

PHD RESEARCH

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The Island and the Storm. A Social-Cultural History of the Belgian Diplomatic Corps in Times of Democratization, 1885-1935

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The Island and the Storm examines how processes of democratization have revealed themselves in the evolution of diplomatic culture. Focusing on the Belgian diplomatic corps as a test case and investigating the social and professional practices and discourses of its members, it sheds light on a fundamental phase in the diplomatic corps' transition from a European aristocratic fraternity to the international meritocratic elite that it is today. As such, it contributes to our understanding of the process of negotiation between "pre-modern" and "modern" ways of conceiving and articulating international relations.

The study fills an important gap in our understanding of late modern diplomatic culture. Contrary to more 'traditional' diplomatic histories, it writes the political into the social-cultural history of diplomats. First, it clearly positions the institution of diplomacy within the national political system and implements a perspective that reconciles diplomats on the one hand and the three poles of 'mixed government' on the other hand. This implies scrutinizing the changing relations between diplomats and the monarchy, the members of the government, and parliamentarians and journalists. Second, it adopts the perspective of the diplomats of a minor and neutral state, whose stakes differed considerably from those of the much studied Great Powers and thus differently affected the ways in which the institution of diplomacy

created meaning for its practitioners. Thirdly, the thesis examines the social-cultural history of diplomatic development before and after the transformational First World War. Contrary to the few existing social(-cultural) histories of diplomatic communities, which tend to offer static portraits of diplomats in an age when the paradigms of 'traditional' diplomacy still dominated conduct in international relations, this study scrutinizes how diplomats dealt with the transition from 'old' to 'new' diplomacy on the international level. On the domestic level, it takes into account how they reacted to the social-political transformations caused by the war.