diplomatic ranks. They remain on the edges of diplomacy, essential but by extension dispensable. Yet the question of immunity needed to be resolved once consular affairs were brought into the diplomatic fold. The central document providing a codified, internationally recognized set of regulations on this is the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations from 1963. One thing that is immediately apparent is that it is almost double the length of the Convention on Diplomatic Relations from 1961, coming in at 29 pages in contrast to the earlier document's 16. Although consular affairs do not stretch into the rarefied air of high politics, the sheer breadth of the consular portfolio caused difficulties for the negotiators. References and stipulations covering consular status and role had been scattered across bilateral treaties and agreements over time, and the Vienna

Convention served a key purpose in gathering all the threads in order to establish "an accepted guide to international practice" (Gore-Booth 1979: 212; See also Lee and Quigley 2008). Each state can also decide how to employ them, since honorary consuls "perform their duties based on a specific act of appointment by the ministry of foreign affairs of the sending State," and these may range from full consular roles to purely symbolic functions (Dela 2014: 71). As Euripides Evriviades expressed it, to be an attentive honorary consul "requires constant attention to developments ranging from issues of international trade and investment to the political and economic, and it includes the cultural and the social. It is no easy task ... . [and] does not receive enough honor" (Evriviades 2005: 24–25).

The Convention stipulates that consular premises, along with official archives and all relevant documents and diplomatic correspondence, are inviolable. Consuls have freedom of movement and communication for official purposes, subject to any specific restrictions placed by the host state with the exequatur. Tax benefits and exemption from customs duties also accrue. Nevertheless, Article 43 of the Vienna Convention states that "Consular officers and consular employees shall not be amenable to the jurisdiction of the judicial or administrative authorities of the receiving State *in respect of acts performed in the exercise of consular functions*." Here lies the difference between consular and diplomatic immunity. Consuls may be called as witnesses in a court of law, something not demanded of diplomats. The shallow level of immunity also does not stretch to family members. While consular premises are protected, they can still be expropriated with compensation, and the private dwelling of a consul is *not* covered as part of the consular premises. These limits are amplified the lower one descends the consular ladder, from consul general to consul to vice-consul to honorary consul. It is the latter who possesses probably the most remarkable status in the diplomatic pantheon. Honorary consuls are not even specifically defined in the Convention, such has been their "chameleonic quality" through time (Melissen 2011: 2), and they are afforded a minimum of privileges. Because they are often engaged in commercial activities for their livelihood, the general taxation provisions for consuls do not apply. They miss out on the immunity from arrest, granted to full consuls unless in the case of "a grave crime" (Article 41). Instead, since honorary consuls are often long-term residents or even nationals of the host state itself, the limits to inviolability from prosecution are expressed firmly in Article 71 "in respect of official acts performed in the exercise of their functions." In other words, whereas for a diplomat the cloak of (host state) immunity stretches across everything they do, for the honorary consul the 'diplomatic space' that they occupy is severely limited, offering little room to claim that any action was one hundred percent an 'official act' and thus deserving of full protection.

The Vienna Convention therefore does clarify the consul's position and rights, but only in a way that emphasizes the legal precariousness of the profession (Trocan 2011). The 'double ontology' or 'bicultural' nature of the consul – occupying both public and private space simultaneously – is clearly visible throughout, as is the fact that the diversity of activities prevented any comprehensive overview in the Vienna Convention. Leira and Neumann make the claim that this prevented any identifiable 'consular culture' from emerging, since the cultural skills developed by consuls are necessarily local-specific and "did not include mastery of an extensive and generalized 'being-in-the-world' that would be instantly recognizable by other consuls" (Leira and Neumann 2013: 169). Of course, some would dispute this, since it goes against the assumption of a coherent corps akin to that embodied by diplomats. Berridge, for instance, claims that "analogous to the diplomatic corps, the consular corps is often better organized and more collegial" (Berridge 2010: 129). Nevertheless, the effort to incorporate consular affairs into diplomatic normalcy can only partly succeed. Admittedly, diplomats may increasingly fulfill consular tasks as part of their official role, but that does not solve the particular status of consuls themselves. Thus Leira and Neumann continue by stating that "consuls in many ways transcend diplomacy", and have a longer history than what is considered as traditional inter-state diplomacy: they possess a "quality of being both inside and outside" the state system and its sustaining diplomatic networks (Leira and Neumann 2013: 169–170). Jan Melissen concurs – although he places the consul firmly within "the broader context of diplomatic practice", he does nevertheless situate consular work more within transnational rather than inter-state relations, such that "the traditional division between 'foreign' and 'domestic' was alien to the world in which consular officers operated" (Melissen 2011: 2). Consuls inhabit the diplomatic borderlands – not just in legal or academic terms, but in geographical terms as well. The honorary consul may be the lowest on the diplomatic ladder (indeed, may not even be considered to have a foot on a rung at all) yet they can provide services in far-flung locations that could never receive the attention of more established diplomatic outlets.

Despite this second-rank official status in modern diplomatic hierarchies, the consul has made a substantial revival as a diplomatic figure over the past two decades. On the one hand, the cut-backs in diplomatic networks by North American and European ministries have led to a greater need for cheaper options to maintain representation, and smaller nations also need representatives at minimum cost. Coupled to this is the rise of 'economic diplomacy' as a priority, with trade missions becoming equal to if not more important than any other form of regular diplomatic interaction. Consuls can function on a

minimum of diplomatic foundation, enabling a larger 'diplomatic footprint' across far-flung locations for trade, investment, and tourism promotion. The greater mobility of people in the late twentieth century has also increased the interface between Foreign Ministries and the public, particularly during crises or natural disasters when the media spotlight is focused on the safety of nationals. The previously relatively mundane task of issuing visas has also taken on dramatically increased importance following 9/11 and the introduction of stricter immigration requirements by the United States, which has forced other countries to follow suit in order to ensure compatibility and avoid travel hold-ups (Okano-Heijmans 2011: 21–41).

So not only has the number of consuls and honorary consuls increased, but also their responsibilities, and while their diplomatic status has strictly speaking not improved, their importance for embassies, ministries, and businesses definitely has (Copeland 2009: 196). In this scenario, the honorary consul represents a further extension of consular reach, at reduced cost, and, due to their residential status and local (often business-related) knowledge, with added benefits (Stringer 2011: 62–96). Despite resistance to the position from some delegations at the time of the Vienna Convention, the separate section in the final document secured their long-term recognition. Strong support came from the maritime Nordic countries, and Iceland, Norway and Sweden continue to make good use of extensive networks of honorary consuls. In 2009 Sweden's global consular network was predominantly honorary (400 out of 413 posts), while Germany also made use of 350 honorary consuls worldwide. Smaller states also make prominent use of them, in particular Singapore, Malta, and Sri Lanka (Berridge 2010: 138; Rana 2011: 212n.9). Honorary consuls, those civilian-diplomat hybrids, 'double ontology' personified, the interface of the official merging with the commonplace and the every-day, are increasingly a feature of twenty-first century diplomacy. Consuls are often the first point of diplomatic contact for citizens who encounter trouble abroad, such as a lost passport or a major health issue. Not all nation-states are in favour. As retired US diplomat David Merkel remarked: "having someone else represent us would be kind of goofy" (Economist 2013).

While diplomatic studies has started to investigate the practical added value of these positions, the hybridity discussed above has largely been passed over. It was Rohan Butler who gave us the term 'paradiplomacy' to refer to private initiatives that either supported or contested state-run foreign policy (Butler 1961: 12–25; Kuznetsov 2015). Noé Cornago, one of the foremost scholars on this subject, has put his finger on the central dilemma of this non-state terrain:

> These valuable policy approaches to 'paradiplomacy' nonetheless fail to address what constitutes surely its most salient feature, namely, its ambivalence. In other words, the way in which both in practice and discursively 'paradiplomacy' suggests a desire to emulate official diplomacy whilst simultaneously affirming a distinctive will of political autonomy. (Cornago 2013b)

The ambiguity of the (legal) status of the honorary consul can also be linked to the 'diplomatic fictions' that sustain the practices of the profession. Constantinou thus refers to the fiction of the sovereign subject (the state), the representative agent, the instrumental object, and the specialized process that have become fixed as the legal and normative cornerstones of diplomacy (Constantinou 1996: 103–110). Cornago added a fifth: the fiction of perfect reciprocity (equality among nation-states) (Cornago 2013a: 160). Honorary consuls might arguably be a sixth: the fiction of diplomatic status.

Constantinou's diplomatic fictions provide a perfect bridge to the examination of the (honorary) consul in literature and the arts: fiction being used to explore fiction. The reputation of consular positions in public life has long been contested. The Soviet Union originally rejected them as "nothing more than bourgeois spies," and Berridge notes that their limited privileges were also related to "the suspicion of not being entirely respectable that they have tended to attract." As stated above, Berridge dismisses Greene's *The Honorary Consul* as providing a negative image of the position (Berridge 2010: 137). But Greene, foremost among a host of literary authors, provides significant insights into the double nature of the honorary consul that so far have escaped mainstream diplomatic studies.

A Fictional Turn: "None of These Stories Has a Happy Ending"

Fictional explorations of diplomacy have been conducted before, but not as a way to explore diplomatic hybridity and (honorary) consuls as advanced here (Sheeran 2007; Hampton 2009; Krzakowski 2013, 2017). The first thing that strikes any such investigation is that (honorary) consuls are invariably put forward as individuals with a murky past, an unsettled present, and often an uncertain future. They seem to occupy a social grey zone, simultaneously within but nevertheless on the edges of the host society, integrated by their business dealings but set apart by their status, a situation that matches the various caveats and sub-clauses at the end of the 1963 Vienna Convention. The post-structuralist James Der Derian began his alternative reading of diplomacy as "a

mediation between estranged individuals, groups, or entities," but what can be added is that of all diplomats it is the honorary consul who represents an ontological estrangement within the profession itself, being part diplomat and part civilian (Der Derian 1987: 93). This gives them an in-built risk factor, in that their private occupation may transgress their diplomatic status, and vice versa. Since one cannot expect diplomacy to advertise its own ambiguities, it is useful to turn to fiction in order to investigate how this ambiguity is portrayed through the imagination – and in so doing, offering a narrative on the edges of diplomacy.

In June 2012 the precariousness yet essential value of the profession was emphasised – in perhaps a rather unfortunate manner – by the then Dutch Minister for European Affairs and International Cooperation, Ben Knapen, at a conference for Dutch honorary consuls in The Hague. Knapen began his speech by noting that honorary consuls were marked by popular conceptions of "diplomatic obscurity", "international men of mystery", or "card-carrying agents of a foreign power". He continued by commenting on various literary representations, including by Cees Nooteboom (the short story 'Heinz') (Nooteboom 2013), Thomas Mann (*Buddenbrooks*), and of course Graham Greene (*The Honorary Consul*). Knapen then noted to his audience that "none of these stories has a happy ending", since all three of the fictional consuls are dead by the end of their respective stories (this is actually not true – Greene's character Charley Fortnum does survive his kidnapping). He then told his audience to "be glad there is a difference between fiction and reality", before shifting away from this literary diversion to concentrate the later part of his speech on emphasizing the necessary role of honorary consuls. Referring to them as the "Good Relations Infantry" and praising their "invaluable" work, Knapen acknowledged that it was being carried out "without being a burden on the nation's treasury" (to his credit he did then note in an aside that this is a typical comment for a frugal Dutchman). He ended his speech by noting that however foreign policy strategies or goals may change over time, "countries will always promote their trade and culture, and will always help their citizens in need abroad. In other words: we will always need our honorary consuls" (Knapen 2012).

Knapen's speech neatly reveals in one short text both the popular rendition of honorary consuls, and the increasing value of their position for the diplomatic networks as a whole. A survey beyond that carried out by Knapen's speechwriter reveals a wider selection of examples where consuls and honorary consuls are typified as estranged and vulnerable to a host of risks. This survey does not take in authors who were themselves consuls, as others have done, and which is in itself a valuable research field (Claybaugh 2009). Instead, it looks to the representation of consular positions in literature and the arts in order to

illustrate how the ambiguities of these positions have been best captured through fictional accounts.

Paul Theroux's *The Consul's File* narrates the travails of a young American diplomat posted to an outer corner of Malaysia, a fitting frontier-land in which to position the semi-lost estrangement of consular identity (although his main character does escape to the mainstream with a successful posting to London in the sequel, *The London Embassy*) (Theroux 1977; 1983). Marguerite Duras's *The Vice-Consul* sees the figure of Anne-Marie Stretter dealing with the advances of the vice-consul of Lahore in a feverish Calcutta. The vice-consul, facing investigation and possessing a shady past, becomes indicative of Duras' interest in capturing her charaters in an indecipherable web of truth and fiction, once again in line with the consul's vulnerable 'double-ontology' (Duras 1966). Aliefka Bijlsma's *The Consul General's Wife* deals with the ostensibly fortunate Dutchman Melchior Steenbergen enjoying his posting in Rio and looking forward to promotion, but this is nothing more than a "house of cards" where the main character is "unable to recognize his own flaws", and it rapidly turns into tragedy (Bijlsma 2012). Bartholomew Gill's crime thriller *Death of an Irish Consul* also attaches vulnerability (and double lives) to its diplomatic protagonist (Gill 2002). Geoffrey Firmin, the main character in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, is even more vulnerable to adverse events, being an *ex*-consul, addicted to spirits, and increasingly lost within Mexican society during the Day of Death celebrations (Lowry 1947). Lowry's fictional creation, semi-autobiographical in its depiction of the central character as a "tragic figure", raises the interesting question as to why the author would choose to attach the consular title to this forelorn individual (Doherty 1990: 118). Once again, the consular figure does not make it to the end of the novel alive. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* an American vice-consul makes a brief appearance to assist the main character Dick Diver's brush with the Italian police, but the assistance is reluctant and carried out with "an official expression of disapproval." Fitzgerald's eye for class divisions places the diplomat as jovial on the surface but essentially aloof and distant underneath, again fitting the ambiguities of a consular intermediary between the public and the private (Scott Fitzgerald 1986 [1934]: 254–255).

Fitzgerald's novel does make the point that the consul, whatever their limitations, can occasionally make an appearance to save the day. Volker Schlöndorff's *Diplomacy* (2012), a film depicting a fictional all-night debate between Swedish consul-general Raoul Nordling and the Wehrmacht General Dietrich von Choltitz on whether to follow Hitler's orders to destroy Paris in 1944, is a further reminder of this. Dedicated to arch-negotiator Richard Holbrooke, the film depicts Nordling as a wily agent of humanity prepared to

use persuasion and deceit in order to bring von Choltitz round to disobeying the Führer. A paean to the arts of diplomacy, it greatly embellishes Nordling's role, which in reality never stretched as far as saving this beautiful city (Buruma 2014). In contrast, Gian Carlo Menotti's three-act play *The Consul* (1950) presents a situation where the diplomatic persona, with the power to make or break lives through the issuance or refuals of a visa for travel abroad, never makes an appearance throughout the entire performance. Menotti's critique of faceless bureaucracy and the far-reaching consequences of mundane paperwork presents the consul in a similar light to the anonymous, unreachable but all-powerful authorities portrayed in Kafka's *The Castle* (1968 [1926]).

The epitome of consular fiction is undoubtedly Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul* from 1973. Greene's novel has been referenced briefly in diplomatic studies, but its significance for diplomatic identity has not been fully explored (see Sheeran 2007: 124; Berridge 2010: 137). Haplessness, drunkenness, estrangement, and vulnerability are rolled into one semi-diplomatic figure. The consul, Charley Fortnum, first appears in the narrative when the novel's main subject, Eduardo Plarr, lets it be known that he has been sleeping with the consul's wife – something that Fortnum himself is unaware of. By chapter two Fortnum has not yet made an appearance himself, but he is already described as having "veins [that] run with alcohol, not blood", and who's pregnant wife has a reputation for infidelity (Greene 1982 [1973]: 31). Soon thereafter, Fortnum has been kidnapped in a case of mistaken identity, the Argentinian perpetrators believing that he was actually the visiting American Ambassador. In the dark, they had mistaken the CC of Consular Corps on Fortnum's car number plate for the Ambassador's CD – Corps Diplomatique. The blurriness of the honorary consul's official status had again proved to be the root of his potential downfall.

Greene himself described *The Honorary Consul* as "perhaps the novel that I prefer to all the others", and it is widely regarded as one of his most successful works (Greene 1981: 226). In search of inspiration and background material, Greene had made a trip through Argentina and Paraguay in 1968, travelling up from Buenos Aires to Corrientes and then across the River Plate to Asunción in Paraguay. He made a repeat of the trip in 1970. At the time this was pretty lawless terrain – during his eight days in Corrientes there was a murder, an archbishop under arrest, an excommunicated priest, a bomb in a church, a family suicide, and – the source for the later novel – the kidnapping of a consul. The boundaries between religion, law, criminality and insurgency were blurred, a perfect context for Greene, who revelled in searching out both seediness and the limits to civilised behaviour (Sherry 2004: 513, 515). But it all took an unexpected turn when he also came across a recent kidnapping case.

In March 1970 a Paraguayan consul was kidnapped by the Argentine Liberation Front, and then freed after eighty hours of captivity. The demand that two members of the Front held in Paraguayan prison had been ignored by the regime's leader, General Stroessner, and the guerillas decided to end the affair without bloodshed. A kidnapped consul did not hold enough value to force a response. This worthlessness was noted – as Greene's biographer Norman Sherry explained in relation to the protagonist of the later novel, "As honorary consul he is the weakest reed in the diplomatic corps" (Sherry 2004: 520). Earlier correspondence from Greene also allowed Sherry to unearth the actual role model for the boozy, hapless, but ultimately resourceful honorary consul of fictional fame. In 1949 the author had travelled to Sierra Leone from Paris, but had difficulties arranging the required certificate for a yellow fever vaccination. Desperate to bypass the regulations, Greene called on the British consul-general in Dakar, Senegal, finding a drunk, dishevelled diplomat with whom he "stayed about half an hour, unable to get any sense out of him". Yet this same inebriated official was still able to provide at short notice the "bogus medical certificate" necessary to satisfy the French authorities, and Greene was allowed to travel on to Sierra Leone thanks to his assistance (Sherry 2004: 521–522). The drink, the haplessness, *and* the street-wise semi-legal resourcefulness would all return in the figure of honorary consul Charley Fortnum twenty or so years later. Greene fittingly portrays the edges of diplomacy to be both vulnerable *and* potentially profitable, with a necessary ability to negotiate and succeed in encounters with the underside of society. In the context of the origins and skills of the consul discussed earlier, this is a more than apt portrayal.

It is worth concluding with a further twist to the *Honorary Consul*'s tale, and this concerns the actual identity of the novelist himself. In July 1941 Greene joined the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6) and served until May 1944 as part of Section V, counter-intelligence. This included a frustrating stint as station chief in Sierra Leone, followed by a period in London under the direct command of Kim Philby. Whereas biographer Norman Sherry compartmentalises this intelligence posting as no more than a wartime experience, his biographical competitor Michael Shelden has convincingly argued that Greene maintained a liaison and information-gathering role long after 1945. Greene's incessant travelling to non-tourist hotspot locations – Prague in 1948, Vietnam in 1951 and 1955, Havana in 1957, repeated trips to places such as Moscow and Warsaw – was publicly defended as the rambling of a famous novelist both searching for material and increasingly professing a left-leaning anti-Americanism. Yet according to Shelden this was all a carefully constructed ruse, the perfect cover for gaining access to locations and leaders (Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Papa Doc Duvalier) that MI6 were interested in. His 1951

trip to Hanoi, for instance, was to visit Trevor Wilson, the British consul who also just so happened to be the MI6 station chief (Sheldon 1994: 29–44). Just as the honorary consul operates on the edges of formal diplomatic identity, so too did the creator of the literary *Honorary Consul* himself operate on the edges of fact and fiction. In both cases it is difficult to draw a clear line between public and private, official and unofficial, covert and overt. In this context it is worth reflecting in passing on the fact that David Cornwell (John Le Carré) also served as a 'political consul' at the Hamburg consulate-general while still with MI6 during the early 1960s, exactly the period when he was making the transition to become a successful full-time writer of espionage novels (Le Carre 2016).

Conclusion

In an influential recent essay Karen Gram-Skjoldager argued for bringing the figure of the diplomat "back into the international historical narrative while moving beyond the often instrumental and static view of this historical agent held by much mainstream international history" (Gram-Skjoldager 2011: 2). The diplomat should no longer be treated as a fixed, ahistorical category, but an agent of change – both in the sense of bringing change *and* experiencing (going through) change. Most studies of the consul have made similar observations on the changing identitites and demands of the consul through history. Yet none have actually focused on the essential hybridity of the position and the semi-official status of the honorary consul in particular, occupying a position that is simultaneously public and private throughout the history of the position. Certainly, the multiple forces of globalisation have questioned the primacy of the nation-state in international politics, and greater attention has been given to non-state actors as additionally if not equally of importance. Yet the boundary between old (nation-state) and new (non-state actors) in diplomacy has never been as clear cut as has been made out. Through the consul, and particularly the honorary consul, it is possible to illustrate how identities in diplomacy have always been relatively blurred, in contrast to the claims made by the modernist turn of the last two centuries. The return of the consul to a position of prominence in global affairs itself epitomises how aspects of the history of diplomacy are not so much linear as circular. But the position of consul represents more than that, since its location at the edges of diplomatic practice exactly brings into focus the permeability, fluidity, and 'double ontology' that lies at the very roots of diplomatic identity.

Literary renditions of consuls and honorary consuls have given us some useful reminders of this – in fact, it is worth noting that while conventional studies of honorary consuls are few, their appearance in novels is not

uncommon, which also may say something about their fictional value for exploring ontological uncertainties, and the unwillingness of diplomatic studies to acknowledge this. Even if the literary representations are not entirely uniform in terms of characteristics, they all point to the (honorary) consul being a figure occupying a socio-diplomatic grey area. This brings us back to the 'double ontology' of diplomats mentioned above. As diplomacy's most eloquent literary spokesperson, Harold Nicolson, put it:

> This suspicion of foreign ambassadors for long contaminated the esteem in which diplomatists were regarded even in their home countries. It was felt they might have become infected with foreign ways of thought, and have lost their national character. It would be too much to say that this atmosphere of suspicion (essentially an oriental failing) has been entirely dissipated in our own enlightened days. Even in this country a professional diplomatist is regarded as rather un-English; as a queer cosmopolitan; and so he is. (Nicolson 1962: 52)

Foreign services have forever been under suspicion of 'going native' should they spend too much time in one location abroad, scrambling their allegiances and confusing their representative functions. But the honorary consul is *a priori* already native. As yet, only literary interventions have fully brought this into focus.

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