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Charlotte Faucher, *Propaganda, Gender, and Cultural Power: Projections and Perceptions of France in Britain c. 1880-1944.* Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2022. xiv + 238 pp. Notes, references, and index. $85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780197267318.

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What, exactly, comes to mind when we think about the project of international diplomacy? Is it smoke-filled back rooms strewn with papers and maps, or perhaps more formal negotiations in equally august settings? In both of those imaginings, I would hazard a guess that, in popular thinking, the major players are male and state-sponsored, and the discussions center on political and economic concerns. Charlotte Faucher's innovative work on Franco-British relations in the pivotal nineteen and early twentieth centuries complicates our understandings of not only how the two major powers viewed one another, but also who, precisely, impacted international diplomacy and how. Faucher compellingly demonstrates that women played a crucial role in creating a new narrative of France in Britain, and that their contributions changed international relations of the time and the practice of diplomacy itself.

Faucher employs an impressively broad set of sources to support her argument, looking far outside traditional diplomatic archives (although those are still here as well), and including interviews and private records of cultural institutions, schools, and media from England, France, and Belgium. Her work is clear and convincing, and the book would make an important inclusion in seminars on international history, diplomacy, and Anglo-French relations, among other topics, especially for scholars and teachers looking to go beyond traditional methodologies.

The book moves chronologically, with each chapter "highlighting discrete stages" in the development of this cultural diplomacy project (p. 19). Chapter one begins with the question of the French language in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, including providing historical context for a strong French presence on British soil since the time of the Huguenots. Still, during the period in question, Faucher argues that officials in the French government were more concerned with shoring up its supremacy--cultural and otherwise--within the French empire, and thus put little effort into maintaining the French presence in Britain. Into that breach stepped an energetic population of French laypeople, many of whom hoped that culture could be mobilized as a representation of the greatness of France. They included a significant number of teachers, who viewed the French language as an ambassador in and of itself, especially if they could block Germans from either taking Francophone posts or attempting to teach their own language. There were bilingual Germans who could teach both French and German. The French also tried to block Swiss and Belgian nationals from teaching French. Germans, Faucher notes, "made up the largest European community in Britain…in the late nineteenth" (p. 31) and early

twentieth centuries. This community numbered many governesses and schoolteachers, and it led to the defensive creation of the National Society of French Teachers in England.

In chapter two, Faucher moves into the twentieth century, where what she calls "high-society cultural diplomacy" became de rigueur (p. 45). Championed by a fascinating, chameleon-like figure called Marie Orliac, such efforts used gendered notions of French high-society life to attract similarly elite British attention. Orliac self-consciously fashioned a different origin and identity for herself once she crossed the Channel, claiming more high-born roots than the reality as she began her career as a teacher (Orliac referred to herself as Marie d'Orliac, a nod to invented aristocratic origins, which Faucher sensitively paints as both a common and necessary artifice for many women trying to make a life for themselves). She soon broadened her efforts, opening the University of French Arts in 1910, a school designed to attract a certain type of British woman who hoped to align herself with the elite social and cultural markers for which France had become famous. Speaking French and wearing the correct fashions, Faucher notes, carried important cultural cachet, especially for women.

Faucher moves on to pre-World War I high academia in chapter three, highlighting the important role that the French Institute played in attracting the attention of British students. Indeed the French Institute had been Orliac's University of French Arts, although the change was one of far more than nomenclature. The University of Lille offered support for the creation of this new French Institute and with this kind of official institutionalization came a shift from the female origins of cultural diplomacy to "male academic, political, and economic elites" (p. 77). Ensconced within the halls of the academy, cultural diplomacy looked much more masculine; there was less attention devoted to the desires of a female audience and more given to spreading the work of French male academics.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the French in Britain were instrumental in propping up French governmental aims, especially reinforcing the outsider status of Germany and Germans. Chapter four focuses on this time and how the battle became cultural (as opposed to military) for the French who remained in Britain. Indeed, Faucher writes, French expatriates "transferred French 'war cultures' to Britain" and "put resentment against Germany as the forefront of their discourse" (p. 98). Publicizing German atrocities and amplifying French patriotism dominated the programs of cultural organizations, which viewed it as a national duty to remain open and active. Pivotal to these efforts was the opening of the Maison de la Presse, a government-sponsored organization that both amassed information on British official activities and sought to influence the British people with positive news stories. Thus, with the advent of WWI, French officials had recognized the value of cultural diplomacy and wanted to imbue it with higher status. In this case, that meant giving positions to male academics with credentials that women could not attain. With her questionable origins, Marie Orliac (now Marie Bohn) became *persona non grata* in the more officially accepted practice--a fitting metaphor for the increasingly gendered nature of French cultural diplomacy.

Chapter five addresses the question of women in cultural diplomacy directly, looking at their experiences in the interwar period. As cultural diplomacy increasingly transitioned to state-run outlets which required professionalization and credentials, women's roles were increasingly circumscribed. Still, there remained room for women to participate, albeit in limited ways. First, certain women (here Faucher specifically cites headmistress Thérèse Oakeshott and propaganda agent Marie-Reine Garnier) continued to work officially. Second, Faucher argues, civil cultural diplomacy did not simply disappear. For example, Yvonne Salmon of the Alliance Française (another, transnational

organisation) in London was able to "walk a tightrope between French official line and her own understanding of what strategies worked best for British audiences" (p. 139), a sometimes-thankless enterprise, but one she found extremely valuable in the context of rising German aggression.

The final chapter addresses the Second World War and the influence of Free France on the Franco-British cultural world. Because Free France was so hampered in terms of personnel, women actually had the opportunity to thrive within the organization, particularly in the design and execution of its cultural policies. As such, Faucher powerfully shows an innovative way that women served in and shaped the narratives of the French Resistance. Still, despite their clear value to the project, the women of Free France in London did not ascend to the highest levels of the organization, and commentators often stressed their femininity and temporality. Historians of childhood will be especially interested in her work on how refugee children were simultaneously targets of diplomacy and passively used in its practice.

There is little to quibble with in this well-researched, well-argued book. This is a story of the well-born, with mainly white bourgeois characters at the center (although some, like the colorful teacher Marie Orliac, came from humbler origins and only pretended to be part of the middle or upper classes). That said, I wonder how more insalubrious (at least for the era) pursuits played a functional role here in the British imaginings of national identity, and how that impacted the directions such cultural diplomacy took. It is unclear how the British received French cultural diplomatic efforts or how that reception would have been shaped by British assumptions about the French. The historian Harvey Levenstein has shown that tourism to France from the Anglo-Saxon world during the period in question was often inspired by its less salubrious reputation; experiencing the clubs and dancehalls of a place like Paris became a rite of passage for a certain kind of traveler.[1] Attesting to the potency of such expectations, Mary Louise Roberts demonstrated how the American army in the Second World War lured GIs into enlisting to go and fight in France with promises of sensual experiences unavailable in the (allegedly) more puritanical United States.[2] How do those sorts of reputations and assumptions fit into the broader project of cultural diplomacy? Do they show how difficult it is to shift perceptions and stereotypes? How would they have manifested in the treatment of actual French women in Britain? Perhaps it is the case that the women featured here blunted some of the more risqué edges of France's reputation within the British context, but tourism to France flourished, much of it driven by the potential for bawdiness *à la française*.

With this book, Charlotte Faucher shifts the narrative around cultural diplomacy, asking us all to understand not just the grand moments and gestures, but to be able to read more deeply into how the international order can be constructed--and reconstructed--in ways that hew far from traditional. Historians' role is to deal with what actually happened, but it is hard not to ask, given the implications of Faucher's conclusive argument, an ever-pertinent question: what might the world have looked like if women had not been increasingly excluded from realms of diplomacy based simply on their identity as such?

NOTES

[1] Harvey A. Levenstein, *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Harvey A. Levenstein, *We'll Always Have Paris: American Tourists in France since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[2] Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

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