



ANALYZING THE GENDER DIPLOMACY: EXPLORING STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

Gender diplomacy has emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary international relations, reflecting efforts to address gender disparities, promote gender equality, and integrate gender perspectives into diplomatic practices. This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of gender diplomacy, examining its strategies, challenges, and implications within the realm of international relations. Drawing upon interdisciplinary perspectives from political science, gender studies, and diplomacy, this research critically analyzes the evolving role of gender in diplomatic endeavors. Through a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and case studies, this paper elucidates the strategies employed by states and international organizations to integrate gender considerations into diplomatic agendas. Furthermore, it investigates the challenges encountered in implementing gender-inclusive policies and practices within diplomatic frameworks, including cultural barriers, institutional constraints, and political resistance. Finally, this research explores the broader implications of gender diplomacy for international peace and security, human rights, and global governance, highlighting its potential to reshape power dynamics and advance more inclusive and equitable diplomatic engagements on the world stage.

Keywords: *Gender diplomacy, International relations, Gender equality, Diplomatic strategies, Challenges, Implications*

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy in International Relations which has been recognized as a distinguished and noble career in the world has been largely dominated by men. Women have seldom been permitted into this career, and they had no choice but to play unofficial roles, like being the wife of a diplomat. The motivating factor for not allowing women into diplomacy is the ideology that women do not comprehend the intricacies of warfare, thus the domain of international politics have been men concentrated (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). States and International Organizations

in the 1920s reluctantly started to allow women to participate in different diplomatic capacities. In the 1990's there was a vigorous change among States, inter-governmental and non-governmental Organizations in an attempt to enhance higher representation of women in the practice of diplomacy and in other productive global spheres (Aggestam & Towns, 2019). Men however are still dominating the arena of diplomacy a century later and women who make up for half of the population of the world are still scant in the diplomatic field (Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013). In a recent development the queer groups have been clamouring to be included into the diplomatic (Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

This study will focus only on the male and female gender in the diplomatic arena. This paper follows this sequence: The introduction, clarification of concepts, literature review, theoretical framework, gender discourse and diplomatic practice, factors limiting the adequate representation in diplomacy gender makeup of diplomacy: to what extent has it changed and finally conclusion and recommendation. Diplomacy is the instrument of representation, through which communication and negotiation is carried out by states and other actors in the International System in handling their transactions. Trade deals and other issues among states and non-state actors are carried out through communication and negotiation between the parties involved (Hart & Siniver, 2020). Diplomacy in contemporary times is no longer about achieving national interests but also it encompasses the management of global issues, such as ensuring the peace of the world by signing peace treaties and mediating in war zones, in an attempt to bring an end to the war. (Hart & Siniver, 2020).

Gender in International Aspect

Women in the area of foreign policy have been neglected. This is as a result of the traditional perspective of Western and Eastern philosophers such as Aristotle and Confucius. They believed that the same way the man runs the household, is the same way the state should be ruled by men. Thus the state was conceptualized with the ideology that relegates women's labour to the family, while men concern themselves with the affairs of the state (Diplomatic Encounter, 2018).

Traditionally, International Politics has remained a male dominated area. Diplomatic work has been presented by Enloe (as cited in Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013) as a man's world governed by standards of masculinity. Foreign and military policy making has been mostly carried out by men, that is men has performed inter-state relations and sensitive diplomatic relations to an extent we have adapted to comparing what is human with what is masculine. This practice is usually executed in the realm of international politics. Cohn (1987) and Campbell (1992) have accentuated means in which the importance of ensuring the security of the state which is central in diplomacy has been authorized through appeals to glorified forms of masculinity. Thus characteristics such as toughness, domination, heroism and strength which are conceptualized as masculinity are deeply netted into the vocabulary of Foreign Policy. In contrast characteristics such as being conquered, subordination and weakness are usually woven with femininity (Cohn 1987; Campbell 1992; Ruddick 1993; Elshtain 1995; Kinsella 2005 & Sjoberg 2012, Cited Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

Women in Diplomacy

The most significant contribution made by women to diplomacy from the advent of the new state system in the 19th century up to the mid-20th century was as the wives of diplomats, not as official representatives for the state (Enloe 1990, Neumann 2008 cited in Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013). Although women were not official decision makers and were referred to as peripherals, notwithstanding, they played a significant role in the diplomatic process even though they were not paid (Jones 1995, Enloe 1990 & Neumann 2008 cited in Dharsani & Ericsson 2013).

The refusal to include women earlier in International Politics was propelled by the viewpoint that women do not

comprehend the act of warfare and so the domain of international relations have been occupied by men (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007 cited in Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013:5). Women were restricted from entering into the diplomatic field until after the first world war, when the reserved for men diplomatic career for men finally opened up to women. Also, with the advent of women empowerment agenda by the United Nations (UN) which has been presented through the different occasions of the UN World conferences on women, with the first one taking place in 1975 and 1995 subsequently, little by little more women are now being admitted into the diplomatic service (Diplomatic Encounter, 2018).

At present day, the volume of women taking up diplomacy as a career is substantially low and the uneven gap between the male and female gender in diplomacy is still persistent (Udoh, Folarin & Isumonah, 2020). It is with this view that this study will examine to what extent has the gender makeup of diplomacy changed between 2014 and 2021. This time frame was selected in order to portray how the gender makeup of diplomacy was in 2014 and how much changes occurred six years down the line (Alam et al., 2025).

According to Giddens (as cited in Enyew & Mihrete, 2018:60), liberal feminists posit that gender inequality is spawned by menacing the access for the female gender to civil rights, such as the right accessing the resources of the society like education and employment, this is as a result of the already constructed patriarchal societal structure that continues to strengthen inequality between the two sexes. According to Peterson (1992), states have been structured to accept patriarchy, hierarchy and a suppressive power system. For the liberal feminists, subordination of the female gender has its roots in the set of customary laws and legal constraint that block successful entrance of women into the public spheres of life (Tong 2009 cited in Enyew & Mihrete, 2018:60). In its central assumption, liberal feminists assert that the biological make up that differentiates men from women (in terms of reproduction) does not make women inferior to men, and as such women deserve equal rights, such as right to education, employment opportunities, right to own properties etc. (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016).

These liberal feminists view of gender inequality explains the how women were first hindered from entering the diplomatic profession for ages, simply because of biological differences. In other words they are women, thus they need not worry about the keeping the world at peace, men will take care of that. They should rather be bothered about producing children and taking care of their homes. Thus the diplomatic sphere became a male dominated arena and a job reserved for men. Even when women were later allowed to be diplomats, there were explicit policies enforced to deter women from pursuing diplomacy as a profession such as they would have to resign from Foreign Service as the consequence of marrying which was upheld in the U.S. until 1972 (Schiemchen, 2019).

Presently, even when women have been allowed to become diplomats, diplomacy is still a male dominated sphere, according the liberal feminists this is because of the already constructed patriarchal societal structure which continues to keep the fire of inequality between sexes burning. Apparently, for women to be promoted and become impact agents of a state they must be able to challenge the already reflected male- centered context (Peterson, 1992).

Gender Discourse and Diplomatic Practice

Women involvement in diplomacy is not a recent phenomenon. Historical studies in diplomacy recognizes the dynamic roles that women have played in the practice of diplomacy. There were diverse political arrangements during the 17th and 18th century in Europe and in other parts of the world. In monarchies of West Africa and Native American tribes the politics was gender-balanced, in East Africa, presently as Kenya, Zambia etc., there was a

gender mixed but male dominated political system. While in China, Korea, Ottoman Empire etc., which is assumed to be universal practiced a male dominated system with very few women. In Europe, women were restricted from participating in diplomatic affairs, albeit it was not in all countries in Europe, some countries allowed for queen regents, for example England, Scotland, Russia, Spain etc. Diplomacy at this time was not a sphere totally reserved for men. During this period, diplomatic interactions among elites were conducted within the networks of both men and women in the royal court. In this way, women who belonged to a high social class could influence diplomatic activities and perform diplomatic duties throughout the 17th and 18th century, though the women were not equal with the men (Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

The Elizabethan period in England between the 16th and 17th century women were involved in diplomatic and intelligent events through assembling and disseminating of news (Daybell 2011 cited in Aggestam & Towns, 2019). According to Tischer (as cited in Aggestam & Towns, 2019) Renee du Bec-Crespin, countess of Guebriant was one of the few women officially nominated an ambassador in Poland in 1645. Other women examined in the 18th century between France and Spain are Francoise d'Aubigne, Madame de Maintenon and Marie-Anne de la Tremoille, Princesse des Ursins of who engaged in diplomatic Fora. Madame de Pompadour in the 18th century maintained a close tie as an adviser to Louis XV (Dade, 2010 cited in Aggestam & Towns, 2019). Women therefore challenged the aristocratic and masculine trends that required so much skills and competence (Clark 1998, Kiddle, 2015 cited in Aggestam & Towns, 2019). Therefore, the history of foreign relations and diplomacy was heterogeneous. However with the move from a monarchical kingdom to the institution of a constitutional state system in the 19th century, there was a change to a political leadership dominated by men, which spread globally and this change came with the exclusion of women. Thus as states became more democratic and more open to the public, it became less accessible for women. There were laws that banned women's participation in politics in some European countries, e.g. Germany 1900, Italy 1912, Portugal 1913, England 1832 etc. as a result, all the women who had powers lost their powers (Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

During this same period there were shifts in diplomacy, the modern Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) was developed and diplomacy became professionalized. With this development, women were squeezed out also of Foreign Service. Diplomacy now became a male dominated sphere with women serving primarily as diplomatic wives (Towns & Niklasson, 2017). The 20th century witnessed the global struggle for women's re-inclusion into the Foreign Service. There was a huge transnational suffrage movement among States, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations in an attempt to enhance a higher representation of women in the practice of diplomacy and in other productive global spheres that women were restricted from joining. In the 1920s to 1950s the ban that restricted women from participating in Foreign Service was lifted, however there was a new ban on women entering into the Foreign Service, women had to choose between their jobs and marriage. The marriage ban was lifted in the 1970s. Women are now involved in diplomatic missions as professionals in Foreign Service (Aggestam & Towns, 2019).

The Societal Conceptualization of Gender Roles

This area is concerned with societal sex and gender norms and assumptions. One of the most difficult exclusion factors to define in a specific manner is social stereotypes, which are made up of societal beliefs and predominantly the impact of these values. (McGlen & Sarkees 1993). One example of this social influence is the belief that men possess unique qualities that are thought to be more desirable in leadership roles. Men are considered to have such characteristics, and notwithstanding the fact that many women are in positions of leadership, the more desirable characteristics are still seen as male. Another gender role to consider is the role women can play in society. Is she best suited to be a policymaker, or are women more suited to care-giving roles or even becoming housewives, with

the primary duty of looking after the family or household? This social aspect also expresses problems for the individual woman in finding a way to balance her work and her personal life. (McGlen & Sarkees 1993). Women had to prove for a long time that their labor life would not have a negative effect on their family. The common belief is that paying job would adversely affect the wife's dedication to what the society terms "her primary domestic and maternal duties" (Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013).

Individual Conceptualization of Self

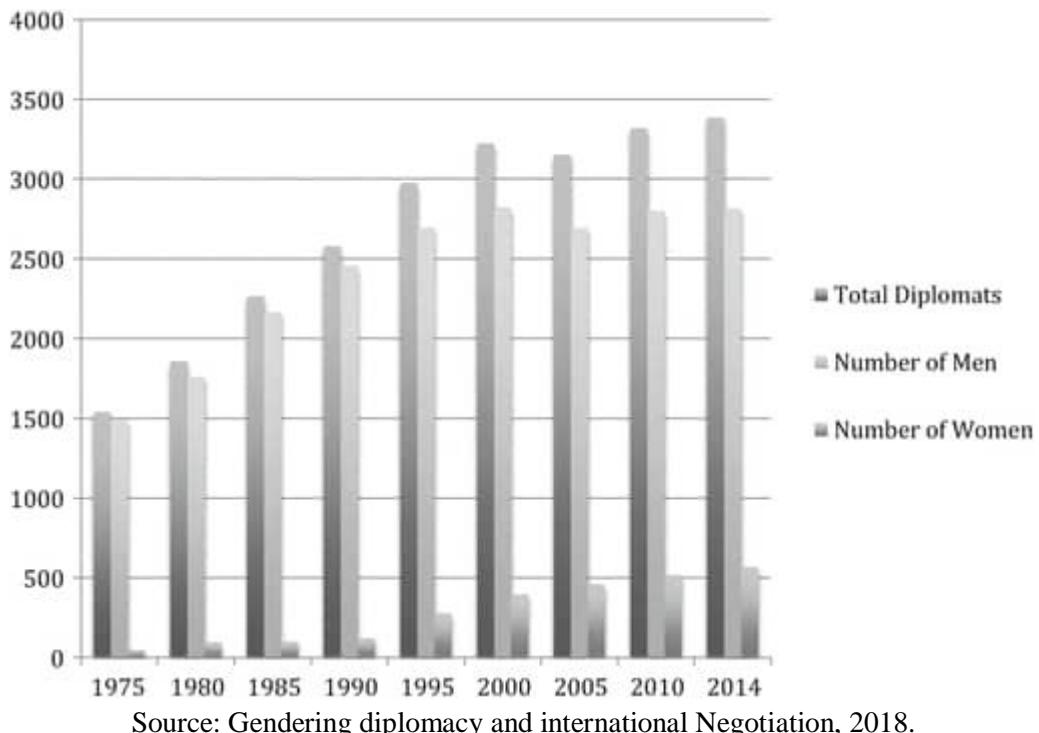
The individual factor examines the woman's "personal sphere". That is, if the dilemma is caused by the individual rather than by societal standards, it is an individual issue. Some individuals comments, acknowledge that women as individuals lack the necessary expertise to do well in the diplomatic arena (Hossen & Pauzi, 2025). Women's presence on the field is jeopardized by a shortage of expertise, since men already possess the requisite skills or experience, thus making them more attractive for decision-making roles. A family obstacle may also be classified as an individual factor. It's likely that a woman makes the decision to choose her family over her job. Thus it could be said that some women made the choice of not pursuing an ambitious career like diplomacy, so they can have time for their family which for them is a priority (Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013).

The Organizational Factor

This factor, on the other hand, combines both human and societal factors into the organization. The positions women are given in corporate settings are affected by implicit perceptions about which tasks will suit for characteristics of women. Women have been exempted from positions of authority, and men hold the dominant positions of power in the workplace. This factor indicates that the workplace climate makes it impossible for women to reach the profession and find a place in a male-dominated environment (Adepoju, Gberekvbie & Ibhawoh, 2021). The perceptions and activities of employees of an organization or department would be influenced by the culture of that organization, and therefore the perceived strength and presence of women within the organization (McGlen & Sarkees, 2001). To summarize, the problem's root cause may be framed as an organizational one, with foreign policy institutions locking people out. This is done by creating a separate agenda on the issues of women in the organisation. The involvement of women is hampered by the fact that their issues are not viewed equally to men's. This explains how in politics women have made to occupy the offices that specializes on the issue of women (Tickner, 1992).

The Gender Make-Up of Diplomacy

According to Towns and Niklasson (2017) at 2014 women occupied 15% of the world's ambassadorial appointments which is the highest office for diplomats and political designation. While a UN study from women reveals that the number of women occupying negotiation tables is lower at 9%, chief mediators at 2.5% and signatories at 4%. Women are also not properly represented in the European council negotiating committee system. Thus the core negotiating activities are done by male diplomats, and women are participating as public advisers or in purely supportive and administrative duties which by societal perspective "suits their nature" (Aharoni 2018; Paffenholz 2018, as cited in Aggestam & Towns 2018). Though there are some cases where male dominance is not deeply rooted in some countries, an example is the Japanese delegation to the UN which constitute of 60% of women. Albeit they only make up 3% of Japanese ambassadors and 17% of diplomats in all (Flowers, 2018 as cited in Aggestam & Towns 2019).



Source: Gendering diplomacy and international Negotiation, 2018.

The figure above shows the gender makeup of diplomacy from 1975 to 2014, and in clearly shows how women were scant in the diplomatic field (Hossen & Pauzi, 2025). A research by World Economic Forum (WEF), carried out on January 2021, found out that women have in negotiations have moved from up to 13% of negotiators and just 6% as mediators and signatories in peace negotiations around the world and a fewer than 40% of women are given ambassadorial appointments (WEF, 2021).

Therefore, women representation in diplomacy has been increasing but at a slow pace. The world's male ambassadors still dominates the diplomatic arena, thus making high prestige post an international post dominated by men. Female ambassadors are still not equally represented in the most prestigious positions (Ajayi, Olanrewaju, & Nwannebuife, 2019). Though women have held good positions and headed institutions but very few. There are still some sort of glass ceilings, because the very core important offices are still not open to women. It is glaring that all ambassadorial offices are not equal, in the sense that states with strong economic and military power are weightier than states with little military and economic power (Rashed et al., 2025). For instance, being appointed ambassador to London or Washington D.C is definitely not the same as been posted to Burundi or Ghana (Towns & Niklasson 2017).

Female ambassadors should have the same chances as men, the gender status appointments are not enormous though consistent. That is women are more likely to be appointed to the low status states. This is because even when the marriage ban on female diplomats have been lifted, in reality, the problem of combining a tasking diplomatic career with a demanding marital life which includes children has lingered till date (Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The gender makeup of diplomacy has changed over the years especially in this 21st century no matter how small and slow. This slow pace is as a result of the significant challenges that formed the root of diplomacy in its foundation and has grown to produce fruits with the same sour taste with which it was planted. The patriarchal

structure on which the bed of diplomacy was made has continued to foster unequal patterns of ambassadorial appointments between the female and male gender in the field of diplomacy and a number of factors which stem from societal norms, organizational practices and individual choices have been the reason for the slow pace of change in the gender parity of diplomacy (Mohd Pauzi & Shahadat Hossen, 2025).

Gender roles in the society that are accrued to women such as caregiver to the kids and husbands should be generalized. In other words, the role of who is responsible for taking care of the children should also be accrued to the men. This way, women will not be burdened with family responsibilities alone and can pursue a career in diplomacy if they please. Also there should be no limitations or form of bias against women in occupying strategic and key diplomatic positions. This study did not take into account the position and diplomatic makeup of the Lesbian, gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in diplomatic field, if there are transgender diplomats and the challenges they face, if any in the diplomatic sphere. Thus, future studies and research can be conducted on this area.

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