

Against the Current: Back to Public Diplomacy as Government Communication

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The scholarship on public diplomacy has become particularly unsettled about who is the actor of the practice. The state (government) has been traditionally viewed as the actor, whereas non-states also have been recognized from the perspective of “public diplomacy as social practice.” With the societist perspective having become a strong current of opinion, its proponents now mount a bounded thrust to further delimit qualifications for non-states as actors. This article addresses such dissensus against the societist current by taking issue with the two bounded qualifications—“the public interests” and “the national interests”—and by criticizing the former for being politically biased and the latter for being indeterminate in designating specific non-states as actors. This article then makes a proposal for a return to public diplomacy as government communication, in which non-states are treated as actors in “the global public sphere,” while the government as the sole actor in public diplomacy.

Keywords: public diplomacy, definition, states, non-states

The scholarship on public diplomacy has developed beyond its coming of age, over decades of multidisciplinary feed from academia and of growing recognition and interest from governments, non-states, and even laymen. Despite such growth, however, the discipline has become unsettled on its foundation—the definition of this practice of international communication. Many scholars have voiced concerns about this situation, including “no agreement on public diplomacy definitions” (d’Hooghe, 2015, p. 18); “no consensus on its analytical boundaries” (Gregory, 2008, p. 274); and “definitional chaos” (Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 91). A primary source of confusion is differing views on the actor in public diplomacy as one of the practice’s definitional attributes. Examining a total of 150 definitions, Fitzpatrick (2009) suggested that “definitional chaos” is due to dissensus over the actor and the other attributes of public diplomacy, such as purpose, target, and function. Yun (2020) went further to take the actor dissensus to be the most responsible, however, observing that it has left scholars most diverged in their definitions.

Conflicting views on the actor cluster around two opposite perspectives that Wiseman (2015) aptly characterized: public diplomacy as “state practice” versus “social practice.” The state perspective has been

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held up by the camp of so-called traditional public diplomacy, which sees the state (government) as the sole actor, communicating with foreign publics to achieve national interests, as exemplarily defined by Malone (1985). The social perspective, meanwhile, has become embodied in the camp of so-called new public diplomacy, which also regards as an actor non-states that advance their values and interests autonomously or together with governments. With Gregory's (2008) definition likely the most representative, the societist camp has now grown into a strong current of thought in the literature, as documented by Ayhan (2019). Recently, this camp has come to launch what can be termed "a bounded thrust" to delimit conditions for non-states, transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in particular, to qualify as actors (Ayhan, 2019; Gregory, 2016; La Porte, 2012; Lee & Ayhan, 2015; Wiseman, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to address such dissensus over actor against the societist current by critically revisiting its bounded thrust, ultimately making a proposal for a return to public diplomacy as government communication. To this end, this article is organized into two sections. The first section begins by tracing the development of the societist camp up to its bounded thrust and proceeds to define engagement in political communication, the primary condition for actorness in consensus. The section then takes issue with the primary's two subconditions about the kinds of interests to be advanced: "the public interests" and "the national interests." The former is to be criticized for its political bias toward normative nature, and the latter for its indeterminacy in designating specific NGOs as actors. What follows is a further expectation that the thrust would still be problematic when extended to other types of non-states, including multinational corporations (MNCs), social movements, and sub-states. The second section makes a proposal for a return to public diplomacy as government communication. The proposal consists of two parts. The first part recognizes non-states as actors in "the global public sphere," and the second part regards the government as the sole actor in public diplomacy while treating non-states in concert with governments as "partners" in public diplomacy, not as actors.

The Societist Current Up to Its Bounded Thrust

The view of public diplomacy as a practice by non-states also, independently or with governments, has become prevalent, preceded and informed by a corresponding, overarching shift in the definition of diplomacy itself. This higher order shift had preceded, geared up by a multitude of non-states directly pursuing their values and interests. From the late 1980s on, they became fully recognized as players alongside governments (Reimann, 2006). Non-states' ascendancy called on observers of international relations to pick up a name for their activities. Coming in handy, then, was the term *diplomacy*, which had been regarded as the exclusive purview of government. Recognizing and enamored with their rise, observer after observer joined the march to associate what these entities did with diplomacy. Some started causally calling their activities as such, and soon terms such as *non-states diplomacy* or *NGO diplomacy* (Tolley, 1989) became fixtures in academic terminology, and even in everyday language.

This neologism, *diplomacy*, was well received by a slew of observers for the practical purpose of referring to what non-states were doing. It was nonetheless faced with reservations about the invited definitional discontinuity of diplomacy. Modern definitions of diplomacy had taken root within the state system, as the representation by the government of people residing in a state (Nicolson, 1969). Given that non-states also comprise such people, however, calling diplomacy their direct pursuit of values and interests

disrupted the continuity of diplomacy as the government's representation. To address this challenge, attempts have been mounted conceptually, reworking the definition of diplomacy itself. Scholars tried to liberate diplomacy from government-only ownership, conferring it on non-states as well. One such rework came from Sharp (2005), who argued for diplomacy as a social practice in international life. In his vision, people living in groups and valuing both conditions of their separateness from and relationships with other groups is an essential part of human existence. Diplomacy develops to manage these relations, whose core functions are communication and representation. Sharp (2005) envisaged diplomacy as "the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented" (p. 106). In a similar vein, La Porte (2012) proposed that diplomatic actorness derives not only from legal status [government], but also from representational capabilities [non-states] stemming from legitimacy and efficiency.

Informed by such a conceptual reworking of traditional diplomacy, the definition of public diplomacy also has been rewritten accordingly. Classical definitions of the practice up until the late 1980s had predominantly recognized the government as the sole actor. A typical of those definitions was offered by Malone (1985): "[a government's] direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments" (p. 199). Public diplomacy as a government-to-foreign-publics communication was then distinguished from traditional diplomacy as a government-to-government communication; nonetheless, both practices were still regarded as the government's representation of the collective values and interests of its people.

But as non-states began to be recognized as actors in diplomacy in the background, so too were they seen as actors in public diplomacy, which was at once recast as "diplomacy by publics" also, not just "diplomacy with publics by governments" in the traditional sense. This broader, unified, general concept of public diplomacy, now often referred to as "new public diplomacy," has evolved to date. It was, in Yun's (2020) genealogical appraisal, germinated by Signitzer and Coombs (1992), who argued for the conceptual convergences between public diplomacy by governments and communication practices of non-states in general. The concept was then cultivated by Gilboa (2008), conferring the actor status specifically on non-states engaged in global advocacy, culminating in Gregory (2006, 2016) extending the status to those in global governance. Gregory (2008) most famously defined public diplomacy as an instrument used by both states and non-states to "understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values" (p. 276). Furthermore, this societist view of public diplomacy has reached a turning point, where the historical origin of the practice is entirely denied. This point was marked by Castells (2008), who presented a Copernican view of reconceiving the practice as only being conducted by non-states, not by states, drawing on ideas of global civil society and global public sphere. "Public diplomacy," he proclaimed, "is the diplomacy of the public [not of the government], that is, the projection in the international arena of the values and ideas of the public" (Castells, 2008, p. 91). So in his vision, public diplomacy has now been transmuted into a practice of all types of networked communication and shared meaning among the global public. Over the course of such development, the societist view of regarding non-states as actors in public diplomacy has become a steadfast current in the literature, inevitably inviting definitional disagreements over who the actors are. Ayhan's (2019) taking stock of conflicting perspectives is eloquent on this situation. Analyzing 160 articles that contained definitions and were published between 1985 and 2017, he found that 68 subscribed to the

societist view, and the rest to the traditional statist-centric view. He further classified those 160 articles into five distinguishable variations of both societist and statist view.

A second phase of the societist reasoning came simultaneously. In this phase, while still acknowledging the state or government as an actor in public diplomacy, scholars started questioning one thing: Castells's (2008) view of public diplomacy embracing all non-states. Gregory (2016), for instance, argued that it risks "taking diplomacy beyond a bounded concept and instrument to a domain where we're all diplomats and all global interaction is diplomacy" (p. 3). In the same vein, Weisman (2015) also questioned the characterization of all global interaction as diplomacy, including "transnational dialogue, global networking; cross cultural, humanist interaction; or private market-driven relations" (p. 298). Viewing this sweeping perspective as posing a conceptual problem of consequence, these and other societist thinkers (Ayhan, 2019; La Porte, 2012; Lee & Ayhan, 2015) have launched what can be termed a bounded thrust, to refine the societist perspective. The thrust's two guiding questions are: What activities of non-states are to be recognized as public diplomacy and, thereby, which of the non-states are the actors?

Non-states are usually classified into four strands (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2010): supra-states (e.g., the UN); sub-states (e.g., municipal-level authorities within a state); MNCs; and transnational NGOs. However, this classification has been questioned, particularly concerning the status of supra-states. Willetts (2011) argued that supra-states are not non-states in an exact sense because their members are states. He proposed the term *transnational actors* (TAs) instead of *non-states* for those entities and individuals other than states that engage in transnational relations in which at least one actor is not an agent of the state (Nye & Keohane, 1971). TAs thus include transnational NGOs, MNCs, sub-states, social movements, and individuals. Against this backdrop, the bounded thrust has been proceeding in two directions: first, primarily focusing on transnational NGOs, and second, delineating conditions under which they are to be recognized as actors, thereby determining their qualifications.

Political Communication, the Primary Condition

The primary condition in consensus in the bounded camp is that for transnational NGOs to be recognized as actors, they should be engaged in "political communication or strategic communication" (Gregory, 2006, p. 30). That is to say, public diplomacy as an instrument to advance one's own values and interests—be they those of a government or an NGO—is political in essence (Gregory, 2008). Similarly, NGOs should seek political agendas (La Porte, 2012), including foreign policies, both political and economic (Ayhan, 2019; Lee & Ayhan, 2015). What this camp generally means by "political communication" resonates with the definition offered by Denton and Woodward (1990). In search of definitional attributes, they arrived at three that make communication political—intentionality, content, and purpose—regardless of the source of a message. This view of purposeful communication about politics is fleshed out in McNair's (2011) formulation: "all forms of communication by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives" (p. 4). Given this definition, this camp identifies NGOs engaged in such political communication as actors in public diplomacy, those intent on molding public policies and norms with international consequences into their values and interests. Not only that, this camp also delimits the status to only those formally institutionalized entities, excluding loosely connected individuals with political intention, for instance, in social movements (Ayhan, 2019; La Porte, 2012; Lee & Ayhan, 2015).

The Public Interests Normatively Biased

In its search of bounded qualifications, however, the societist camp has come to suffer from an intractable problem of political bias and attendant disagreements. The camp has been in the same voice, stating that for NGOs to qualify as actors, they should engage in advocacy for their values and interests—not all kinds, however, but a specific kind, which is what the camp calls “the public interests” (Ayhan, 2019; Gregory, 2016; La Porte, 2012). So, the focal locus of internal disagreements is conflicting views of what values and interests are public. In common usage, the adjective *public* generally means “common to or concerned for all,” as in public policies. However, when covering the general good, the term *public interests* is an essentially contested concept, concerning both who the public is and what the common interest is (Bohman, 2004).

The most restricted of all the proposed concepts of public interests is from Gregory (2016), informed by the notion of the global public good, the core public interests upheld in global governance. Introduced by Rosenau (1992), the term *global governance* refers to a collective response by states and TAs, including NGOs, to the problems accompanying globalization. Such problems usually refer to the so-called new security agenda, which includes the environment, pandemics, poverty, and humanitarian rescue; it concerns all humanity and, in this sense, the highest-order public interests. However, Gregory’s (2016) concept of the public interests is at once restricted, qualified by his specific vision of diplomacy: Diplomacy and “diplomatic actors are accountable to the public interests of groups as a whole. They represent a group’s collective interests rather than the interests of sectors or organizations within groups” (p. 9). By this standard, he suggests that for transnational NGOs to qualify as actors in public diplomacy, they should represent the most universally shared interests among the global public as a whole. Applying this criterion, Gregory further argues that not all of them in global governance are diplomatic actors, a category that should include only those fulfilling such interests, not those of sectors and quarters of the global public. Accordingly, Gregory (2016) singles out a handful from a sea of NGOs as actors in public diplomacy, on the grounds that they fulfill such global public interests: Médecins Sans Frontières and the Gates Foundation (the global fund to fight AIDS), for instance. But he equally denies the status of actor to other NGOs, such as Freedom House, because they go after narrow, sectoral, factional “private interests” rather than “public interests.” To use the global governance literature’s classification of NGOs, only those designated as operational service providers of global public goods, such as value-free humanitarian rescue, are entitled; but they are not advocacy NGOs, operating typically in the domains of human rights and democracy—those “sharing particular values, principled beliefs and a common discourse” (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 2).

Naturally, Gregory’s (2016) distinction between public and private interests leads to a divergence. Questioning his distinction as arbitrary, Ayhan (2019) advocates as well for the entitlement of advocacy NGOs. His rationale: They are equally “interested in producing collective benefits beyond the private interests of their boards and constituents” (Ayhan, 2019, p. 72). Though Ayhan’s (2019), Gilboa’s (2008), and La Porte’s (2012) views are more inclusive and less arbitrary than Gregory’s (2016), they all remain exclusive and arbitrary in a notable respect. Foremost, their views run up against the problem of a political bias of normative nature. In other words, their views, taken together, acknowledge only progressive values and interests (e.g., humanitarianism, environmentalism, democracy, and human rights) as constituting “the public interests”; so, they instead implicitly deny the status of public interests to so-called reactionary values

and interests, and even to those Castells (1997) associates with resistance identity politics of a religious, national, and ethnic nature.

This bias begs a disturbing question: Why is there no such progressive qualification set up for states to be recognized as actors in diplomacy, except for representing the national interests, whereas a progressive one is strictly required for NGOs? There is hardly any satisfactory answer. A seemingly promising way out, however, may be conceivable by acknowledging in the first place the highly contested nature of the public interests (Bohman, 2004). Willetts (2009) observes that no NGOs could bear the general public interests because no interests are universal, even if they are claimed to be so—to be the voice of the people and to have greater legitimacy. No single homogeneous public interest could exist within a country, much less “any such thing at the global level” (Willetts, 2011, p. 11). What might exist only are competing NGOs “making differing claims about interests (as the common), based on different value preferences” (Willetts, 2011, p. 130).

Willetts’s (2009, 2011) observations may point to one possible way out for the camp of bounded reasoning, afflicted by progressive political bias. It may embrace all kinds of values and interests—even regressive, reactionary, resistant, and revolutionary ones—if they are directly pursued by NGOs on either a regional or a global scale by means of communication and democratic procedures. This way out may seem even truer to the camp’s underlying vision on diplomacy: that social groups of legitimacy and efficiency can also be diplomatic actors when they seek their values and interests in relation to other groups. However, this way out paradoxically would bring the bounded thrust into a theoretical limbo. At its heart lies the recognition that diplomacy should be a finite concept and that neither all NGOs nor all global interactions among them involve diplomacy. But this way out hinges on embracing a far wider spectrum of NGOs and their values and interests, contradictorily ending with far less restricted conditions and qualifications for them as actors in public diplomacy.

The National Interests in Indeterminacy

Instead of heading this self-contradictory way, the societist camp stays bounded by attempting to address the problem of normative political bias, additionally invoking another sub-condition: the notion of national interests. The alternative is what Ayhan (2019) has conceived of as an “accommodative” approach from his SCOPUS survey of existing definitions of public diplomacy. Classifying into a “non-traditional” approach definitions that qualify as actors NGOs in pursuit of both the public interests of global governance and those particular sets of principled ones of transnational advocacy, he admits to the approach’s “more normative and idealist” (Ayhan, 2019, p. 72) bias. So, his “accommodative” solution is to recognize not only the non-traditional approach, but also what he characterizes as a “traditional” approach. The traditional approach confers the status of actor on NGOs pursuing interests in conformity with a government’s foreign policy. As such, the accommodative solution seems to present two sets of political interests, goals, or agendas as the bounded qualifications for NGOs: on the one hand, those normatively defined “public” interests, and on the other, the so-called national interests, those underlying foreign policy. So the key addition in the accommodative solution is the notion of national interests.

The national interests are, precisely speaking, the interests of a state, the Westphalian political community with a territory, a government, and a people forming a civil society with institutions to participate in political life (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2010). The national interests presuppose the existence of the collective interests among a civil society—no more and no less. The notion is thus far from inherently associated with any particular kind of political values and interests, but it refers only to the collective ones among the civil society of a state. Given this, the accommodative solution reveals a conceptual problem of combining things on different levels. The solution, it seems, presents the national interests as something comparable with, yet distinct from, those value-laden, particular normative interests. The national interests, Bolewski (2017) reasons, are empty of any substantive particular values and interests, neither fixed, nor static, nor an intangible given of a state, subject to a constant and deliberate rewriting of national purposes. This constant rewriting involves a political mechanism, one offered by liberal pluralism, for instance. Politics, defined as the authoritative allocation of values (Easton, 1965), involves segments and their coalitions in a civil society vying with one another to make their values and interests the national ones that represent the collective interests of society as a whole. The social classes and interest groups enter politics to win support for their sought-after values and interests by engaging in democratic procedures that guarantee legitimacy. So, in principle, the political values that win this struggle become the national interests—be they regressive, reactionary, resistant, progressive, or revolutionary. This way, politics becomes a social practice, and so does the formation of national interests.

This view of the national interests as societal value preferences can be further illuminated by constructivism. According to Wendt (1992, 1994, 1999), it is human agency, ideational forces, and intersubjective beliefs that ultimately construct the interests and identities of purposive actors. In short, people make the social world. When the dominant intersubjective beliefs in a state make of the interstate system as anarchy, as in “Anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992, p. 395), every state is destined for a permanent struggle for security, wealth, and sovereignty, maximizing the necessary resources, including military. These values become the national interests, which realists take as natural or given, and which are often called exclusive, narrowly defined geopolitical self-interests (Glanville, 2016). However, the realist national interests are open to change and reconstruction. When the prevalent intersubjective beliefs in a state make of the interstate system differently from anarchy—say, as interdependency or interconnectedness—then so-called inclusive, broadly defined, enlightened self-interests may become the interests of the state. The new security issues or values (health, the environment, and the like) are in fact an enlightened version of realist security—the reconstruction that the security of a state is guaranteed only by the security of the international community. The COVID-19 pandemic is now making such enlightened self-interests ever more urgent and existential for the international community. Calling for humanity-centered diplomacies, Zaharna (2022) elevates enlightened self-interests into the status of the interests of the human species from an evolutionary perspective: “the survival and [perpetuation] of all of humankind and the planet” (p. 154).

Such enlightened self-interests are often exclusively associated with progressive values, including the global public goods of global governance and particular principled beliefs of transnational advocacy. But as much as constructivism is conducive to progressive and liberal interests, and even to realist national interests (Barkin, 2003; Fearon & Wendt, 2002), it is also conducive to national interests of any kind; these can represent even regressive, reactionary, resistant, and revolutionary values, as long as these values

have become the prevailing intersubjective beliefs in a state. This point might make clearer the problem with the accommodative solution. The national interests are not fixed, particular sets of political values and interests, nor can they be comparable with, yet distinct from, those particular progressive ones. Given this all-encircling, constructivist nature of national interests, free from political bias, a better approach than the accommodative may seem plausible for the bounded thrust. The conceivable solution would be to anchor to the national interests. That is to say, the thrust might confine itself to what Ayhan (2019) has identified as the statist approach, that only NGOs in pursuit of national interests are to be designated as actors.

But would the national interests then be the definitive criterion for NGOs being actors in public diplomacy? Before answering this question, consider the following. Back in April 2021, the inaugurated Biden administration announced its support for Japan's plan to dump into the North Pacific 1.2 million tons of radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Condemning the United States' stance, a marine biologist in Anchorage leading national and transnational NGOs on environmental conservation wrote an op-ed calling on the administration to block the dumping plan, arguing that it is in U.S. national interest (Steiner, 2021). This case of NGOs against a government's foreign policy by invoking national interests is not exceptional, but usual, particularly in liberal democracies. Could one confidently call such NGOs actors in public diplomacy simply because they argue that their values and interests are in the national interest? This question further invites follow-up probes: how the national interests are ultimately defined and translated into foreign policy, and what kind of relationship there is between government and civil society in the process. If national interests are taken as a product of societal value preferences, they are the collective interests among the majority of a civil society—not in numbers, but in political power. Namely, they are those of the most politically powerful social groups and their coalitions or the most dominant strands of intersubjective beliefs. For some, the national interests are viewed even as a "justificative rhetoric to elevate a preferred choice of policy to the level of collective and rational legitimacy" (Bolewski, 2017, p. 3).

The collective interests as the product of a political contest, ideally democratic enough to ensure legitimacy, become a mandate from civil society to government, which is entrusted with fulfilling them as the national interests. Thus, the relationship between society and government is often characterized as that of principal and agent (Jönsson, 2018). According to Jönsson (2018), the mandate is of two kinds: "an imperative mandate, being strictly accountable to their principals, or a free mandate, being authorized to act on behalf of their principals" (p. 21). In liberal democracies, where complex chains of principals and agents are multilayered, governments are more likely to enjoy a free mandate or increased autonomy, particularly in foreign affairs. Over time, national interests are further translated, formulated, and proclaimed into foreign policy by the government exercising its free mandate. To the question of who ultimately defines the national interests, it is probably the government, the official bearer. Otherwise, who else can make the national interests the lingua franca of the international community of states, objectively recognizable in the eyes of the other neighbors? As Bolewski (2017) puts it, the national interests are "defined by the governing regime and can be changed in response to shifts in domestic politics and international circumstances" (p. 3). They change across governments of a state, and even over time during the course of the same government—though such governmental pursuit of the national interests in democracies is institutionally subject to approval or disapproval by their principal through congress's ratification, national referendums, and elections.

Now back to the beginning question, which is whether the national interests could be the definitive criterion for the bounded thrust. One must admit, however, national interests would remain problematic. For the national interests defined by government—thus in flux—often would bring indeterminacy and its attendant confusion into designation of what specific NGOs are actors in public diplomacy. Consider the return of the Biden administration in January 2021 to the Paris Agreement on climate change, after the Trump withdrew the United States from it in February 2017 (Milman, 2021). Under the Biden government, regarding its return as being in the national interest, such NGOs as Greenpeace USA and Friends of the Earth U.S., in direct pursuit of the same environmental cause, can be given the status as actors in public diplomacy. But under the Trump government, hardly any of these NGOs could have been regarded as actors. Greenpeace US and the like certainly are not the only NGOs that are possibly subjected to indeterminacy and confusion over their status. Democratic and Republican governments have been alternately defining what the nation's interests are, often in opposite terms. Then, a wider range of NGOs whose sought-after values and interests are generally aligned with either government would raise the same problems of indeterminacy and confusion. This problem would be also common to NGOs in other countries, especially democracies.

Finally, one may be left with the interim verdict on the bounded thrust after all the theoretical possibilities and ways out for sustaining it have been consumed. The thrust might not stand much of a chance in its endeavors to determine conditions for transnational NGOs to qualify as actors.

Similar Problems Likely With Other Transnational Actors

Moreover, with the thrust's ill-fated prospects, the societist vision in general would likely face similar conceptual confusion and disagreements in qualifying other types of TAs. Some MNCs with national allegiances have sought what they see to be in the interests of their home countries by promoting a positive country image and reputation. For instance, from 2002 to 2010, a dozen U.S.-based companies, including PepsiCo, Google, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's, teamed up to repair the United States' damaged image worldwide, because of anti-American sentiments in the wake of the Afghanistan War (White, 2015). Other MNCs are on another front, seeking progressive values and interests to fulfill what they call "corporate social responsibility." In 2020, H&M, a Swedish clothing MNC, stopped using cotton produced in China's Xinjiang Province, protesting a violation of human rights involving forced labor of Uyghur ethnic and religious minorities (Shepherd, 2021). Pfizer and others financially assisted countries such as Haiti in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew and helped to address the global refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East (Kanski, 2016). Most recently, Wells Fargo donated to International Medical Corps across 30 countries to fight the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Of these MNCs, only Pfizer and Wells Fargo would qualify as actors in public diplomacy, according to Gregory (2016), who would see their values and interests as the most common to the global public as a whole, but not H&M and PepsiCo, for instance. However, these MNCs all would be recognized as actors in public diplomacy by Ayhan (2019) and others. Regarding social movements, with anti-globalization, revolutionary values, and interests of social and economic justice for all, the Occupy protests arose in 2011 and instantly mushroomed to 95 cities in 82 countries. Alongside these protests, "resistance identity" politics (Castells, 1997) has prompted social movements, for instance, upholding so-called reactionary religious

fundamentalism across the Middle East and other parts of the world. In sight of these social movements, Castells (2008) would qualify individuals therein as actors in public diplomacy, whereas Gregory (2016) and Ayhan (2019) would disqualify them, regarding their values as not progressive or normative. In addition, Ayhan and others (La Porte, 2012; Lee & Ayhan, 2015) would do so on other grounds, stating that individuals in social movements are not institutionalized into formal organizations, although social movements are difficult to distinguish and separate from NGOs, the movements' indispensable catalysts (Willetts, 2009).

Finally, sub-states, also referred to as non-central governments, include regions, cities, and constituent states in federal governments that engage in constrained yet somewhat autonomous external relations. Those entities have long pursued not only their economic interests in promoting trade, inbound investment, and tourism, but also increasingly political ones, such as environmentalism, human rights, and even their becoming an independent state. For instance, the Catalanian regional government in Spain is known for active political communication to gain international support for its will of self-determination (Guibernau, 2014). Such activities by sub-states have been recognized by the term *micro diplomacy* for decades (Duchacek, 1984) in the literature of international relations. However, they are now newly assigned the term *public diplomacy* by the societist vision (Torras-Vila & Fernández-Cavia, 2018), which might be questionable given the legal status of these entities. They are not social, but public, governmental ones of a smaller scale than states.

A Return to Public Diplomacy as Government Communication

The endeavors of the societist vision, however, deserve credit for their eager receptiveness to the demands of our times, for recognizing the rise of TAs with legitimacy and efficiency in world affairs, and for further theorizing diplomacy, which, according to some, has remained undertheorized (Poulit & Cornut, 2015). But those endeavors are likely to be unfulfilled; the move for recognition of TAs as actors in diplomacy might not make the intended contribution to the theory of diplomacy. Rather, it might end up doing the opposite, as judged by Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, and Sharp (2012). Rejecting the term *globalist diplomacy*, referring to activities of TAs, they argue that "assigning the term diplomacy to it [them] offers little enlightenment and creates confusion" (Hocking et al., 2012, p. 10). Moreover, in a sense, the move to call what TAs do "public diplomacy" might "privilege" not them, but states and governments through assigning TAs the term "diplomacy," which has historically been borne by the state. In other words, the labeling has unintended privileging overtones for states over non-states or TAs, in much the same way that the very term "non-states"—something *not* states—"is a loaded term because it privileges 'states' and downgrades other actors" (Willetts, 2011, p. 22).

Transnational Actors, the Actors in Global Public Sphere

How, then, can one do justice to TAs, properly privileging them? A brief proposition can be laid out. It rests on a view of world affairs as a social practice. By "social," it is meant that peoples and social actors set world affairs in motion. Currently, social actors around the world increasingly have two venues, channels, or mechanisms for pursuing their values and interests. One is by means of the state, the current primary unit of their political organization, in which the politically powerful of domestic social actors have their interests represented as the national interests by the government practicing diplomacy. The other is by

means of their transnational relations, intensely driven by globalization and empowered by technologies, where domestic social actors-turned-TAs directly pursue their interests and values; these interests and values are already enfranchised into, or disenfranchised from, the national interests and foreign policy. In a liberal democracy, the government and civil society are not monolithically unitary, as is assumed by realism; instead, they are separable, in the sense that all TAs are engaged in direct pursuit of their values and interests, regardless of the nature of their relationships with governments—some in cooperation and others in conflict. In this process, these TAs interact with their counterparts abroad, foreign governments, and international organizations.

Against this background, a proper privileging of TAs would be to recognize them as what they are, not by assigning them the misfitting label of public diplomacy, but by reinstating identifiers or descriptors already reserved and established for them. Those terms include *transnational relations*, *global civil society*, *global public sphere*, *global advocacy* or *global activism*, and *global governance*. TAs, from NGOs to MNCs to individuals in social movements, have long been recognized as the weaving thread, and thus citizens, of global civil society (Willetts, 2009, 2011). The global society, according to Willetts, has the following features: First, it is an emergent realm where TAs engage in public debate and dialogue about global norms and policy; second, it is not normative, promoting only progressive values, but is the sum of all the activities of all TAs in pursuit of a wide spectrum of values and interests; and third, it is at best bounded together by strongly procedural norms: commitments to due process of law, political democracy, and social pluralism. Castells (2008) identified such a projection by TAs of their values and ideas into the international arena with Habermas's (1996) term *public sphere*. So the way to do TAs justice would be to recognize them as what they are: as actors in the "global public sphere."

Government, the Sole Actor in Public Diplomacy

From this proposal, it follows that TAs should not be recognized as actors in public diplomacy. This "TAs-not-actors" statement, however, only halfway tackles the decades-long confusion in the literature over who such actors are. Another proposal for the tackling the other half is necessary, speaking up front about who should be recognized as the actors. The proposal to be made here is that only the government should be the sole actor of public diplomacy on two grounds: first, for the continuity of diplomacy as a historically bounded practice and concept of the state system, with the government being the official bearer and representative of the national interests, and second, for the conceptual clarity of public diplomacy as being a government-to-foreign-publics communication—to borrow from McDowell (2008)—as contrasted with traditional diplomacy as involving government-to-government communication.

Certainly, to some, this view of the government as the sole actor may look like an anachronistic, fundamentalist, and doomed doctrine. In "Requiem for Public Diplomacy," Robin (2005) sounded a death knell for this view, on two grounds: first, governments' blinded, "epistemological" paradigm of the anarchic state system, and second, their backward "technical" shortcoming of one-way communication. Hence, "No grand paradigmatic shift in public diplomacy . . . no bold technological innovation will assure regeneration" (Robin, 2005, p. 351). In fact, Robin's requiem for public diplomacy had already been foreshadowed by the so-called hypoglobalists' declarations (Ohmae, 1995) of the languor of the nation-state in the face of globalization. Yet, to others, the state is still in place and even in regeneration. The so-called skeptics (Hirst,

Thompson, & Bromley, 2009) continue to see the state as being the principal force shaping world politics, with geopolitics, nationalism, and territorial boundaries continuing to have great significance. Whereas these skeptics' sight is set on the revival of a realist state, many others see a paradigmatic regeneration in the emergence of activist states whose national interests include even the global public good. For Hocking et al. (2012), for example, states in a postglobalist world engage in integrative diplomacy, pursuing not only realist but also globalist interests. Now governments eagerly make nimble, proactive adaptations to global challenges by upgrading their public diplomacy through employing new paradigms of collaborative network, relationship, and two-way symmetry in communication with foreign publics (Fisher & Lucas, 2011). In addition, on a more fundamental plane, the state is even foreseen to persist as the principal political community in the form of a constructivist state (Wendt, 1999) whose interests are no longer inherently fixed to realism.

This prospect for the state to remain regenerated constructively undergirds the proposal made here that the government is, and will be, the sole actor in public diplomacy. To further clarify the proposal, however, its proponents must still address a long-unheeded issue: what can be seen as a realist assumption of the unity between government and society as a whole, both sharing values and interests. This assumption might unconsciously dispose its proponents toward regarding domestic homegrown TAs in general as coactors. To governments, such a view might be politically tempting because it can help mobilize and co-opt those TAs into the pursuit of national interests and foreign policy as defined by governments. Nonetheless, this view invites a self-contradiction on the proclamation that the government is the sole actor. In fact, the assumption has been persistent from the dawn of traditional public diplomacy, when the government was regarded as the sole actor (Malone, 1985; Tuch, 1990). Returning to the burgeoning period of the Cold War, earlier definitions (Delaney, 1968; Gullion, 1965, as cited in Cull, 2009) had already treated homegrown TAs as actors alongside the government. Delaney (1968) had ascribed public diplomacy to "both governments and private individuals and groups" (p. 3) influencing foreign publics' attitudes with a direct bearing on their governments' foreign policy. He identified those "private individuals and groups" as "the idealistic Peace Corpsman, the long-suffering missionary, the foreign correspondent, the businessman, the visiting professor or student" (Delaney, 1968, p. 5). As such, his view, along with Gullion's as cited in (Cull, 2009), was likely imbued by the assumption of unity between government and "private individuals and groups."

Even today, this realist assumption can be seen in action, more potently in views of public diplomacy across East Asian countries. In China, Japan, and Korea, government and society are commonly seen as joint actors. This development, as suggested by Zappone (2012), is attributable to the region's long-held political and cultural tradition. Confucianism sees both entities as unitary, composing one body. Cho (2012), speaking of Korean public diplomacy, defined the practice as "a process used by the government and private constituencies of a nation to promote the national interests" (p. 284). The grip of such unity, however, has become increasingly challenged by globalization. The centrifugal economic and cultural forces of globalization have disintegrated and disunited the values and interests in a civil society deeply embedded in affairs of the domestic-international nexus. The need for the government to be the countervailing, centripetal, integrating force against globalization has recently brought about a response, termed by Huijgh (2011) as *domestic public diplomacy*. Directed to domestic civil society, it is meant to engage as many domestic constituencies as possible through democratization and societization of diplomacy in the conduct

of foreign policy. Given this, domestic public diplomacy can be seen as striving to retain unity, continuing to see domestic constituencies as an actor alongside the government. Although compelled toward reconfiguration, the unity assumption is untenable given the political pluralism in a civil society. Not all values and interests therein are represented by the government. Domestic constituencies whose values are disenfranchised still pursue them, in conflict with the government.

To be sure, however, homegrown TAs exist whose values and interests are enfranchised in the government's foreign policy. These TAs pursue their goals both autonomously and in concert with the government. Regarding this, some terms have long been around for characterizing these TAs as actors. For example, *track 2 diplomacy* (Davidson & Montville, 1981) refers to the autonomous and concerted activities of TAs to peacefully resolve conflicts with an adversarial country via unofficial, informal interactions with their counterparts in the country. The now more familiar term *citizen diplomacy* has a historical origin in track 2 diplomacy in particular. Gaining traction nowadays in a different domain is the term *social diplomacy* (van Doeveren, 2011). This term refers to, for instance, Dutch NGOs as actors working independently and together with their governments, through their sociological contacts and networks with foreign civil societies, to provide developmental and humanitarian assistance.

Understandably, there is good reason for governments' regard for like-minded TAs as co-actors in terms of pragmatism and synergy. However, in terms of theoretical considerations, this outlook leaves confusion, as previously explicated in this article. Foremost, governments and TAs are ontologically distinct entities. The confluence between the two—the national interests (foreign policy goals), as defined by a government, and the values and interests of a TA—is likely impermanent and contingent. It is in flux over the course of the same government and across different domains of foreign policy, not to mention across alternating governments. To avoid confusion, TAs, in cooperation with a government, must be recognized as “a partner” in the government's public diplomacy. Here, the key terms are *partner* and *partnership*. In common usage, *partnership* specifically refers to cooperation between two or more parties under two conditions. First, the parties are distinct entities. Second, when they share and pursue the same interests with an equal status as joint principals (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), the labels of “partner” and “partnership” are more appropriate; they fit not just with the common usage, but also with the academic usage already established in the literature of global governance. In discussing global governance, scholars acknowledge two separate entities: the public sector, consisting of governments, and the private sector, consisting of TAs. They are both in pursuit of shared global public good in three forms, according to Börzel and Risse (2007): by the public sector alone, by the private sector independently, and by both in cooperation, the last of which is commonly referred to as public-to-private partnerships. Also, note here that the terms *partner* and *partnership* are not reserved only for global governance; they are equally applicable to the pursuit of whatever the interests shared by the government and the like-minded TAs of a civil society may be. Moreover, using these terms would clarify the characterization of TAs in ever-expanding cooperation with governments, which has brought about the network paradigm (Fisher & Lucas, 2011).

Finally, the whole proposal laid out thus far could be summed up as follows. The government is the sole actor of public diplomacy, communicating with foreign publics to achieve foreign policy goals as its formulations of national interests of a constructivist nature. Its practice takes two forms, as described by d'Hooghe (2015) and Hocking (2004): (1) the government alone, and (2) in the mode of the network public

diplomacy in which the government cooperates with both domestic- and foreign-born TAs sharing the same values and interests as a partner, not as an actor, in public diplomacy. Though this proposal may appear “too absolute,” it could be a solution to the confusion surrounding the definitional issue of who the actor of public diplomacy is. In fact, rather than reverting to the traditional realist state-centric definition, what is called for is an upgrade to a constructivist state-centric definition. Instead of attempting a grand, unified, general theory of public diplomacy by both the state (government) and non-states (TAs), let us keep to a bounded, special theory of public diplomacy by the former.

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