

## “The New Label Did not Create the Research, But it Made it Visible”

Susanna Erlandsson in Conversation about the New Diplomatic History and What Chefs, Animals and Masculinities Have to Do with International Relations

The subsequent interview was conducted via email between the editor and Dr Susanna Erlandsson in 2023 and 2024. Dr Erlandsson obtained her doctoral degree in 2015 and subsequently worked as a Senior Lecturer at the History Department of Uppsala University. From 2017 to 2020, she held a postdoctoral fellowship from the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) and held visiting scholar positions at the University of Amsterdam and the London School of Economics and Political Science. From 2021 to 2023 she was editor-in-chief of *Historisk tidskrift*, Sweden's premier scholarly journal in history, and is currently Docent at the History Department of Uppsala University. Her expertise centres on European foreign policy before and during the Cold War, which she examines through the lens of intersectional gender studies methodologies.

*Falko Schnicke: In your research, you have already dealt several times with topics that – let's put it this way – are not part of the mainstream of historical research on foreign policy: you have explicitly explored the role of so-called small states in the Cold War, dealt with unofficial and informal practices of diplomacy, with gendered forms of and non-human actors in foreign policy. And now, in your current project, you are investigating domestic staff in embassies, such as cooks, butlers or cleaners. How do you come up with your topics and what guides you in developing your research projects?*

Susanna Erlandsson: I have stumbled across all my topics by chance, guided by curiosity. There was never a master plan, and I did not set out to look for topics that were not mainstream. Nevertheless, I suppose all of my research topics have in common that there was some sort of discrepancy that piqued my interest. To quote

---

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-2024-35-2-9>



Susanna Erlandsson, Department of History, Uppsala University, Engelska parken, Thunbergsvägen 3 A, 751 20 Uppsala, Finland; [susanna.erlandsson@hist.uu.se](mailto:susanna.erlandsson@hist.uu.se)

Falko Schnicke, Department of Modern and Contemporary History, University of Linz, Altenberger Straße 69, 4040 Linz, Austria; [falko.schnicke@jku.at](mailto:falko.schnicke@jku.at)

physicist Richard Feynman: ‘When you’re thinking about something you don’t understand, you have a terrible, uncomfortable feeling called confusion. It’s a very difficult and unhappy business.’<sup>1</sup>

What originally confused me about small states was that contemporary descriptions of the role of Sweden and the Netherlands respectively in the world were so similar. As a Swede, I had always learned that Sweden’s (self-proclaimed) role as a “moral superpower” was tightly linked to its policy of neutrality, but when I studied for my Master’s degree in the Netherlands, I found that the Dutch term “guiding country” (*gidsland*) was used in a strikingly similar way, in spite of the Netherlands being a NATO member. For my dissertation, I decided to compare in detail how the two governments reasoned about security between 1942 and 1948, the period just before the Netherlands abandoned its policy of neutrality while Sweden reclaimed it. Other researchers have generally described this period as an impasse, even a time of paralysis. I thought that if it was such a period of indecision, it might just as well be seen as a window of opportunity, a time when all options were still open. The security ideas and preferences of that period were short-lived only in retrospect, and identifying them allowed me to catch sight of similar long-term goals that others had overlooked.<sup>2</sup> This in turn led me to question the overall tendency to view neutrality or alliance as of overriding importance for a country’s security policy, and to think a lot about how we use the term power and what this means for small-state research in general. Together with my Dutch colleague Laurien Crump, I eventually got a whole group of experts on different European states, both East and West, to use the concept of margin for manoeuvre, a term I used in my dissertation, to analyse these states’ Cold War policies.<sup>3</sup> One thing leads to another.

The same is true of my postdoctoral project on everyday diplomatic practices. In this case, I was initially surprised to find 31 diaries of the Dutch wartime foreign minister’s wife, Margaret van Kleffens, in Eelco van Kleffens’ archive at the National Archives of the Netherlands. The fact that a non-official’s ostensibly private writings had been added to his personal but decidedly political collection puzzled me. As I started asking around and reading up, I not only began to understand how her diaries could be relevant to his work but was stunned to realize how much research on the history of international relations – my area of expertise – I had never yet

---

1 Quote from a frequently reposted 1963 video interview with Richard Feynman, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lytxafTXg6c> (27 August 2024).

2 Susanna Erlandsson, *Window of Opportunity: Dutch and Swedish Security Ideas and Strategies*, Uppsala University 2015, <https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:795647/FULLTEXT02.pdf> (3 May 2024).

3 Laurien Crump/Susanna Erlandsson (eds.), *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe: The Influence of Smaller Powers*, London 2019.

come across just because it focused on women or gender. My own ignorance dismayed me, but I was even more disturbed by what this must mean for our understanding of the past more broadly. It seemed to me that this gap between the stories of women in international relations and men in international relations was strange, considering that women and men live in the same world and tend to have many common goals. So I made the diplomatic couple the starting point of my new project and set about looking empirically at the division of tasks between men and women in mid-twentieth-century diplomacy on a day-to-day basis, thinking about what that division meant for the functioning of diplomacy as an institution. The result was a book that showed how a gendered division of tasks was central to personalizing relations, which, in turn, was an integral part of political international relations.<sup>4</sup>

Two other projects were born out of this research. One has so far only been a little side-project, but one that I hope to return to. I had occasion to write a short essay and took the chance to use the diaries I had already studied to make a survey of the uses of non-human animals in daily diplomatic practices.<sup>5</sup> I believe there is much to be gained by integrating insights from animal history into diplomatic history (or from any field that complicates our existing assumptions and narratives). The other is my current three-year project, again funded by the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*), on diplomats' household staff. Reading diplomatic actors' diaries and letters from the mid-twentieth century, it struck me how frequently the topic of servants came up. The discrepancy, in this case, is that while servants were evidently a major concern in daily diplomatic work, they are well-nigh entirely absent in historical accounts of twentieth-century diplomacy. Yet, the empirical evidence I have looked at so far points to household staff playing crucial roles in the functioning of diplomacy, both practically and symbolically. Again, I think that dominant ideas about power and *a priori* assumptions about who is relevant or irrelevant have led to a damaging oversight. Considering that household hierarchies were quite clearly gendered as well as racialized, for example, it seems worthwhile to study whether and how this taken-for-granted practice of diplomats influenced attitudes towards other diplomats based on their gender and ethnicity.

So far, then, my projects were all born out of specific empirical observations tied to an interest in general, more theoretical questions. It often starts with a small detail that catches my eye, but once I begin to think about it, pulling on the thread sticking out so to speak, the whole thing starts to unravel. I am fascinated by how

---

4 Susanna Erlandsson, *Personal Politics in the Postwar World: Western Diplomacy Behind the Scenes*, London 2022.

5 Susanna Erlandsson, *A Diplomat's Best Friend?: Non-human Animals in Mid-twentieth-century Diplomacy*, in: Astrid Wendel-Hansen/Katarina Nordström/Francisca Hoyer (eds.), *To Take Us Lands Away: Essays in Honour of Margaret R. Hunt*, Uppsala 2022, 155–169.

our frameworks, conscious or unconscious, influence the way we study past international relations.

*Falko Schnicke: These are all exciting projects that connect to many aspects of recent research, such as the focus of Cold War studies on countries from the Global South, as beyond the bloc centres,<sup>6</sup> or the whole area of human-animal studies, which is opening up fascinating new directions right now.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, it would be very interesting to look systematically at the emergence of individual research topics. For now, I would be interested to know more about the current project you have just started: What are you particularly interested in about household staff in embassies and what new perspectives on diplomacy can this open up? Do you already have any preliminary theses or assumptions?*

Susanna Erlandsson: With the rise of New Diplomatic History (NDH), scholarly attention to how diplomacy works in practice, or to the processes of diplomacy, including the power relations between the various actors involved in these processes, has broadened and concretized the scope of diplomatic history. However, despite its impressive expansion, the field has remained mainly horizontal, with the lower classes largely absent. Studies of diplomatic practices tend to centre on elite inner circles, and discussions of (gendered) hierarchies tend to pertain to hierarchies within the elite or to normative ideas. Unless they are at the heart of some scandal, embassy domestic staff are conspicuously absent from studies of mid-twentieth-century diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> It is as if the very prowess of diplomatic servants has caused even scholars to overlook them: good servants were self-effacing, making sure things ran smoothly without drawing attention to themselves. There is a missed opportunity here. A study of embassies' household staff will provide a perspective on diplomacy that highlights issues of ethnicity and class, something that is still rare in diplomatic

---

6 Tony Smith, *New Bottle for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War*, in: *Diplomatic History* 24/4 (2000), 567–591; Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, London 2017.

7 Halvard Leira/Iver B. Neumann, *Beastly Diplomacy*, in: *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 12/4 (2017), 337–359; Nadir Weber, *Diplomatic History*, in: Mieke Roscher/André Krebber/Brett Mizelle (eds.), *Handbook of Animal Studies*, Berlin/Boston 2021, 197–211.

8 Among the few diplomatic household staff members who have made it into the history books is Elyesa Bazna, the valet of British ambassador Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen in Ankara during the Second World War, because of what has become known as the Cicero affair: Bazna, code name Cicero, spied for the Germans by photographing secret British documents brought home by the ambassador. The people who have written about this incident include Bazna himself: Elyesa Bazna/Hans Nogly, *Ich war Cicero: Die Bekenntnisse des grössten Spions des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Hamburg 1962. For an overview of the affair, see Robin Denniston, *Bazna, Elyesa [Alias Cicero]*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

studies, even though scholars agree that diplomacy has long been a highly racialized, classed and gendered institution.

The aim of my project is to anchor a conceptual analysis of diplomatic hierarchies at the macro level in concrete hierarchies at the micro level. Specifically, cooks, cleaners, chauffeurs, and other servants were indispensable to day-to-day diplomatic practice. They also had a symbolic value, which reflected back on the status of those engaged in international relations. The fact that this value was often tied to gender, race, or nationality makes for interesting patterns. Several Washington embassies had French chefs, for instance, and they all had male butlers but female parlour maids – who were often lighter-skinned than laundresses and cleaners. My preliminary assumption is that there is a relationship between diplomats' household hierarchies and international hierarchies, but the exact nature of this relationship remains an empirical question. Based on my observations so far, I can at least say with certainty that the staff's appearances and behaviour had a bearing on the image of their employer, and that household staff was essential to diplomats' standing in the diplomatic community.

As a contribution to the understanding of diplomacy, the study will nuance our ideas about who and what has impacted international power relations. In a broader sense, it contributes to understanding the connection between specific and structural hierarchies in human society. Recent social movements such as *#MeToo* and *Black Lives Matter* have raised global awareness of the transnational and systemic character of sexism and racism. The cross-cultural group of workers who specialized in serving diplomats embodies how household and international hierarchies intersected in a uniquely concrete way. They can help us understand the upholding and shaping of transnational classed, gendered, and racialized power relations.

*Falko Schnicke: This approach is what you call researching the machinery of diplomacy from an “intersectional perspective”,<sup>9</sup> is it not? In what other domains of diplomatic history beyond the traditional embassy setting do you envision potential applications for this methodology?*

Susanna Erlandsson: I find it hard to think of a domain of diplomatic history where intersectionality in some form would *not* be potentially relevant. For anyone interested in how power works and why some relationships are prioritized over others, it is surely useful to be aware of the multiple power contexts at play. An intersectional perspective helps detect “the overlapping and co-construction of visible

---

9 <https://www.uu.se/en/contact-and-organisation/staff?query=N9-1724> (27 August 2024).

and, at first sight, invisible strands of inequality”, as Helma Lutz puts it.<sup>10</sup> Paying attention to how one type of hierarchy may either enhance or counteract another makes for a more nuanced understanding of all sorts of relations in diplomacy at different levels. It complicates simple notions like “big states have more power than small ones” or “men’s privileges have excluded women from political power”, notions that do not distinguish between European and African small states, for example, or take into account that a diplomat’s wife in the 1940s had considerably more political influence than a male servant.

Of course, intersectionality may be less relevant to some research projects than it is in mine. The intersectional approach provides me with a framework to take into account the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race and gender, but also of class and nation. These “dynamics of difference and sameness”<sup>11</sup> make a useful prism through which to view servants’ representative functions and their connection to international hierarchies. I should add that it is not my only methodology. Like many historians, I am a bit of a magpie when it comes to theory and method, tinkering to combine parts I find useful while being as concrete and clear as I can. I lean on theories of trust and reliance, for example, but rather than speaking of trust in general, I pose the question, who could be trusted/relied upon to do what? That allows me to use trust as a tool for applying an intersectional framework as it makes it possible to identify perceptions of what persons – bodies – were considered suitable for what kind of work. To connect what is essentially a micro study to macro systems, I also use a comparative approach, looking at similarities and differences between the household staff at the embassies of different countries. I only have the time and language skills to cover a few Western embassies, but perhaps the results will be sufficiently interesting to allow me to develop a larger-scale project in which I can collaborate with others for a wider reach. That would be great.

*Falko Schnicke: Your argument is both cogent and persuasive. Especially crucial for historical analysis is the point of viewing intersectionality not only as the – historically and socially highly significant – production and accumulation of discriminations, but also as the social privileges that arise through inequality.<sup>12</sup> Returning to your just pub-*

---

10 Helma Lutz, Intersectionality as Method, in: DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies 2/1–2 (2015), 39–44, 39.

11 Sumi Cho/Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw/Leslie McCall, Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis, in: Signs 38/4 (2013), 785–810, 787.

12 Patricia Hill Collins/Valerie Chepp, Intersectionality, in: Georgina Waylen/Karen Celis/Johanna Kantola/S. Laurel Weldon (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics, Oxford 2013, 57–87, 59; Falko Schnicke, Terminologie, Erkenntnisinteresse, Methode und Kategorien – Grundfragen intersektionaler Forschung, in: Falko Schnicke/Christian Klein (eds.), Intersektionalität und Narratologie: Methoden – Konzepte – Analysen, Trier 2014, 1–32, 28–32.

lished book on the van Kleffens diplomatic marriage, critics have unanimously and rightly lauded your method of viewing the heterosexual couple as a functional unit,<sup>13</sup> aptly termed an “organisational unit” by you to highlight Eelco’s and Margaret’s contributions to representing the Netherlands abroad.<sup>14</sup> This perspective on gender and its role within diplomacy adds a valuable dimension to the existing literature, which, though not yet extensive, includes studies on women in diplomatic roles from the early modern period to contemporary times.<sup>15</sup> This research holds value as it provides fresh insights not only into previously overlooked actors but also sheds light on the importance of gendered everyday logics of diplomacy. However, a notable gap in this literature persists regarding the analysis of diplomatic masculinities. You have hinted at this in various instances, particularly in discussions about unmarried male diplomats, homosexual males, or the appearance of men.<sup>16</sup> Do you agree that additionally exploring (different) diplomatic masculinities could be pivotal for a more nuanced understanding of how social norms and circumstances influenced interstate relationships? How might such an investigation be pursued? Considering this also relies on the availability of sources, could Margaret van Kleffens’ diary, for instance, serve as a suitable resource for this endeavour?

Susanna Erlandsson: I think there are many ways in which such an investigation could be pursued. In my own research, I focused on the diplomatic couple and on the norm of the diplomat as not only a man but a heterosexual, married man. That norm obviously influenced the scope of manoeuvre of the first female diplomats and of male diplomats who were unmarried and/or homosexual, but its importance goes beyond the effect on individuals. Norms like these impact the whole system of diplomatic networking and who is considered reliable. Moreover, visible norms of a state (as seen in its representatives) may affect its international status. Political scientist Ann Towns has written a book called *Women and States* in which she explores how norms about women and women’s emancipation have been connected to hierarchies

---

13 Julia Eichenberg, [Rev.] Erlandsson, Personal Politics, in: H-Soz-Kult, 24.03.2023, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-115769> (3 May 2024); Alexandra Penler, [Rev.] Erlandsson, Personal Politics, in: Cultural and Social History 20/4 (2023), 610–612; Emma Rosengren, [Rev.] Erlandsson, Personal Politics & Nash, Breaking Protocol, in: Journal of Contemporary History 59/1 (2024), 212–214.

14 Erlandsson, Personal Politics, 2022, 5.

15 Helen McCarthy, Petticoat Diplomacy: The Admission of Women to the British Foreign Service, c. 1919–1946, in: Twentieth Century British History 20/3 (2009), 285–321; Corina Bastian/Eva Kathrin Dade/Hillard von Thiessen/Christian Windler (eds.), *Das Geschlecht der Diplomatie: Geschlechterrollen in den Außenbeziehungen vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2014; Gkenda Sluga/Carolyn James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, London 2015; Jennifer A. Cassidy (ed.), *Gender and Diplomacy*, London/New York 2017; Philip Nash, *Breaking Protocol: America’s First Female Ambassadors, 1933–1964*, Lexington 2020.

16 Erlandsson, Personal Politics, 2022, 47–50, 137–138.

between states.<sup>17</sup> I imagine one could do something similar with norms regarding masculinity.

You are right that there is still much to be done when it comes to exploring diplomatic masculinities. I can think of a few scholars who have been or are working on masculinity ideals in diplomacy. Towns has written an article that nuances the idea of diplomacy as a man's world by pointing to ways in which male diplomats have been feminized in an American context.<sup>18</sup> Another political scientist, Iver Neumann, has identified different masculinity (and femininity) scripts in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on archival material and interviews.<sup>19</sup> Historian Nevra Biltekin has discussed masculinity ideals among twentieth-century Swedish diplomats using autobiographies.<sup>20</sup> British PhD candidate Harry Mace is exploring masculinity ideals in his research on the shifting gender order of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the late twentieth century, based on interviews.<sup>21</sup>

I am not familiar with early modern studies on the topic, but from a historical perspective, I would love to see a study of how the norms regarding diplomatic masculinity have changed over time. For the modern period, sources should not be so hard to find. Some possibilities have been mentioned above. The diaries of Margaret van Kleffens could certainly be used. They give insight into her expectations, prejudices, and assessments of male diplomats as well as reveal discrepancies between norms and practice. I am sure other diaries and letters would also serve as a useful complement to normative material like guides to diplomatic practice. Other archive materials, like policy discussions of diplomacy, protocols, and evaluation forms could probably be used to identify both implicit and explicit norms.

*Falko Schnicke: If one were to look for a label for this kind of research and your own work, one obvious option would certainly be the NDH. Would you agree with that? What role does this approach play for you? And how do you observe the development of (recent) diplomatic history from Sweden?*

Susanna Erlandsson: I consider my research part of the NDH field and an ongoing 'practice turn' in international relations that has inspired many of my choices. My

---

17 Ann Towns, *Women and States: Norms and Hierarchies in International Society*, Cambridge 2010.

18 Ann Towns, 'Diplomacy is a Feminine art': Feminised Figurations of the Diplomat, in: *Review of International Studies* 46/5 (2020), 573–593.

19 Iver B. Neumann, The Body of the Diplomat, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 14/4 (2008), 671–695.

20 Nevra Biltekin, *Servants of Diplomacy: The Making of Swedish Diplomats, 1905–1995*, Stockholm 2016, 166–186.

21 <https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/people/harry-j-mace> (3 May 2024); Harry Mace, *Masculinities and Diplomatic Culture in late twentieth-century Britain*, unpublished paper presented at the 2019 Gender and Diplomacy workshop at Gothenburg University, Sweden.

latest studies provide insights into diplomats' cultural, political, and social milieux and highlight previously overlooked diplomatic actors. At the same time, I do not necessarily think of myself as a diplomatic historian. Although my topics have thus far been tied to diplomatic and international history, I am simply a historian, interested in understanding human society and (power) relations. It is quite possible that next time, I will choose a topic that has nothing to do with diplomacy. If prompted about a common denominator to my research, I might sooner say that I have a penchant for bringing big questions down to the everyday level. I like to connect all those momentous words and decisions to concrete daily ideas and activities.

So, although you could label my study of embassy household staff as NDH, you could also label it microhistory or history from below and the history of everyday life. The 'history of everyday life' can mean many things. I use the concept to indicate studying people who are ordinary (in the sense of not exceptional in their context) and not individually powerful – "cogs in the machine", as Alf Lüdtke puts it.<sup>22</sup> My interest is in both cogs and the machine. Through the focus on subalterns in an elite setting, my study applies a history-from-below perspective on a topic – diplomacy – traditionally associated with high politics par excellence. There is a close fit to the microhistory ambition of asking "large questions in small places".<sup>23</sup> I take on questions about the structures and ideas that shaped the post-war world and international hierarchies by studying their connection to practices at the micro level, bringing the insights from studies of how low-wage labour underpins the whole system of international (economic) relations (à la Cynthia Enloe) into the individual diplomat's salon.<sup>24</sup>

That said, the NDH Network<sup>25</sup> has been crucial to my ability to conduct my latest two projects successfully. This dynamic and growing research field has provided me with a stimulating arena for testing my ideas and cooperating with others. The international character of the network of researchers has been crucial when studying a transnational environment. It has also allowed me to combine my Swedish network with international ones. At the third conference of the NDH Network in 2018, my colleague Sari Nauman from the University of Gothenburg and I arranged a plenary roundtable about trust and diplomacy with a group of Swedish historians working on diplomacy-related topics ranging from the seventeenth to the late twen-

---

22 Alf Lüdtke, *What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?*, in: *ibid.* (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton 1995, 3–4.

23 Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*, Urbana/Chicago 1999, 1.

24 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed., Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2014.

25 *New Diplomatic History*, <https://newdiplomatichistory.org/> (3 May 2024).

tieth century. I am much in favour of historians cooperating not only over national borders but over different time periods. My own work, which is all modern history, has often been inspired by early modern research. The effort of this “Swedish School of New Diplomatic History” to work together over different time periods resulted in a discussion book on using the concept of trust as a bridge between personal relations and diplomatic processes.<sup>26</sup> The discussions with those colleagues had a major impact on the theoretical considerations and methods I used in my book *Personal Politics*.

I have also been a member of the Gender in Diplomacy network (GenDip) since the first conference of that research group in 2019. The international and interdisciplinary GenDip programme was established at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and is led by political scientist Ann Towns.<sup>27</sup> I have benefitted immensely from the generous and constructive research climate of GenDip and it has been very useful to receive comments on my work from researchers active in other disciplines. There seems to be a surge of interest in diplomacy and diplomatic history in Sweden in recent years. Besides the networks mentioned above, there has been an increase in the number of memoirs published by (former) diplomats in Sweden, for example, and in March 2020, the Hans Blix Centre for the History of International Relations was formally established at Stockholm University.<sup>28</sup> It would be a stretch to speak of any well-defined coordinated Swedish effort to reinvent the field of diplomatic history, however.

*Falko Schnicke: You mentioned that you do not exclusively identify as a diplomatic historian, which is quite understandable, and I am intrigued to see how your research interests will evolve in the future. Determining whether one is a diplomatic historian (or not) can involve self-identification. Moreover, there are various academic frameworks – some consider an expert to be someone who is deeply involved in a single topic, while others value a breadth of knowledge across multiple subjects, even spanning different centuries. Having mentioned the benefits of the NDH, what do you see as the added value of its approaches?*

Susanna Erlandsson: I find it hard to answer this question beyond what I have already mentioned. I am no expert on all new (or even old) diplomatic history approaches. Maybe the added value is the very width of the field it has fuelled. There were scholars working on topics that were not so-called mainstream diplomatic his-

---

26 Susanna Erlandsson/Sari Nauman (eds.), *Tillit och diplomati: En diskussionsbok om personliga relationer och diplomatiska processer 1670–1990*, Uppsala 2019.

27 GenDip: Gender in Diplomacy, <https://www.gu.se/en/gendip> (3 May 2024).

28 About the Centre: Hans Blix Centre, <https://www.su.se/hans-blix-centre/about-the-centre> (3 May 2024).

tory before the NDH network – which is presumably why it was formed and why it subsequently grew so quickly. The new label did not create the research, but it made it visible and lent it legitimacy. It has contributed to the acceptance of all kinds of topics that were previously not considered diplomatic history and has connected researchers interested in similar things. All this has no doubt inspired many new research questions – and is that not what good scholarship is all about? When new answers raise lots of new questions, you know that you are on to something exciting.

*Falko Schnicke: Additionally to your research, you have also worked as an academic teacher. What are your experiences in addressing NDH topics with students or in mentoring young scholars? Did you meet with interest?*

Susanna Erlandsson: Because of generous research funding from the Swedish Research Council, I have not taught much in the past few years. On the occasions when I have lectured about gender and the history of international relations, I have found the students highly engaged with the topic. I have also been fortunate enough to be able to offer internships for master students in my projects, and there has been so much interest that I have had to turn applicants down. Studying international relations from below seems to strike a chord among young scholars, and my general impression is that students find the type of questions raised by NDH important. Part of it may be that bringing big issues such as systemic racism or the Cold War down to the level of everyday practices makes it easier to understand why the world looks the way it does.

*Falko Schnicke: The curriculum of historical seminars frequently aligns with the demands of history teacher training programmes. These courses often prioritize traditional, outcome-driven approaches within diplomatic history. Did this present challenges in your teaching approach? Moreover, a significant hurdle is the scarcity of source collections available for exploring NDH topics in university teaching. How did you address this issue, and what additional obstacles did you face?*

Susanna Erlandsson: Again, my teaching in the last few years has been limited, so I may not be the best person to answer these questions. Moreover, there are probably a lot of differences between universities in different countries, and my university may be more encouraging of the inclusion of new perspectives in teaching than others, rendering my experiences less than representative for many people reading this.

That said, I do think that it is often possible to bring in other perspectives even when teaching the more traditional story of the history of international relations. For example, when lecturing first year students on the First World War, I like to say a few words about Sophie Chotek von Chotkowa when mentioning the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Simply pointing out how many historical

accounts name the assassin Gavrilo Princip as well as the archduke while leaving out his wife's name is a way to make the students aware of both traditional and new perspectives. Starting with the concrete event, I tell them how the couple was normally not allowed to sit together in public, which had a bearing on their being where they were on that day, and point out some other political implications of, and reasons for, their morganatic marriage. Using their love story to touch on some broader issues of nationalism and empire central to the outbreak of the war, I show both how specific personal matters can be tied to large-scale political patterns, and how the motives behind who gets mentioned rest on assumptions rather than on some objective hierarchy of relevance. Hopefully, this makes them more aware of the selection of facts that is the prerequisite of any story we tell, and open to the idea that this selection is not the only one possible, or even necessarily the best.

The obvious challenge is that it takes time to think of ways like these to bring new perspectives and nuances into teaching, and that time is usually scarce for any university teacher. Lack of time is a much bigger obstacle than lack of sources, in my opinion. Besides plenty of interesting sources for NDH topics in regular foreign office archives – such as instructions and protocols, or correspondence and diaries in personal archives of diplomats – published materials often yield a lot of interesting information for anyone prepared to engage in reading 'against the grain'. Easily accessible sources such as newspaper articles, memoirs, instruction booklets, and literature reveal a lot about beliefs and attitudes as well as practices, both by what is said (and how) and by silences and omissions.

*Falko Schnicke: Lastly, we have previously discussed prospective endeavours: what emerging areas of study and teaching do you envision within the context of NDH, and how do you foresee the progression of your research in this domain?*

Susanna Erlandsson: NDH grew from historians integrating trends and advances from other fields and disciplines into diplomatic history, and this process is likely to continue. One development that I think will have a huge impact on future NDH research, as well as on teaching possibilities, is the rise of digital humanities. New methods make it possible to identify patterns in large data sets and to collect, sort, and share information about big groups of people, opening up new areas of study as we speak. The digital research platform nodegoat, a web-based research environment developed especially for the humanities, enables historians to process, visualize, and analyse complex datasets relationally, diachronically, and spatially.<sup>29</sup> Recent

---

<sup>29</sup> nodegoat was created in 2011 by Pim van Bree and Geert Kessels. More information on how it works and examples of how it has been used can be found on the website <https://nodegoat.net/> (3 May 2024).

NDH research includes some truly groundbreaking work on prosopographies and network analyses using large datasets.<sup>30</sup> A group of researchers in Denmark collected information about League of Nations employees between 1919 and 1948 into a database and created a digital research tool that enables users to carry out their own customized searches, visualize metrics, and download the datasets they want to work with.<sup>31</sup> This is a great resource for researchers, but also for empirically grounded student assignments.

As far as my own plans are concerned, whether and how I end up combining my predilection for animal history with NDH remains to be seen. The idea to develop an extended version of my current project on diplomats' domestic staff depends on securing funding, but I see a lot of concrete possibilities for and potential benefits of such a study. A wider geographical and longer chronological reach would yield a better understanding of global power relations and systemic inequality by analysing and comparing the classed, gendered, and racialized nature of diplomatic relations in different times and places. A research environment like nodegoat makes it feasible to manage a prosopographic study of diplomats' domestic staff that could keep growing geographically and diachronically. Beyond that, I am bound to stumble across some new discrepancy that will demand my attention by being a complete surprise, and which is, therefore, as yet by definition unpredictable.

*Falko Schnicke: Dear Susanna, thank you immensely for the enriching insights and thoughts!*

Susanna Erlandsson: I should be thanking you, Falko. Your questions have given me a rare opportunity to take the time to think about the big picture of my research and teaching.

---

30 E.g. the Mattingly prize-winning article by Gert Huskens, In the Shadow of Ancient Thebes. Belgian Consular Representation in Luxor and Local Elites, 1860 and 1937, in: *Diplomatica* 5/2 (2023), 169–194; Martin Grandjean's work on network analyses and intellectual cooperation and diplomacy, <https://www.martingrandjean.ch/> (2 May 2024).

31 Haakon A. Ikonomou/Yuan Chen/Obaida Hanteer/Jonas Tilsted, Visualizing the League of Nations Secretariat – a Digital Research Tool, Copenhagen 2023, <https://visualeague-researchtool.com/> (3 May 2024).