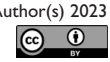
Original Article

EJIR

European Journal of International Relations
1–25



DOI: 10.1177/13540661231170731
journals.sagepub.com/home/ejt
Sage

The cosmopolitan standard of civilization: a reflexive sociology of elite belonging among Indian diplomats

Kira Huju
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Introduction

> A cosmopolite is a premature universalist, an imitator of superficial attainments of dominant civilizations, an inhabitant of upper-caste milieus without real contact with the people.
>
> —Indian freedom fighter and socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia

This article sketches out the social rules for belonging among the 'cosmopolitan elite' at the geopolitical margins of international society. It does so by analysing an awkward balancing act performed by career diplomats of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS): even as Indian diplomats contest Western political hegemony and its attendant ideologies, they perpetuate social behaviours that signal a desire to be recognized as elite members of a Westernized diplomatic club, in whose hierarchies of race and class they hope to ascend. Cosmopolitanism operates in this balancing act not as a world-embracing ethic upholding an equal, pluralistic, or liberal international order but as an elite aesthetic which presumes cultural compliance and social assimilation into Westernized mores.

If it once was European powers who employed a colonial 'standard of civilization' to legitimate their dominance over those whose social practices they judged inferior (Buzan, 2014), in a formally postcolonial order, Indian diplomats themselves have come to employ elite performances of cosmopolitanism as a kind of civilizational standard. This standard is continually enacted to secure one's status as a worthy participant of a white,

Corresponding author:
Kira Huju, Department of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.
Email: K.Huju@lse.ac.uk

historically upper-class, Westernized order in which some members are more equal than others. It is used domestically by the Service's elite against internal Others – lower-caste or lower-class diplomats, rural recruits, vernacular speakers – who are classified as insufficiently worldly. Instead of transcending private loyalties, as Western political theory presumes cosmopolitanism to do, this practice ties cosmopolitanism to a dominant position in hierarchies of class, caste, and civilizational standing.

I adopt a critical sociological sensibility – this is an international society narrated not through its high principles like non-interference or institutions like Bretton Woods, but through quotidian practices, manners, and tastes. The analytical sensibilities of reflexive sociology, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, allow us to consider how social hierarchies discipline diplomatic performances. The Bourdieusian emphasis on *habitus* underscores diplomacy's embodied nature, locating forms of power and hierarchy in quotidian gestures that would escape a diplomatic historian charting the contours of world-historical developments. Bourdieu allows us to understand why conventions of international society endure and how they are socially reproduced. Through gestures of distinction and recognition, the rules of elite belonging among the cosmopolitan elite reflect structural hierarchies of class, religion, race, gender and caste.

Out of these hierarchies emerges a pattern whose significance transcends India: there is a disconnect between the ideals of cosmopolitan theory and the social behaviour of cosmopolitan elites. In the Western canon of political theory, cosmopolitanism connotes an ethic of equality and tolerance, which mainstream theorizing has intuitively 'understood to have a positive valence and progressive implications' (Bender, 2017: 116). Cosmopolitanism 'elaborates a concern with the equal moral status of each and every human being and creates a bedrock of interest in what it is that human beings have in common, independently of their particular familial, ethical, national and religious affiliations' (Held, 2010: x). Diplomacy has contributed to globalizing these ideals, since 'all human beings are now participants in a single, global institutional scheme – involving such institutions as the territorial state and a system of international law and diplomacy' (Pogge, 1992: 51). Approximating this theoretical orthodoxy, Indian diplomats, too, occasionally tie their cosmopolitanism to abstract ideals like respect for the Other[1] or articles of liberal faith like universal human rights.[2]

Yet ideal theory is not the primary modality in which Indian diplomats practise their cosmopolitanism. In the diplomatic everyday, 'cosmopolitanism' is intuited to be a domestic marker of distinction and status. Instead of embracing the world, it functions as a social sieve. I examine who gets to be a cosmopolitan in the imageries of international society that the IFS produces – that is, who is seen as inhabiting the correct *cosmopolitan habitus.* This reading undermines some of the self-congratulatory rhetoric about the ability of liberal international order to accommodate difference (see, for example, Ikenberry, 2011): social rules perpetuate implicit hierarchies of recognition in a formally equal, pluralistic order.

The article builds on 85 semi-structured interviews conducted mostly with former and serving Indian diplomats, but also Union ministers, Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress affiliates, and academics, as well as on archival research, used in this article mostly for background, in the National Archives of India (NAI) and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in 2019.

I proceed in three phases. First, I outline Bourdieu's theoretical universe and critically position myself in relation to existing Bourdieusian IR, introducing caste into its lexicon. Second, I discuss cosmopolitanism among Indian diplomats. I analyse the colonial genealogy of the cosmopolitan habitus and its contemporary expressions, illustrating how it has spawned an institutional hierarchy for the IFS that differs from conventional domestic hierarchies. Third, I propose two social functions that sustain the cosmopolitan aesthetic: first, of elite recognition internationally; second, of elite reproduction domestically. This section includes my argument for reading the cosmopolitan aesthetic as political failure and concludes by analysing how the potential demise of Western supremacy and the rise of Hindu nationalism might transfigure it.

The diplomacy of distinction

Bourdieu and IR

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was insistent that social orders are maintained neither through constant physical coercion nor by ideological fiat. They endure through the subtle assimilation of society into worldviews and dispositions that reflect the preferences of dominant groups. This is not token authority: it is a 'worldmaking power', allowing elites to set the 'legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions' (Bourdieu, 1987: 13) and to thereby 'reproduce and reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space' (Bourdieu, 1989: 21). Quotidian behaviours and discourses normalize forms of differentiation, notably between 'the groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced' (Bourdieu, 2010a: 481). Bourdieu gives us an appreciation of the IFS as a scene of social struggle.

Since the very concepts through which we understand social orders are embedded in hierarchical structures within which we give them meaning, there is no purely *abstract* understanding of cosmopolitanism – only one rooted in particular social structures that sustain a *situated* reading. A reflexive sociological approach takes concepts of political theory and asks how they are understood, contested, and reproduced in the everyday. This process of conceptual rooting often reveals a disconnect between analytical or ethical priors and lived experience; this is why studying the everyday life of seemingly settled concepts is important. It also permits us to query the oxymoron in the term 'cosmopolitan elite', which pairs equality with elitism and toleration with exclusion.

As Bourdieu has travelled into IR, scholars like Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2013), Didier Bigo (2011), Iver Neumann (2008, 2012) and Vincent Pouliot (2010) have pioneered theories on international fields and the diplomatic habitus. While indebted to these works, I depart from some trends in them – notably their statist predisposition, technocratic bend, and Eurocentric tenor. First, a discipline primed to prioritize the national has gravitated towards readings of *national* habitus (e.g. Pouliot, 2010). Framing IFS culture as a natural derivative of Indian national culture risks reproducing nationalistic, even nativist, tropes (Behera, 2007: 359). A national reading also uncritically allows dominant actors to speak for the nation, obscuring domestic relations of power. Second,

I adopt an anti-technocratic sensitivity. Martin-Mazé (2017: 203) argues that IR's appropriation of Bourdieu often erases his emphasis on domination: an analysis not of polite disputes between professionals but the symbolic violence underpinning social relations. Indian diplomats exist at the intersection of internal and international hierarchies – caste, class, gender, race, nationality – even if this struggle eludes dominant actors and those who study India through them. My analysis shows the limits of technocratic sociability. Third, this article marks the first Bourdieu-inspired treatment of South Asian diplomacy. It joins Nair's (2019) judicious exploration of diplomacy in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as one of the very few Bourdieusian readings of diplomacy done outside the West at all. The Eurocentrism of Bourdieusian IR – indeed, of sociological IR generally – has shaped the concepts in which it trades. Therefore, pertinent non-European social categories like caste are missing.

An axiom of Indian anthropology and sociology, caste is a loud absence and telling omission in IR. While critical and postcolonial IR offer correctives to the evasions of orthodox theorizing, Krishna (2014: 139) cautions that binaries like 'black/white, western/nonwestern, and global north and south tend to draw our eyes away from the complexities within each of them and desensitize us to ways in which they are themselves hierarchized' – and so it is with caste. While the politics of this silence and the broader dynamics of caste are beyond this paper's scope, it is imperative to establish that caste is not an exotic drag on rational modernity or a ritual doctrine to be banished by a secular temperament – if this were so, it would arguably have made its exit by now. Contemporary manifestations of caste are fundamental to Indian cultural, social, economic, and political relations (Béteille, 2012; Teltumbde, 2010). Caste matters for the IFS because caste-based hierarchies, recruitment methods, and representational ideals have fundamentally shaped the Service. Considering caste makes for a less Eurocentric way of 'doing sociology' and thinking about order in IR.

The cosmopolitan habitus

Speaking about diplomatic representation in interviews, Indian diplomats habitually returned to the importance of 'having a kind of manner' or 'quality', an unspecified air surrounding the best diplomats that could not be captured in a simple laundry list of characteristics[3] – a certain *habitus.* Habitus is the largely preconscious embodiment of dispositions that constitute the individual. These dispositions – tastes, thoughts, manners – are socially produced, being 'the result of the internalization of external structures' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18). Bourdieu (1989: 18) once explained habitus as the sum of 'the mental structures through which [individuals] apprehend the social world'. But habitus – 'the social made body' – is also corporeal, expressing itself in how the body is presented (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127). It approximates what old-guard diplomats described as proper ways of 'carrying oneself'.

Performing the habitus requires *capital* – societal currencies mobilized to gain and maintain one's place in a hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2010b: 82–84). *Cultural capital* comprises intangible assets: manners, knowledge, competences, and style. It expresses familiarity with dominant culture and provides the means to symbolically dominate a social order.

A dominant habitus signals belonging in an order's elite. It 'marks, produces, and organizes a distinction between those whose tastes are regarded as "noble" because they have been organized and legitimated by the education system, and those whose tastes, lacking such markers of nobility, are accorded a more lowly status' (Bennett, 2010: xix–xx). Any dominant habitus signals its Other, but it must do so subtly. Indeed, a basic intention of distinction is 'to suggest with the fewest "effects" possible the greatest expenditure of time, money, and ingenuity', so as to display 'the "natural" self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized' (Bourdieu, 2010a: 380, 250). Tellingly, Bourdieu was conceptually indebted to Elias' (1978) work on the 'civilizing process', which Elias saw as an evolution of manners that distinguished a 'civilized' person at a given historical moment (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 104) – a colonial logic to which I shall return.

The *cosmopolitan habitus* is a kind of dominant habitus. Its contours emerged over long conversations with diplomats and approximate the 'IFS type': 'elite, English-speaking, Anglicised and urbane' (Sullivan, 2014: 646) – as well as upper-caste. Its ideals centre around the notion that a cosmopolitan is somebody who, with Bourdieu's effortless superiority, is naturally 'at home in the world'.

Inhabiting a cosmopolitan habitus does not entail an absolute negation of national inheritance – for example, my observations suggest that female diplomats tend to wear a *saree* on duty, rendering their sartorial appearance more distinctly South Asian than that of many male colleagues. The lived expressions of cosmopolitanism exhibit hybridity, melding Indian conventions with global practices of status signalling. Furthermore, Anglicized cultural references or manners are not strictly "foreign"; they have long been incorporated into educational and professional contexts and normalized as expressions of domestic status reproduced by Indian elites. By contrast, there is no unspoiled Indian "authenticity", safe from outside influence or internal cultural contestation. I am, therefore, less interested in constructing a fixed binary between "the international" and "the national" than in analysing how domestic elite reproduction is pursued in the name of a transnational, cosmopolitan class consciousness.

Following Nair (2019: 4), I suggest that the production of the cosmopolitan habitus is not merely about *secondary socialization* into a generic 'diplomatic habitus' but crucially about *primary socialization* imparted in early familial and educational environments. Primary cultural capital still matters after formal equalization processes – say, diplomatic training – 'as one finds whenever social origin distinguishes individuals whose qualifications are identical' (Bourdieu, 2010a: 99). Indeed, although Bourdieu never mentions a cosmopolitan habitus, he theorized that 'cosmopolitan capital' emerges in the relationships between 'global fields' and 'local elite schools', which produce national elites that often resemble foreign counterparts more than their less privileged compatriots (Bourdieu in Cohen, 2018: 229). Unaddressed in diplomats' self-narrations was the question of what, precisely, makes somebody a natural cosmopolitan. In denaturalizing and contextualizing the cosmopolitan habitus, it is this question that the article addresses.

Positionality and method

Interviews are complex processes, in which much is revealed, concealed, and creatively reinterpreted. I do not consider them as forensic evidence, sanitized through analytical

de-personification, but as 'autoethnographies': 'commentaries and analysis by informants on their own sociocultural milieus' (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 130). They do not provide traditional 'external validity': they offer insight not *despite* their subjectivity but *because of* it.

The interviews here are always anonymous but never positionless. Much IR research on elite institutions equates confidentiality with obscurity, 'to the point that elementary social characteristics of the agents too often disappear, at least to the reader, behind anonymity' (Cohen, 2018: 222). This divorces worldviews from the social positions that underpin them, erecting a false façade of neutrality and reducing differences of perspective into matters of personal preference. Bourdieusian analysis must record 'a position, a past, and identity' (Leander, 2011: 299). Names do not matter; context does.

My process of negotiating interview access occurred mostly through 'snowballing' – one interviewee recommending another. As one Additional-Secretary cautioned, 'like begets like': a 'typology' emerged from heeding recommendations from the most celebrated diplomats.[4] 'People will keep pointing you to people who are articulate', creating a cycle which 'perpetuates certain social biases', an elite-schooled Under-Secretary remarked – before generously and almost conspiratorially drafting a more heterodox list of potential interviewees.[5] A focused counterbalancing of snowballing effects was required throughout, in fact, including explicitly requesting recommendations for demographics underrepresented in snowballing suggestions: women, lower-caste diplomats, officers without an Anglicized education or urban roots.

Anonymity relaxed the boundaries of acceptable speech. There is bound to be some difference, however, between lived practice and recounted experience relayed in interviews. One lower-caste officer drew an analogy to caste attitudes: 'it's like racism – since it's now taboo and not *kosher* to say certain things out loud any more', discerning colleagues' positions is hard.[6] Younger diplomats who fit elite markers practised a most millennial performance: they kept 'recognizing their own privilege' when giving what might sound like elitist answers, 'called out' colleagues' insufficient progressivism, and self-policed their language for 'essentializing markers' when talking about less privileged peers.[7]

Indeed, interviewees can produce an *outsider-oriented discourse*, self-theorizing their worldviews as an interpretive courtesy (Bourdieu, 1977: 18) – or an instrument of narrative control. Diplomats are, by profession, experts at careful framing. Counterbalancing the 'typology' offers a partial corrective: the performed liberalism of the IFS elite, for example, was qualified by the lived experiences relayed by marginalized officers, who rarely shared elite colleagues' self-congratulatory accounts of just how tolerant their everyday behaviour towards colleagues from lower-class, lower-caste backgrounds was.

At the same time, reactions to intersubjective 'truths' range from 'a deeper internalization of dominant notions to a more cynical or pragmatic conformity', suggesting considerable elasticity in how individuals relate to dominant narratives (Eagleton-Pierce, 2013: 53). The question is not about personal conviction or universal veracity but canonisation: whose worldviews become common sense? Who narrates themselves, who is narrated by others? Who implicitly sets the Service's dominant expression of cosmopolitanism?

Where interviewees 'talk from' matters (Pouliot, 2012: 51), but so does who they talk *to*. Securing interviews was undeniably and undeservedly abetted by my then affiliation to Oxford University's Balliol College, which under the British Raj trained most Indians at Oxford and the mention of which elicited many approving nods, entangling

the interview process in the colonial legacies being studied. So etched into the Anglophile imagination has Balliol become that a Delhiite diplomat in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* could be adequately captured with the sardonic observation that he 'never lost an opportunity to let people know that he was a Balliol man' (Roy, 2017: 186).

To some diplomats, a young European woman outside her inherited social milieu seemed to come across as culturally innocent or politically naïve. Consequently, many expounded on sensitive themes in ways they may not have with another interviewer. Officers may also have self-presented in ways that mirrored what they expected to be my likely political or social sympathies. Sometimes, interviewees operated from an assumption of closeness rather than distance. Some diplomats – liberal-arts graduates, Oxbridge alumni, culturally mobile millennials, women – drew me into their fold, presumptively speaking of 'people like us'. Here, too, triangulating between officers of different backgrounds sharpened my vision: playing out different assumptions of closeness and distance between interviewer and interviewee surfaced different variations on the theme of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitan elites and internal Others

A colonial genealogy of the cosmopolitan habitus

It matters for the cosmopolitan aesthetic that the IFS is not, in fact, a fully postcolonial creature. It has entangled colonial roots, both in ethos and personnel. On 10 July 1835, Lord Macaulay (2003: 237) presented his *Minute on Indian Education* in the British Parliament, developing an anatomy of a future colonized elite, 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect'. This elite was embodied in Indian members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) – the administrative corps of around a thousand men that once governed over a quarter of the world's population, of which the British in 1920 decreed half should be Indian (Lall, 1981: 18, 49). The ICS elite was socialized into imperial administration and its ideologies of the world. The Raj gave them not only employment and status but a way of being: an image of international society narrated from the perspective of European power.

Socially, the ICS became a 'symbol of inequality, casteism' (Paranjape, 1966: 32): it was predominantly educated and trained at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Mangat Rai, 1973: 39) and was deeply Brahminical – Brahmins being the highest caste (Potter, 1996: 118). Race and class intersected to create a liminal status: the Indian ICS officer was schooled to 'think British, feel British, act British, and buy British' (Vittachi, 1962: 54), yet, within the racial hierarchies of empire, was never truly part of the fraternity of gentlemen he mimicked.

Post-Independence, India developed a diplomatic idiom of Third World solidarity and anti-imperial agitation (Chacko, 2013). Democratizing the civil services became an end in itself: a representative body of diplomats would reflect the embrace of postcolonial emancipation, freed of the Raj's bureaucratic elitism.[8] 'Every member of the staff, whether he *[sic]* is a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh, Christian, Brahmin, non-Brahmin, Harijan or any other, or whatever State he comes from, must be treated alike', India's iconic first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, implored in a circular letter in October 1950.[9]

Yet what is striking about the postcolonial transition is not the anticipated triumph of the new but the unanticipated persistence of the old. Particularly remarkable is the fact that Nehru entrusted the establishment of the IFS with an 'ICS generation of men' (Mathai, 1978: 193) – literally, for women were barred from colonial bureaucracy (Dixit, 2005: 32). The ICS furnished India's first nine Foreign Secretaries (Rasgotra, 2016: 16). For decades, 'the entire superstructure was of ICS officers', with nobody else rising above Joint-Secretary rank.[10] Only in 1976, with the appointment as Foreign Secretary of Jagat Mehta, son of an ICS-trained Ambassador, did the IFS cease being led by former colonial officers (Rasgotra, 2016: 16). One diplomat dated the end of the ICS's reign in the 1980s, when the last officer retired.[11] In fact, retired officers served on Foreign Service Interview Boards,[12] projecting their ideals onto the recruitment of diplomatic generations whose members work in the IFS to this day.

Despite his freedom-fighter credentials, Nehru himself was a product of cultural ambivalence. One officer who served under him suggested that 'Nehru's bias' drove him to pick diplomats from among 'people with a social presence' and 'social sophistication' – 'people who felt comfortable abroad', as the euphemism went.[13] Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon recalled his 'partiality for people who had been at college with him' at Cambridge.[14] ICS veterans and Nehru constituted the social aristocracy that set the dominant vision of international society following formal decolonization. Its ideological commitments to Third World solidarity coexisted with a deep-seated social regard for old European diplomacy.

Upon Independence in 1947, India entered a diplomatic world long in the making before its own formal admission, leading ICS veteran Badr-ud-Din Tyabji (1972: 17) to caution those with a romantic postcolonial vision that diplomacy had been 'well-set in its traditional ways since the dawn of modern history' and could not be refashioned for 'the Indian way of life' overnight. As a member of one of the very first batches[15] explained: the IFS 'had to fall in line with the world practice' of diplomacy, with its own meanings and manners.[16]

This 'world practice' preserved social aspects of an old standard of civilization for a postcolonial era. Shaped by traditions born in Renaissance Europe and consolidated under empire, this practice was founded on an 'aristocratic etiquette for world ordering' (Callahan, 2004: 305). Early European diplomats – the 'aristocratic international' – were culturally bound together by their homogeneous backgrounds (Jönsson and Hall, 2005: 131). European world ordering reflected not only dominant readings of civilization but class, as the 'standards of civilization' differentiated the supposedly superior European club of 'international' society from the colonies outside it as well as the domestic lower classes deemed uncivilized. Bourdieu's claim that matters of taste and demeanour are fundamental to a dominant habitus is borne out in the classed, colonial imagery of diplomacy which emphasized etiquette, eloquence, and comportment (Neumann, 2008: 674). This was diplomacy conceived as 'a small society with its own rules of conduct, its own courtesies and what is more, its own prejudices and exclusions' (Roy, 1984: 142).

Writing with Sayad on decolonization, Bourdieu abandoned his former notions of romantic revolutionary postcoloniality, arguing that the structuring power of the habitus would preserve colonial-era 'manners of behaving and thinking' (Bourdieu and Sayad, 2004: 471–472). And so it was for the IFS, with no bureaucratic precedent to fall back on

– 'except', as one early-1960s recruit noted defensively, 'to borrow whatever we could from the British'.[17] IFS Conduct Rules, governing diplomats' behaviour, were modelled on their ICS equivalent; internal policies were justified with reference to British Foreign Office precedents.[18] To Service elders, the ideal diplomat looked an awful lot like 'a result of their respective social background and value systems of colonial India' (Dixit, 2005: 31). One admiring officer's description of a Head of Mission in Afghanistan in 1948 described a man who 'possessed certain essential qualities that contributed to the success of an envoy': a person 'with refined manners', 'invariably clad in immaculate' clothing, who 'carried himself like a benevolent feudal lord' (Raman, 1986: 11–12). This was the 'aristocratic international', Indianized.

Socialization into the postcolonial IFS was, partly, socialization into a bygone world of upper-class, imperial notions of 'worldliness'. Through social mimicry, ICS officers' 'social graces, manner of conducting themselves' set a social standard of elite comportment, a diplomat who worked under them for two decades explained.[19] Diplomats recruited after Independence volunteered that they made a 'conscious attempt to emulate them'[20] and that 'the *esprit de corps* began with them embracing us as youngsters to be brought up'.[21] For ICS grandees, diplomacy 'was not just work, it was a lifestyle', as a retired sceptic clarified with a mockingly raised eyebrow – 'the lifestyle was already defined; it's not like diplomats entering the Service after 1947 could change it'.[22] 'There was a code of conduct that the British Civil Service had established', to which newcomers were 'molded', described a diplomat who joined the Service a few years into Independence.[23] The seniors were credited for knowing 'how to keep up a conversation at the dinner table'[24] and being 'well-read', 'able to take a wider view of things'[25] – and 'they had dash, they had confidence'[26] and 'swagger in their gait' (Rasgotra, 2016: 16) to show for it. Social continuity facilitated socialization: batches until at least the early 1980s knew that Indian bureaucracy was, in the suggestive description of an elite officer, for 'our kind of families'.[27]

What had once been a colonial imposition began being presented as cosmopolitan discernment. The ability to 'take a wider view of things' had, in many ways, become 'a possibility only because of the existence of empire, that cosmopolitanism could have been inspired or authorized only by the imperial scale' (Robbins and Horta, 2017: 4). Or, as Brennan (1997: 81) polemically describes cosmopolitanism: '[i]t is a discourse of the universal that is inherently local – a locality that is always surreptitiously imperial'. Indian diplomacy came to reflect a parochial postcoloniality: ideologically wedded to representing a decolonized world but socially invested in entrusting this representation with a colonially inflected, exclusionary cadre.

The ideals of the cosmopolitan habitus have weathered significant demographic change. A combination of academic amendments to entry requirements in the early 1980s, the expansion of the affirmative action programme embodied since 1950 in 'reservations' for the 'Scheduled Castes' (SC – *Dalits* or 'untouchables') and 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST – *Adivasis* or indigenous populations*)* to include 'Other Backward Castes' (OBC – *Shudras*, the second-lowest caste) in the 1990s, and labour market reforms coupled with societal change have expanded access into the once exclusive civil services (Fernandes, 2000). Since 2001, there have been three female Foreign Secretaries; incoming batches often reach demographic gender parity (Singh Rathore, 2020).

And yet the footprint of cadre democratization has been light. One is struck – precisely because considerable structural change has occurred – by just how poorly demographic change predicts cultural evolution. No fundamental change exists in conceptions of the cosmopolitan habitus, just in the average ability of incoming officers to inhabit it. As the nature of cadres and the world transforms around them, officers both serving and retired gave little indication that much had changed about the ideal diplomat.[28] The image of an Anglophone, upper-caste, upper-class, eloquent man was an often subconscious benchmark even for those who did not fit it; it also continues to dominate the line-up of Foreign Secretaries.[29] Even those who, in the spirit of democratization, explicitly declared the elitist reverence for liberal-arts educated Anglophile men passé often went on to exclusively name such individuals as examples of the ideal diplomat.

External recruitment has similarly failed to alter IFS culture. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) increasingly employs fixed-term consultants and promotes members of IFS(B), a clerical branch of stenographers and assistants, to diplomatic ranks, occasionally to Ambassador (Telegraph India, 2012). Between them and IFS officers exists what one millennial officer called 'another kind of caste system', with elite-trained diplomats largely keeping to themselves.[30] In fact, a crucial component of the declinist narrative of old-school diplomats fearing the end of an age of enlightened cosmopolitan elites is precisely that supposedly culturally inferior Indians from outside the IFS are ascending the ranks of the MEA. The cosmopolitan habitus doubles as a disciplinary standard against perceived outsiders to justify their exclusion from the tight-knit IFS circle.

Promotion patterns are further evidence of a lack of change: the senior-most Secretary ranks are inhabited by 'blue-blooded Brahmins', a Dalit Joint-Secretary intoned bitterly.[31] A 2015 inquiry found that although SC/ST/OBC officers represented almost a third of diplomats, they were fewer than a fifth among Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Permanent Representatives (The Hindu, 2015). As a prominent former Ambassador explained, as though offering assurance to a fellow member of the cosmopolitan elite, 'democratization' is a question of entry figures – over the first decade, unsuitable officers are 'sifted' out.[32]

Bourdieusian logic makes sense of this disjuncture between formal demographic democratization and informal cultural exclusivity. Arguing against the liberal narrative that post-industrial societies had attained equality through education and democracy, Bourdieu (2010b: 81, 83) contended that elites in formally equal societies perpetuate their dominance through recourse to their habitus and capital. Indeed, it is precisely the inequalities of capital that guarantee its worth. The cosmopolitan habitus is valorized precisely because the elite status it signifies is elusive. But how, precisely, does the cosmopolitan aesthetic operate inside the contemporary IFS?

The cosmopolitan club

It is challenging to get liberals – among whom much of the traditional IFS elite count themselves – to address how hierarchies underpin their navigation of the social world. And yet there was one consistently revealing way, a sociological shortcut of sorts, to tease out these hierarchies. No moment elicited as many beaming eyes, poised smiles, and declarations of conviction as the question: 'Would you describe yourself as a cosmopolitan?' Most diplomats, otherwise careful to weigh up their responses to the most casual questions, enlisted as committed cosmopolitans with a hasty self-evidence.[33] How

they proceeded to divide their Service according to who could be classed as cosmopolitan opened an entire universe of social order. Cosmopolitanism revealed itself to be much more – or less – than an internationalist commitment.

One might consider cosmopolitanism a matter of tradecraft: diplomats are cosmopolitan by profession. Some officers, however, discerned a comparative scale: 'The Japanese are less cosmopolitan than the Indian diplomats', one Additional-Secretary evaluated,[34] while a self-identifying cosmopolitan Under-Secretary hesitated: 'I would love to say "yes, you have to be a cosmopolitan to do well"', but then, 'you have these boorish Chinese people' – diplomats who 'drink their wine with ice'.[35] The argument about the boorish Chinese with their iced beverages is not trivial. It exposes a tension between political theory and lived expressions of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism was a form of distinction carrying undeclared baggage: class, caste, educational privilege, family background. For all its world-embracing ethics, it was not universally available. In fact, the notion that cosmopolitanism expressed one's place in a social hierarchy was one of its most prominent features. It was 'a term of self-congratulation' and 'a compliment for the suave and debonair' (Calhoun, 2017: 192).

Cosmopolitanism had a social code: it required knowledge of Anglophone cultural references and 'an understanding of where people are coming from when they say things', one millennial officer concluded, after half a decade deciphering this code among his more privileged colleagues.[36] Some even began the account of their cosmopolitanism by describing their refined lifestyles.[37] The class script of cosmopolitanism was so institutionally engrained that one Hindi-speaking Joint-Secretary from rural India felt the need to qualify that he may not *look* cosmopolitan, but considered himself one nonetheless, 'opinion-wise'.[38] Cosmopolitanism was aspirational – established officers adjudicated on others' cosmopolitan credentials, while those still adjusting to elite conventions worried about whether colleagues considered them cosmopolitan.[39] Even cosmopolitans' professed values – inclusion, tolerance, respect for difference – had a class edge: 'Yes, I am a cosmopolitan because I don't want to live like middle-class Indians with their prejudices', an upper-class Mumbaikar exclaimed.[40] As Mehta (2000: 633) argues elsewhere, the practices of cosmopolitanism can 'enact the very parochialism they decry'.

To the extent that this cosmopolitanism had an international dimension, it expressed an internationalization of cultural class. Cosmopolitanism was a matter of taste: 'Culturally, your tastes were international, probably because the English language led you there', an instinctive outsider from the mid-1970s batches appraised.[41] 'I like *foie gras* better than chicken curry' was the explanation of one Francophile to what made her cosmopolitan;[42] a contemporary raised the importance of knowing one's wines.[43] One retired diplomat subscribed to the *Financial Times* Weekend edition – 'that's my reading, the word cosmopolitanism comes up [...] so I'm very comfortable when you ask me about cosmopolitanism'.[44]

This transnational uniformity of class was presented as transcending the narrow-minded constraints of the nation state: 'Irrespective of a person's nationality, I get along with people who have a certain educational background and the same social references', was one US-educated Under-Secretary's definition.[45] Cosmopolitanism relied on recounted myths about the rooted and the rootless. Bourdieu indulged in this language, calling elite schools breeding grounds for 'a group cut off from its local ties' (Bourdieu

in Cohen, 2018: 229) – although in interviews, an urban background and thus a very specific socio-geography was repeatedly raised as a qualifier for a pure-bred cosmopolitan.[46] Simultaneously, many defined cosmopolitanism as a portable effortlessness, suggesting that true cosmopolitans are 'comfortable' or 'at ease' anywhere[47] and declaring themselves 'at home in the world'.[48] One is reminded of Bourdieu's (2010a: 250) remarks about 'the "natural" self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized'. What emerges is a form of transnational class solidarity among cosmopolitans, no less exclusionary for its transcendence of the nation state.

Cosmopolitan hierarchies

The gravitational force of cosmopolitanism could rearrange conventional domestic hierarchies: the ideal of the worldly diplomat made insiders of some otherwise marginalized communities. The highest praise from upper-caste officers was preserved for Adivasis from Northeast India, who have traditionally dominated the ST quota, and many of whom had attended the British-inspired St Paul's Boarding School in Darjeeling and Delhi University's prestigious St Stephen's College.[49] With their missionary education and 'beautiful English',[50] upper-caste Hindus celebrated these tribal communities as 'well-groomed'[51] and 'very presentable'[52] – and the crowning compliment: they were 'more cosmopolitan in their outlook than many others'.[53] They were 'not the archetype tribal you think about'[54] – evoking exoticized images of destitute communities cut off from the flows of cultural capital that coursed through Delhi. No such welcome was extended to Adivasis from states like Jharkhand or Odisha, who were less likely to have been subjected to Western missionary pedagogies and who, a Hindu officer instructed, were consequently 'not so readily suitable to the outside world'.[55]

An appreciation of their cosmopolitan habitus extended to India's few Muslim diplomats, too. Although Nehru was particular about according to senior rank to Muslims who entered as emergency recruits after Independence (Dutt, 1977: 18, 42), he lamented the scarcity of 'suitable Muslims' after the formalization of recruitment procedures,[56] since much of the Muslim elite, which he presumably would have most readily recognized as fitting the desired habitus, had departed for Pakistan during Partition. Because the Constitution designated no reservations for India's relatively deprived Muslim communities, the Service mostly attracted the '*crème de la crème* of Muslims', who were 'very warmly accepted' because 'they came from very good pedigree', one Muslim retiree chronicled, almost proudly.[57] The IFS may have been 'casteist and classist [...] but not communal' – 'a person like me would be easily accepted because of my class'. Eschewing a typecast of Indian Muslims as lacking refinement, Muslim interviewees often emphasized their elite education and upper-class upbringing.[58] There was a subtext of erasure to their embodiment of the cosmopolitan habitus. A retired Hindu diplomat offered her admiration of Muslim colleagues in a strange compliment: 'If you met them, you would never know they are Muslim!'[59] A vanishing act occurred: erudite, elite-educated Muslims were cherished precisely because their Otherness in Indian society was obscured behind their cosmopolitan habitus.

Conversely, the cultural cache of cosmopolitanism also created internal Others. Those without elite education or urban background were 'hemmed in' by life in foreign

capitals, a St Stephen's-educated Additional Secretary expounded.[60] Officers who had originally pined after domestic positions in India's Home Services were often the most maladjusted: 'those who were put in the IFS were very unhappy people – in terms of lifestyle, it was even more difficult to integrate than for me', one senior diplomat from outside Delhi's social circles commiserated.[61] Those who did not speak the Service's 'poetic' English with its 'flowery' dispatches,[62] or those with 'a heavy Indian accent',[63] were similarly stranded outside the cosmopolitan circle.

Cosmopolitanism had a caste, too. If cosmopolitanism is supposed to transcend parochial classifications, it ought to have transcended the discriminatory practices of caste – a qualifier that some liberals attached to their definitions of the term, even if sometimes only moments before elaborations on why lower-caste officers struggled to be sufficiently worldly.[64] A tension emerges in the secular liberalism of upper-caste diplomats: while they ideologically support caste equality, their gatekeeping of elite cosmopolitanism is premised not on inclusion but assimilation. Marginalized groups are welcome only if they can reproduce the cosmopolitan aesthetic, but at the same time, much of the traditional elite has already decided that this was a social impossibility. The problem is the 'suitability' of lower-caste officers for international careers, one former Foreign Secretary carefully emphasized to demonstrate that he had no political objections to their presence[65] – merely social ones. Lower-caste beneficiaries of affirmative action 'did not have the confidence', another Foreign Secretary argued in distinctly Bourdieusian tones.[66] One officer complained that OBC communities were 'by nature less cosmopolitan'.[67] In response to my incredulous clarification question on whether Dalits could be cosmopolitan, a retired officer grew baffled: 'Of course not'.[68] A Dalit Joint-Secretary noted that the much-discussed lack of confidence among reservation recruits was fed by the stigmatization faced from the very diplomats telling them to be more at ease with the world.[69] In Bourdieusian fashion, both renouncers and defenders of reservation recruits believed they could be identified by their manner, dress, tastes, speech, and writing.[70] One retired upper-caste officer even ventured that while the Home Services should observe reservations on moral grounds, diplomacy's elite nature meant that lower-caste Indians ought better not become diplomats at all.[71]

Finally, the cosmopolitan aesthetic complicates narratives of gender in the IFS. As Neumann (2012: 135) writes of classed and gendered foreign ministries, 'in any sizable organization, where more than one class is represented, performance of gender will meld with questions of class'. Many senior female diplomats testified to conservative societal pressures against a nomadic diplomatic career – consequently, female officers are even more frequently products of liberal-minded, upper-middle class households than male officers.[72] Therefore, many have recourse to the cultural capital provided by their primary socialization, facilitating their approximation of the cosmopolitan habitus. Diplomatic practice is always gendered (Aggestam and Towns, 2019), but women of a certain class and caste could secure recognition for their cosmopolitan performance in ways unavailable to female officers from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cosmopolitanism is a leveller of gendered difference for privileged women, while providing a cultural rationale for marginalizing lower-caste, lower-class female diplomats. The cosmopolitan aesthetic highlights how gender intersects with hierarchies of class and caste in diplomatic practice.

Cosmopolitanism functioned as a powerful metonym. It was common to describe the Service's democratization or expansion of reservations as leaving the IFS less cosmopolitan.[73] 'They wouldn't even know what a cosmopolitan is!', proclaimed an anguished Oxford graduate of a late-1960s batch, decrying entrants from conservative households and provincial schools, who could not 'appreciate a wider world culture'.[74] With a nod to the Bourdieusian imperatives of effortlessness, a Delhiite Joint-Secretary lamented that 'a lot of the people from the Delhi-cosmopolitan background are no longer getting in', meaning that 'the level of sophistication, cosmopolitanism, relaxed upper-class background' had suffered.[75] Cosmopolitanism was a metonym of exclusion: it designated boundaries of belonging in international society using status markers and mobilized these boundaries to construct cultural hierarchies at home. A diminishment in cosmopolitanism did not signify fading interest in equality but a decline in social graces.

The social functions of the cosmopolitan aesthetic

Colonial entanglements produced the cosmopolitan habitus; postcolonial socialization and domestic power structures sustain it. Official diplomatic training, undertaken by all incoming batches, constitutes an ongoing attempt at reproducing the cosmopolitan habitus. For example, social graces are imparted through exposure to the supposedly luxurious lifestyle of diplomats at Delhiite five-star hotels, where probationers spend up to a week matching wines, sequencing spoons, memorizing vocabulary on French cookery, and imbibing 'Western manners of behaving ourselves', as one mid-level officer sceptical of this emphasis outlined.[76] The intangible markers of distinction – unwritten rules of social conduct, a certain slant of speech, a way of carrying oneself – are also learned during Mission attachments and the first few postings, by observing one's Ambassador and seniors.[77] 'It's easy to laugh about it, but there's a subtext there – it's foreign etiquette, it's not our own, but that's the global reality', explained one millennial recruit about the need to study Western diplomatic code.[78]

Culture and power are intertwined in any Bourdieusian analysis. Pursuing this intellectual instinct, I posit that the cosmopolitan aesthetic survives because it serves a dual function: of social recognition internationally and elite reproduction domestically.

First, the cosmopolitan aesthetic serves a social function in international society – that of recognition and belonging, measured against a cosmopolitan standard of civilization. As the colonial afterlives of the cosmopolitan habitus show, the expectation of a large shift significantly underestimated the stickiness of internalized international orders and the cultural grammar that expresses them. The broadly liberal understanding was that decolonization marked the end of the old colonial standard of civilization. 'With the right of independence and sovereign equality becoming almost unconditional', Buzan (2014: 585) argues, 'questions of membership in, and conditions of entry to, international society largely disappeared'. This argument assumes that membership in international society is a singular occurrence completed by a unitary state actor as its sovereignty is formally recognized by other members of the Westphalian club.

By contrast, my Bourdieusian reading considers membership in international society as a continuously rehearsed and domestically contested performance of belonging. Seeking membership involves a recurring set of behaviours and dispositions aimed at finding recognition. These behaviours not only divide the world along national lines but

also reveal which groups within a nation, culture, or institution receive recognition as legitimate insiders: international hierarchies are entangled with domestic ones.

Within this framework, the cosmopolitan aesthetic constitutes an attempt at finding social parity in a politically unequal world. This is its central paradox: in the reasoning of India's traditionally exclusionary diplomatic elite, their continued domestic dominance is justified by a desire to ensure equality abroad. Some Indians were primed to find recognition in the elite diplomatic club, and as such, having them represent India was in the national interest. The cultural capital of Oxbridge degrees, eloquent English, and familiarity with dominant European cultures endowed the first diplomatic generations with a self-confidence – 'effortless superiority' – that proved 'one of the qualities most needed in the establishment of new states' (Symonds, 1986: 11). ICS mentors, one of the very first examination-recruits explained, taught their juniors 'the psychology of diplomacy', which involved believing 'they could stand up to any king' and remembering that 'you treat yourself as equal'[79] – a lesson Indian ICS officers fought to memorize under profoundly unequal colonial conditions. In the uncertain hierarchies of the postcolonial world, one prominent member of the early 1960s batches argued, an Indian diplomat with a 'superiority complex' was 'better than one with a damaged ego'.[80] A Cambridge-educated peer extended a mischievous apology for the Service's inherited elitism: filling the shoes of ICS officers required 'being a bit of a toff'.[81]

Practices like etiquette training were a social defence: learning to whirl around wines in their correct glasses mattered, a retired officer offered cynically, 'because otherwise your interlocutors will have a poor opinion of you'.[82] This felt inferior position was expressed in the body of the diplomat, as officers spoke of a latent uneasiness during Western postings, the emotional toll of European condescension, and the need to imbibe Western etiquette to manage the alienation.[83] Cosmopolitanism atrophied into a personalized coping mechanism. Seven decades on, interviewees' recurrent anxieties about etiquette and eloquence among the 'democratized' batches spoke to a still unequal international society, in which deviance from an established script could be costly for those in an already subordinate position. Knowing the customs and tastes of international diplomacy was an act of imbibing the correct habitus – an act, ultimately, of belonging.

Second, elite cosmopolitanism serves as a domestic form of elite reproduction. It legitimates the continued dominance of officers who can harness their familiarity with aristocratic markers of a bygone white world to secure their own institutional position. Those who match elite markers associated with the Indian upper classes, higher castes, and Anglophile circles can leverage their compatibility with 'worldly' elite markers of distinction against those who do not.

The imperatives of international representability and domestic elite reproduction are interwoven in the discursive strategies of dominant diplomats; a pertinent example is the Service's democratization. Some things you 'cannot sacrifice for the sake of democratization', a former US envoy emphasized, echoing a philosophy most senior interviewees professed: democratization is also declining.[84] The reforms designated to ensure broader access into the IFS expressed postcolonial ideals of representation, but were perceived by dominant officers as a threat to both their own status and that of India abroad. Diplomacy was an inherently elitist endeavour, a renowned former Foreign Secretary argued defensively – 'in my time, "elite" wasn't a bad word'.[85] Democratization constituted a lowering of standards, complicating the quest for recognition from fellow

members of the cosmopolitan elite. For, in the innocuous words of a retired multilateralist: 'you cannot be a person who is not presentable' abroad.[86] In a seemingly self-serving rationale, traditional IFS elites leverage the cosmopolitan aesthetic to justify attempts at managing the cadres' diversification. The inward-facing political project of creating a *representative* Service is interpreted as incompatible with the outward-facing diplomatic project of producing a *representable* one.

The cosmopolitan aesthetic as political failure

The colonial genealogy of the IFS has contemporary political consequences. It has, to an extent, produced and normalized a politically unambitious and heavily hierarchical reading of cosmopolitanism. While Nehruvian internationalism spoke of Third World solidarity, racial equality, and global economic justice, it was, from its very beginnings, intertwined with elite impressions of a thin cosmopolitanism born out of colonialism, aristocratic convention, and transnational class consciousness.

The reduction of a vast concept like cosmopolitanism to a social marker of elite distinction betrays the normative failure of its radical potential in the wake of decolonization, Non-Alignment, and the transnational solidarities of Third World politics. With decolonization, 'Third World struggles' were supposed to replace the standard of civilization with an 'idea of a plurality of civilizations that face one another as equals' (Linklater, 2011: 49). A reimagined postcolonial world would contend with struggles for racial equality, cultural liberation, economic justice, and recognition of the diversity that now defined the enlarged society of states (Hurrell, 2007: 47). This suggested a social restructuring: a brave new world born out of decolonization and its radical potential.

The cosmopolitan aesthetic shows postcoloniality's limits as a political project of equality. As Nair (2019: 10) argues, expressions of cultural hierarchy – inequalities in language or accents, academic degrees or 'embodied ease'– 'profoundly complicate the performances of sovereign equality'. The body of the cosmopolitan diplomat carries a lingering, self-perpetuating standard of civilization: to perform sovereign equality is to reproduce standards once associated with a semi-aristocratic, white, worldly elite.

Social imageries of Europe do politically important work in perpetuating the cosmopolitan standard of civilization. 'To provincialize' Europe in IR is not to ignore it, but to do what Chakrabarty (2008: xiii) originally articulated as the intellectual task of provincialization: 'to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity', and to deconstruct the continued 'silent and everyday presence of European thought in Indian life and practices'. An imagined Europe joined every interview, quietly sitting in the background. We must interrogate what political imaginations structure interpretations of Europe, who is allowed to imagine it, and how these imageries meet the postcolonial revolt designed as its antithesis. My claim is not ontological: I do not argue for the empirical existence of a culturally fixed diplomatic club of cosmopolitan elites. Rather, we are dealing with intersubjective beliefs: a particular reading of the cosmopolitan club exists in the collective consciousness of a Service making sense of the world around it.

Western-centric narratives of international society have dictated that '[j]ust ust as ''society'' is restricted to certain well-mannered classes, ''international'' also means Europe and not the colonies' (Callahan, 2004: 318). Diplomats of different generations, too, often unconsciously recycled 'international' and 'Western' as interchangeable descriptors.[87] Yet the notion of a singular Europeanized international society, making demands on reticent diplomats who would personally have preferred to behave otherwise, was always partly a self-perpetuated fiction – a form of cultural projection. The most traditional Western diplomats may have expected 'the right mix of drinks, flowers, cheese', but nobody in Moscow seemed to care much for such conventions, an officer wary of his Service's cultural convictions recalled.[88] While suits may work in Geneva, in Kathmandu wearing kurtas 'made it easier to talk to the Nepalis, who were not part of the elite' of international society, one former Ambassador to both believed.[89] Even the epicentre of multilateral posturing and Anglophone socializing was less Eurocentric than IFS elites often intimated: 'People in New York speak bad English!', one early-2010s batch officer once stationed at the UN exclaimed – 'the world has changed'.[90]

In some capitals, the supposedly worldly but ultimately parochial enactments of effortless cosmopolitanism have been outright detrimental. There have always been audience costs to Indian diplomats reproducing tropes of European international society, especially in the former Soviet Union, China, and countries of the Third World. In much of the world born out of decolonization and wedded to the binaries of the Cold War, Indian representatives' keenness to embody old-time graces was read as a colonial lag, their insufficient expressions of postcoloniality a diplomatic charge held against them as a sign of their separateness from the group of anti-imperialists they counted themselves among. 'We were, in the beginning, apt to copy the British and adopt their methods and manners for want of any other experience', Ambassador TN Kaul noted in a letter from the Indian Embassy in Moscow in August 1965 – which was 'useful in some countries but a handicap in others'.[91] In a letter from 26 January 1948, Ambassador Vijayalakshmi Pandit relayed to the MEA's first Secretary-General, GS Bajpai that there was 'a good deal of criticism' from some countries, especially Russia, about India's continued reliance on English, instead of Hindi.[92]

'We made too much of this being-at-ease-with-the-rest-of-the-world', a recently retired Delhiite concluded,[93] in language reminiscent of Bourdieu (2010a: 250) thinking on the 'the 'natural' self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized'. Imagining oneself among the chosen cosmopolitan few was not an act of world-embracing solidarity; it was an act of alienating oneself from much of the postcolonial world with its messy solidarities and anti-hierarchical diplomacy. India's enactments of effortless worldliness were not received as proof of belonging but as a sign of a postcolonial elite adrift.

Ultimately, club-like cosmopolitanism requires a politicization. A former Foreign Secretary with a pronounced nationalistic streak evoked such evasions when complaining of colleagues who 'try to advocate building bridges by skirting big issues' – they are 'so taken up by their linguistic affinities' that they fail to convincingly denounce the hierarchies of Western-centric order.[94] This made him the only diplomat to reject the cosmopolitan moniker outright. The disciplining effects of the cosmopolitan aesthetic resemble Guha's (1997: 166) analysis of English education in colonial India, which

'stood not only for enlightenment but also authority': eliding the fundamental asymmetry of colonial pedagogies made it was possible to 'look upon it as a purely cultural transaction, and ignore that aspect which related it directly to power'. In prioritizing social assimilation, elite cosmopolitanism signifies a partial political retreat.

Cosmopolitan futures?

Two contemporary trends are eroding the structural foundations of the cosmopolitan aesthetic. At the dawn of a post-Western order, cosmopolitanism, too, could become something bigger, perhaps emancipatory. 'Cosmopolitanism itself has changed', one recently retired multilateralist declared – a 'new kind of cosmopolitanism' could not only embrace the Global South but revolve around it.[95] Officers were becoming 'less diffident in following the stereotype' which once governed a habitus 'Westernized in approach and habits', one former Foreign Secretary gauged.[96]

The habits of the cosmopolitan class could evolve to match a new cultural grammar of a post-Western world. If the old arrangement reflected a Europeanized hierarchy of tastes, and the IFS has historically equated 'social graces' with customs in its most-coveted 'A-postings' in the West, the definition of social graces might change as beliefs about what constitutes A-postings shift.[97] China's ascendancy might expand an etiquette of forks and knives to chopsticks. Contemporary diplomatic manners are 'not just French food and wine, it's also not just Westernized', as one Francophile officer apologetically hastened to add to his description of diplomatic skills.[98] Some even ventured to turn the habitus on its head: the insularity cultivated by Anglophone education and elite backgrounds, once legitimated by its family resemblance with dominant European culture, may soon become a hindrance in a world with little regard for Westernized practices.[99] Could a more inclusive cosmopolitanism emerge once its performance no longer requires social adherence to Western order? Yet, just as the arrival of a post-Western world with its shifting hierarchies might have signalled a more inclusive cosmopolitanism, an ideology that rejects cosmopolitanism outright has captured the highest office in the land.

The rise of Hindu nationalism suggests that even institutionalized aesthetics can evolve, especially with a political realignment of the magnitude India is witnessing (Jaffrelot, 2021). Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election in 2014, fissures have appeared in the cosmopolitan façade of elite diplomatic sociability (Huju, 2022). Those who do not fit a dominant habitus often resent the pretensions they associate with the dominant, however much they feel compelled to mimic them (Reed-Danahay, 2005: 111). With the desirability of the cosmopolitan habitus in question in an increasingly nationalistic India, this resentment finds a functional justification. This allows for the possibility of cultural rebellion: should the dominated seek to join the dominant group without abiding by the prevailing definitions of distinction, they challenge the very principles by which the habitus is assembled and its attendant hierarchies legitimated (Steinmetz, 2018: 612). A young Under-Secretary from outside the traditional elite, sympathetic to the government, assumed a combative tone: 'those that used to form part of an elite club – their monopoly is broken'.[100]

The Hindu nationalist escape from the cosmopolitan aesthetic promises not emancipation from colonial ideals but another form of homogenization under conservative Hindu rule. Yet the desire to rescue some form of cosmopolitanism is beginning to evoke introspection among the cosmopolitan elite. 'The idea is to make it accessible', the impeccably dressed Francophile implored, believing that cosmopolitanism was 'often mistaken for elitism' but ought to be salvaged in an increasingly populist, nativist world.[101] 'I wouldn't self-identify as a cosmopolitan, but then again, what's the choice?' a progressive Dalit officer agonized, weighing his options between the affectations of the cosmopolitan habitus and the manufactured authenticity of Hindu unity.[102] What was striking about the interviews was the continued tenacity of old elite impressions of cosmopolitanism. However, amid the dual pressures of Western decline and Hindu nationalist ascendancy, a more sustained critique of the cosmopolitan aesthetic is certain to develop.

Conclusion

The IFS was born into a fragile postcoloniality that espoused emancipatory principles even as it measured itself against colonially born ideals. The ensuing cosmopolitan habitus draws the circle of tolerance much tighter than political theory posits. Instead of transcending private loyalties, it is intimately tied to hierarchies of class, caste, and civilizational standing. Self-described cosmopolitans speak the language of diversity while engaging in practices of social exclusion, with internal Others marked by their inability to imbibe the cosmopolitan aesthetic. Cosmopolitans seem to be the only tribe that do not believe they belong to one.

I have argued that cosmopolitanism as an elite aesthetic serves a dual function. First, it has a recognition function internationally: it is a sorting mechanism whereby the IFS elite have sought to leverage their cultural capital to purchase political equality in an unequal world. The anxieties of attaining a cosmopolitan standard of civilization act as constant reminders that India's membership in international society is not a procedural question settled by the formal end of empire but an ongoing social performance of belonging maintained in everyday diplomatic practice. Second, the cosmopolitan aesthetic serves to legitimize the continued domestic reproduction of the traditional IFS elite, who use it to argue for their own unique ability to act as India's representatives.

The performative demands of elite cosmopolitanism have sometimes undermined the postcolonial project of democratizing Indian diplomacy and thinking past Western practices. In this register, elite cosmopolitanism can be read as political failure. In much of the postcolonial world as well as in spaces like Russia or China, it has also been a social hindrance to the efficacy of Indian diplomacy. As Hindu nationalism continues its long march through Indian institutions, what the article captures are perhaps the last moments of cultural reign for a self-professedly cosmopolitan class of diplomats, 'at home in the world'. We may be witnessing the gradual demise of a postcolonial elite whose cultural ideals have for decades been pushing into world-historical overtime, living a sort of cultural afterlife in the wake of decolonization.

There is nothing natural or obvious about elite cosmopolitanism; it is the normalization of dominant Western-centric, post-aristocratic narratives that make the social constitution of the cosmopolitan elite seem inevitable. It is particularly striking in

India, whose postcolonial diplomacy has been predicated on the ideological rejection of Western supremacy. India's case shows how embodied standards of civilization survive formal decolonization even in spaces specifically designed to counter imperial influence. It also illuminates how postcolonial elites become socially invested in self-perpetuating versions of this civilizational standard. Re-enactments of elite cosmopolitanism are not merely expressions of hegemonic policy regimes, nor do they only happen by Western fiat. They are also a question of quotidian exclusionary practices and embodied habitus in the diplomatic everyday – perpetuated by an avowedly anti-imperialist, non-Western diplomatic elite in relations with their own colleagues. Denaturalizing and contextualizing the cosmopolitan habitus allows us to analyse the oxymoron inherent in the notion of a 'cosmopolitan elite' – and to understand how this elite reproduces itself in the face of global and national change.

The paradox of the cosmopolitan elite has broader consequences for how IR engages with lived practises of cosmopolitanism across the globe. It complicates our stories about liberal international order and the cosmopolitan elites entrusted with its governance. The cosmopolitan aesthetic can stifle precisely the kind of diversity that political theory tells us cosmopolitanism ought to celebrate. The stale binary between 'cosmopolitan' and 'closed', which liberal internationalists believe to represent the primary struggle of our time, is the wrong one. Instead, I suggest that we ask in which ways cosmopolitan elites themselves propagate a 'closed' and narrow reading of belonging in the world. As cosmopolitan elites the world over comes under challenge, it is imperative to ask whose sense of belonging is legitimated by their understanding of worldliness.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council UK (ESRC).

ORCID iD


Kira Huju https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1364-4708

Notes

1. Interview 27, April 2019; Interview 37, April 2019; Interview 41, April 2019; Interview 49, May 2019; Interview 56, May 2019; Interview 57, May 2019; Interview 74, May 2019; Interview 76, May 2019.
2. Interview 23, April 2019; Interview 27; Interview 28, April 2019; Interview 52, May 2019; Interview 74.
3. Interview 9, March 2019; Interview 39, April 2019.
4. Interview 7, March 2019.
5. Interview 59, May 2019.
6. Interview 71, May 2019.
7. Interview 56; Interview 59; Interview 82, May 2019.
8. Interview 1, February 2019; Interview 19, April 2019; Interview 48, May 2019; Interview 49.
9. 'Prime Minister's note for the guidance of members of the Foreign Service and more especially, for those serving in our missions abroad. Note dated 20 October 1950, File 11(88)

– FSP/50, NAI.
10. Interview 43, April 2019.
11. Interview 24, April 2019.
12. C. Aiyar, 'Letter to M.S. Mehta', 24 December 1958, '1958-59: Appointment as one of the examiners for personality for the IAS examination – connected papers and correspondence with the Secretary, UPSC', SF/45, Mohan Sinha Mehta papers, NMML.
13. Interview 9.
14. Oral history transcript: K.P.S. Menon, 1976: 2, NMML.
15. 'Batch', in Indian bureaucratic lingo, refers to a group of individuals accepted into a Service in the same year.
16. Interview 16, March 2019.
17. Interview 30, April 2019.
18. Extracts of noting from file No. 117(71)FSP/58 relating to publication of a novel by Shri B. Rajan of the Embassy of India, Vienna, n.d., NAI; Interview 16, 2019.
19. Interview 39.
20. Interview 28.
21. Interview 16; The same interpretation was offered in Interview 18, April 2019; Interview 23; Interview 35, April 2019.
22. Interview 45, April 2019.
23. Interview 18.
24. Interview 43.
25. Interview 25, April 2019.
26. Interview 29, April 2019.
27. Interview 28.
28. Interview 7; Interview 12, March 2019; Interview 19; Interview 41; Interview 59.
29. Interview 57; Interview 59; Interview 75, 2019.
30. Interview 82, 2019.
31. Interview 75, May 2019.
32. Interview 3, March 2019.
33. Interview; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 42; Interview 48; Interview 55, May 2019; Interview 57; Interview 59; Interview 6; Interview 69, May 2019; Interview 70, May 2019; Interview 82.
34. Interview 70.
35. Interview 59.
36. Interview 65, May 2019.
37. Interview 37; Interview 73, May 2019.
38. Interview 58, May 2019.
39. Interview 46, May 2019; Interview 52; Interview 55; Interview 72, May 2019; Interview 76; Interview 78, May 2019.
40. Interview 41.
41. Interview 74.
42. Interview 81, May 2019.
43. Interview 42.
44. Interview 7.
45. Interview 59.
46. Interview 7; Interview 28; Interview 33, April 2019; Interview 37; Interview 42; Interview 49; Interview 55; Interview 57; Interview 61, May 2019; Interview 65; Interview 66, May 2019; Interview 72, 2019; Interview 73; Interview 77, May 2019; Interview 80, May 2019;

Interview 83, May 2019.
47. Interview 37; Interview 40, April 2019; Interview 48; Interview 52.
48. Interview 57.
49. Interview 7; Interview 18; Interview 20, April 2019; Interview 22, April 2019; Interview 27; Interview 31, April 2019; Interview 43.
50. Interview; Also Interview 18; Interview 43; Interview 71.
51. Interview 35.
52. Interview 22.
53. Interview 27.
54. Interview 27.
55. Interview 22.
56. Oral history transcript: Lakshmi N. Menon, 1971: 8, NMML.
57. Interview 7.
58. Interview 9; Interview 53, May 2019; Interview 57.
59. Interview 52.
60. Interview 56; Also Interview 51, May 2019.
61. Interview 45.
62. Interview 49; Also Interview 58; Interview 73; Interview 77.
63. Interview 45.
64. Interview 38, April 2019; Interview 46; Interview 55.
65. Interview 9.
66. Interview 45; Also Interview 25; Interview 35; Interview 36, April 2019; Interview 41; Interview 70; Interview 85, May 2019.
67. Interview 57.
68. Interview 7.
69. Interview 75.
70. Interview 7; Interview 22; Interview 24; Interview 35; Interview 63; Interview 70.
71. Interview 35.
72. Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 46.
73. Interview 7; Interview 57; Interview 61.
74. Interview 37.
75. Interview 57.
76. Interview 58, 2019; Also Interview 61, 2019; Also Interview 45, 2019; Interview 57, 2019.
77. Interview 6, 2019; Interview 7, 2019; Interview 16, 2019; Interview 24, 2019; Interview 25, 2019; Interview 28, 2019; Interview 31, 2019; Interview 39, 2019; Interview 43, 2019.
78. Interview 63, 2019.
79. Interview 16.
80. Interview 43.
81. Interview 9.
82. Interview 35.
83. Interview 14, March 2019; Interview 33; Interview 35; Interview 41; Interview 82.
84. Interview 3; Also Interview 2, February 2019; Interview 10, March 2019; Interview 16; Interview 28; Interview 41; Interview 63; Interview 69.
85. Interview 6, March 2019.
86. Interview 23, April 2019.
87. Interview 25, 2019; Interview 26, 2019; Interview 28, 2019; Interview 42, 2019; Interview 48, 2019.
88. Interview 12, 2019.
89. Interview 24, 2019.

90. Interview 80, 2019.
91. T.N. Kaul, 'Note', 11 August 1965, 'Circular letters issued by N.R. Pillai Chairman, IFS Committee, B.K. Nehru, Foreign Secretary and other papers relating to ICS/IFS Services matters', SF/14, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.
92. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 'Letter to G.S. Bajpai', 26 January 1948, 'August 1947-61: Correspondence exchanged by Mrs Pandit with G.S. Bajpai (Secretary-General, MEA, and Commonwealth Relations)', SF/56, NMML.
93. Interview 19, 2019.
94. Interview 39, 2019.
95. Interview 11, 2019.
96. Interview 45, 2019.
97. Interview 44, April 2019.
98. Interview 56.
99. Interview 17, March 2019; Interview 33; Interview 38; Interview 45; Interview 49; Interview 62, May 2019; Interview 70.
100. Interview 65.
101. Interview 56.
102. Interview 71.

References

Adler-Nissen R (2013) *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*. London: Routledge.

Aggestam K and Towns A (2019) The gender turn in diplomacy: a new research agenda. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21(1): 9–28.

Behera NC (2007) Re-imagining IR in India. *International Relations of the Asia-pacific* 7(3): 341–368.

Bender T (2017) The cosmopolitan experience and its uses. In: Robbins B and Horta PL (eds) *Cosmopolitanisms*. New York: University Press, pp. 116–127.

Bennett T (2010) Introduction to the Routledge classics edition. In: Bourdieu P (ed.) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge, pp. xvii–xxiv.

Béteille A (2012) The peculiar tenacity of caste. *Economic and Political Weekly* 47(13): 41–48.

Bigo D (2011) Pierre Bourdieu and international relations: power of practices, practices of power. *International Political Sociology* 5(3): 225–258.

Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu P (1987) What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32(1): 1–17.

Bourdieu P (1989) Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory* 7(1): 14–25.

Bourdieu P (2010a) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984)* (trans. Nice R). London: Routledge.

Bourdieu P (2010b) The forms of capital (1986). In: Szeman I and Kaposy T (eds) *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 81–94.

Bourdieu P and Sayad A (2004) Colonial rule and cultural sabir. *Ethnography* 5(4): 445–486.

Bourdieu P and Wacquant L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Brennan TJ (1997) *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buzan B (2014) The 'standard of civilisation' as an English school concept. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42(3): 576–594.

Calhoun C (2017) A cosmopolitanism of connections. In: Robbins B and Lemos Horta P (eds) *Cosmopolitanisms*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 189–201.
Callahan WA (2004) Nationalising international theory: race, class and the English School. *Global Society* 18(4): 305–323.
Chacko P (2013) *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004*. London: Routledge.
Chakrabarty D (2008) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Cohen A (2018) Pierre bourdieu and international relations. In: Medvetz T and Sallaz JJ (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 200–246.
Dixit JN (2005) *Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge*. Delhi, India: Konark Publishers.
Dutt S (1977) *With Nehru in the Foreign Office*. Calcutta, India: South Asia Books.
Eagleton-Pierce M (2013) *Symbolic Power in the World Trade Organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Elias N (1978) *The Civilizing Process (Vol. 1: the History of Manners)*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Fernandes L (2000) Restructuring the new middle class in liberalizing India. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 20(1): 88–104.
Guha R (1997) *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Held D (2010) *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals, Realities and Deficits*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Huju K (2022) Saffronizing diplomacy: the Indian Foreign Service under Hindu nationalist rule. *International Affairs* 98(2): 423–441.
Hurrell A (2007) *On Global Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ikenberry GJ (2011) *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Jaffrelot C (2021) *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Jönsson C and Hall M (2005) *Essence of Diplomacy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Krishna S (2014) A postcolonial racial/spatial order: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the construction of the international. In: Anievas A, Manchanda N and Shilliam R (eds) *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*. London: Routledge, pp. 151–168.
Lall AS (1981) *The Emergence of Modern India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Leander A (2011) The promises, problems, and potentials of a Bourdieu-inspired staging of International Relations. *International Political Sociology* 5(3): 294–313.
Linklater A (2011) Process sociology and international relations. *The Sociological Review* 59(1): 48–64.
Macaulay LTB (2003) Minute on Indian education (1835). In: Carter M and Harlow B (eds) *Archives of Empire, Volume I: from the East India Company to the Suez Canal*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 227–239.
Mangat Rai EN (1973) *Commitment, My Style: Career in the Indian Civil Service*. Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing.
Martin-Mazé M (2017) Returning struggles to the practice turn: how were Bourdieu and Boltanski lost in (some) translations and what to do about it? *International Political Sociology* 11(2): 203–220.
Mathai MO (1978) *Reminiscences of the Nehru Age*. New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing.
Mehta PB (2000) Cosmopolitanism and the circle of reason. *Political Theory* 28(5): 619–639.
Nair D (2019) Saving face in diplomacy: a political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *European Journal of International Relations* 25(3): 672–697.

Neumann IB (2008) The body of the diplomat. *European Journal of International Relations* 14(4): 671–695.
Neumann IB (2012) *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Paranjape H (1966) A Trojan inheritance. *Seminar*, August.
Pogge TW (1992) Cosmopolitanism and sovereignty. *Ethics* 103(1): 48–75.
Potter DC (1996) *India's Political Administrators: From ICS to IAS*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
Pouliot V (2010) *International Security in Practice: The Politics of Nato-russia Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Pouliot V (2012) Methodology: putting practice theory into practice. In: Adler-Nissen R (ed.) *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*. London: Routledge, pp. 45–59.
Raman NV (1986) *Indian Diplomatic Service: The First Thirty-four Years*. Delhi, India: Chanakya Publications.
Rasgotra MK (2016) *A Life in Diplomacy*. Gurgaon, India: Penguin/Viking.
Reed-Danahay D (2005) *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
Robbins B and Horta PL (2017) Introduction. In: Robbins B and Horta PL (eds) *Cosmopolitanisms*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 1–21.
Roy A (2017) *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
Roy SL (1984) *Diplomacy*. New Delhi, India: Sterling.
Singh Rathore K (2020) Where are the women in Indian diplomacy? Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/where-are-the-women-in-indian-diplomacy/ (accessed 26 April 2021).
Steinmetz G (2018) Bourdieusian field theory and the reorientation of historical sociology. In: Medvetz T and Sallaz JJ (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 602–628.
Sullivan K (2014) Exceptionalism in Indian diplomacy: the origins of India's moral leadership aspirations. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37(4): 640–655.
Symonds R (1986) 'Indians at Oxford before independence'. Synopsis of a *lecture delivered* at the Oxford Majlis, Trinity Term 1985. Majlis Magazine, p. 7.
Telegraph India (2012) Steno envoy sparks 'caste war'. Available at: https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/steno-envoy-sparks-caste-war/cid/410209 (accessed 6 August 2020).
Teltumbde A (2010) *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid*. New Delhi, India: Navayana.
The Hindu (2015) Top IFS posts still out of bounds for SCs, STs. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/top-ifs-posts-still-out-of-bounds-for-scs-sts/article7950262.ece (accessed 20 August 2020).
Tyabji B-D (1972) *Indian Policies and Practice*. Delhi, India: Oriental Publishers.
Vittachi T (1962) *The Brown Sahib*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Author biography

Kira Huju is a Fellow in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her first monograph is *Cosmopolitan Elites: Indian Diplomats and the Social Hierarchies of Global Order* (Oxford University Press, 2023). Her research interests include India, contestations of Western-dominated order, international political sociology and the possibility of new cosmopolitanisms.