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# CASE STUDY

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

BY

Elizabeth Harper



FOURTEENTH SESSION

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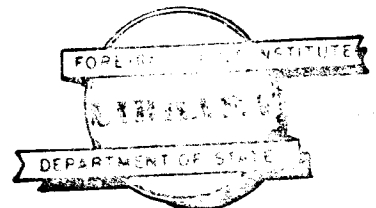
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

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SUMMARY

The issue of the role and status of women in professions formerly deemed "male" has occupied increasing amounts of public attention in most of the world in recent years. As part of this re-evaluation, the Department of State has undertaken significant changes in its personnel system in the past two years to ensure that its women employees would have the same opportunities and conditions of service as the men in the system. This study was undertaken to assess, if possible, the extent to which women are engaged in diplomacy in some other parts of the world -- Latin America, Africa, and the Near East -- and whether their experiences, problems and solutions paralleled or provided useful contrasts to our experience.

In brief, there are, or have been, women officers in the diplomatic service of most (65) of the countries surveyed. In 59 of these countries women are or have been in the career Foreign Service; in some of the others they are home-based in the Foreign Ministry; in a few cases in which women have not engaged in a professional career in foreign affairs, politically-appointed women have served their nations as Ambassadors. In most, if not all, of the other countries, it is considered inevitable that women will so serve their nations within the decade. Some of the family-related problems attendant on women being in positions so mobile have not yet been solved, but social changes are reported to be proceeding at a rate that suggests these problems will diminish in importance within the foreseeable future.

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This report results from interviews with representatives of 72 countries (list attached) and the Secretariats of the UN and OAS. The discussions with national representatives centered on the diplomatic establishments of the individual countries of course, but also covered the general social climate to provide a perspective within which to assess whether the participation of women in this field was expectable or significant. The discussions with members of the international Secretariats were conducted to determine whether there were definable differences in the degree to which women are involved as international civil servants as distinct from national service.

The countries surveyed generally range in age -- in their present structure of government -- from four years to about 170, although there are a few which have had a fairly continuous history for centuries. The differences in their diplomatic establishments and their attitudes and practices toward women officers could not, however, be attributed solely to such differences in age in most cases. For example, of the countries which do not have women officers in either their Foreign Service or their Foreign Ministry, it is true that most are young and did not have an educated female population ready to enter this profession when they became independent; but not all of them fit this mold. Further, of those which do not have a formally-structured "career" Foreign Service, several have a long history. Only in the area of a general career-mindedness on the part of women is there some correlation with the age of the country, in that in almost all of the new countries there is great emphasis on professional education for all able citizens, irrespective of sex, as an essential ingredient in nation-building.

Neither do the differences appear to be grounded in the differing religious heritages of the countries surveyed. There is an almost identical percentage of the seventeen officially or predominantly Islamic states on the one hand (82%) and of the twenty-one Roman Catholic states on the other (84%) which have women Foreign Service Officers. The proportion among states whose populations follow several religions does not differ significantly.

Further, career-mindedness among women, and specifically interest in or accessibility of the Foreign Service as a career for women, does not appear to be a function of either the general educational level nor the per capita wealth in a country. Half of the countries which do not have women in their diplomatic establishments have a fairly low (under 25%) literacy rate and a per capita income under \$300 per annum; the other half have, without exception, much higher literacy rates and, in most cases, markedly higher per capita wealth.

Almost 80% of the countries do have women officers in their Foreign Service today; some have had women officers who subsequently resigned and the experience has discouraged them from appointing others; some have women officers in their Foreign Ministry but do not assign them overseas. Some bias against the entry of women into the Foreign Service was referred to by representatives of ten countries which have women Foreign Service Officers, the most ear-catching of these statements being "It is no harder for an exceptional woman to enter than for an exceptional man, but it is harder for an average woman than for an average man." AS A PROPORTION OF THEIR TOTAL SERVICE



complement, women officers range from "two of 185" in one case to "about 50%" in another. Generally, however, they represent about 10% or more of their respective Foreign Services.

Women officers range in rank from attache to Ambassador or Undersecretary in the Foreign Ministry. As in the case of entry, about ten representatives felt "it may take a little longer" for a woman to be promoted, but most of these also felt that this form of discrimination is diminishing -- a suggestion not offered with respect to entry limitations. The promotion issue appears to be being solved by the conspicuous competence of the women in their Foreign Services. (Most male interviewees stressed repeatedly, and with no evident surprise, that the women officers are "exceptionally able.") With regard to the entry problem however, there continues to be widespread concern that a young woman "will marry and leave us just as she is trained enough to be really useful."

The idea of marriage, per se, of women diplomats does not appear to be a major problem. In only one country would a woman FSO be required to resign if she married. The concern lies in broader social factors. In most countries, the Government has regulations that would permit a non-Foreign Service husband to accompany a Foreign Service wife to post, but in relatively few does the male representative believe that one of his countrymen would "follow his wife." In countries in which it is still "expected" (as contrasted with "assumed") that all women will marry, this has two effects: it reduces the number of women who apply for the Foreign Service; it increases the likelihood that they will indeed resign when and if they do marry.

A different problem arises in some countries from the marriage of two Foreign Service Officers to each other. Although about half of the countries that have women officers do or would assign an FSO-couple to the same post -- and others would assign them to the same city (e.g., New York, in which they have both a UN and consular office) -- about the same number have statutory or constitutional injunctions against nepotism that would prohibit such action. In practice, irrespective of non-discriminatory language in regulations, it is the wife (not the husband) who must "go on leave" or resign until they return for a tour in the Foreign Ministry (which appears to be an exception to the general rule insofar as career diplomats are concerned).

In very few cases are there differences in conditions of service for male and female officers. To be sure, there are still a handful of countries which do not give a married woman the same transportation allowance for a husband (unless he is actually a dependent) that they give a male officer for his wife (without enquiring about dependency), but such examples are rare. Moreover, in only seven countries are women officers more or less grouped in only one or two functions, and even in those there is some indignation at the thought this might be deliberate. (It was noteworthy that almost all of the women officers interviewed were as vigorous in establishing their country's even-handedness as any of the men interviewed.) Cultural inhibitions show up, of course, in those countries which appoint women to their Foreign Ministry (and even send them as delegates to international conferences) but will not post them abroad for a normal tour of duty in their Embassies. The most common comments from the eight countries with this perspective were, "it is not proper for a young woman to be living

in a single room.

alone abroad" and "Parents do not want their daughters to leave the country alone." At least two of these countries do, however, send married women to overseas assignments, with their husbands.

The social climate in which women have been seeking and obtaining careers in the Foreign Service of their countries is, generally, changing at a rapid rate. Particularly in the new countries, the Government expects and needs to use all developed talents, and in many cases women have moved much farther ahead in government service than in private industry; i.e., practical considerations have provided the impetus for changing attitudes and mores. A general career-mindedness among women -- the sense that it is proper to obtain a professional education and to continue in that career after marriage -- is seemingly on the march almost everywhere, but especially in the newer states. Some 54 spokesmen referred to the women of their country as "very" career-minded and elaborated with examples not only of doctors and lawyers (including some who had seats on their Supreme Court) but of women engineers building roads, architects with important commissions, and numerous members of other professions. Others spoke of recent "increasing trends" in this direction, trends which have begun in the past five-to-ten years and have not yet reached full bloom. An even larger number of countries reported women to be in very high positions in their bureaucracy although the women had not, in all cases, made similar breakthroughs in the private sector.

These trends are also reflected on the political scene. Three of the countries are headed by women Prime Ministers. Elected women officials dot the landscape of the majority of the countries surveyed. In most of these countries, women are in the national legislature; in many they are also mayors, provincial governors, and city or provincial councillors. One Ambassador gave great emphasis to the fact that every provincial governor in his country today is a woman -- and that ten years ago every governor was a man. In several countries in which no women have been elected to office -- "they run for office but women don't elect them" -- they have been appointed to national office, such as a Cabinet post or the legislative or party council. This elected-or-appointed pattern exists, indeed, even in nine of the countries which do not have women in their diplomatic service and in only one case was an appointed Senator referred to as "a token, to show we are not biased."

Every effort was made in the interviews to avoid the implication that the absence of women participants in the Foreign Service or other aspects of public life was somehow "a bad thing." Nevertheless, there did appear to be sensitivity, on the part of many of the interviewees, to the idea that they (or their country) might be considered biased against an active role for women. There was an almost audible hint of embarrassment in the delivery of some comments, such as "We don't have women officers not because we are biased but because there are not yet any women qualified for this work" and "The women of our country have political equality and hold many high positions in government but our women do not consider an overseas career in diplomacy the proper field for a woman."

Possibly as a reflection of the same sensitivity, all but one respondent averred that a foreign woman diplomat would be given the same professional credence (and be as welcome) as a male diplomat assigned to their country. However, seven suggested a reverse bias, perhaps unintentionally, by adding "In fact, a woman would probably have an edge," "A woman would be forgiven mistakes a man wouldn't,"



and "A woman diplomat would probably be able to get more information from our officials; women journalists do." The exception to this refrain said "A woman might not be taken too seriously until she has shown she is competent, but then she would have no further problems." (Since a hint of embarrassment might bespeak some hedging, it seems possible this latter statement might be a more accurate assessment of the situation in several countries who spokesmen claimed otherwise, especially when all of the other factors relating to women in those countries are considered.)

There seemed to be greater candor on the question of possible male sensitivity to working under a woman (which might well impact on promotion rates), although in several of the eleven countries in which this is reported to be still a factor "it is diminishing." The most forthright of the comments was that "Men don't like working for a woman or even as a peer; they prefer women to be at home."

On the only other somewhat-subjective, somewhat data-supportable proposition discussed, there seemed to be every reason to take at face value assertions that "Women don't apply" or "Not many women apply." Nevertheless, one Ambassador, when asked whether there were social/cultural factors such as close family ties which might deter the women of his country from applying for the Foreign Service -- as had been avowed by some of his (unidentified to him) colleagues in their countries -- denied it with some vehemence not only for his own country but for their's: "This could only be because they are embarrassed. I don't think this is a matter for embarrassment; when our women are prepared for the Foreign Service, they will join it."

Despite the general agreement that women are as able as men in effective performance on the diplomatic scene, a not-unexpectable tone of chivalrous concern for the well-being of women active in this field ran like a thread through many of the discussions. "We would not assign a woman to a danger spot" came up several times. (One officer followed this by commenting that the number of places they would not post a woman has the practical effect of limiting the number of women his Foreign Service can afford to have on its rolls. He did not, however, believe that the assignment policy had been designed with this result in mind.) "Women should be assigned to 'diplomatic' rather than consular functions, because in the latter they would be involved in some very rough and tough situations" was another reflection of this type of concern. "We prefer to have young women officers in our Foreign Ministry rather than overseas because our Missions abroad are so small that they get lonesome, homesick, and lack a sense of community support" was a refrain among a number of smaller-country representatives. One Ambassador also raised what he referred to as a "moral" problem: "Young women should not live alone and how would we house them if we assigned them overseas?"

Other old traditions also continue to exist and were described as potentially inhibiting to an increase of women in career fields by quite a few of those interviewed. The sense of these comments was, in the words of one, "There's no bias against women now, but as unemployment increases there probably will be. We can't have women holding good jobs and men unemployed when, after all, man is the natural breadwinner." Several persons also mentioned such social restraints as "a married woman could not be posted abroad without her husband's consent" and "a father would not let his unmarried daughter leave the

country. On the whole, however, there appeared to be a general feeling that such "family" constraints had been weakened by the recent trend for young women to go abroad to study.

The most graceful distinction between the sexes as Foreign Service Officers came from the diplomat who spoke of "a recognition [in his country] that women are more patient and understanding and can handle delicate negotiations better than most men."

The sampling of the experience of women at the officer level in the international Secretariats was very small (five people) but the discussions in both organizations were quite similar. There was general agreement, for example, that, since most recruiting is done through the member-countries Missions, the number of women applicants for officer positions is beyond the control of the Secretariats' personnel staffs. Nevertheless, there is also some feeling that there is also a tendency to cast women in secretarial positions which aggravates the disproportion between male and female officers. Another factor influencing their staffing patterns is the effort to maintain a balance among member-countries' citizens.

In both organizations figures were produced to support the contention that women have not gotten an even break on promotions; i.e., the number of women in the senior grades as a proportion of all of the woman officers is significantly smaller than the ratio for male officers. One explanation for this phenomenon was that the road to the top is largely paved by heading special missions at field posts and such assignments almost always go to men. One woman added that "most women don't want those jobs and wouldn't want to go if assigned."

There is discontent at the UN over differences in conditions of service for male and female officers (New York Times' story attached) and, although it has not broken into print, similar discontent at the OAS which has similar rules. Since changes in the regulations must be approved by the General Assembly, optimism about improving these circumstances was less than rampant in each of the organizations.

Distilling the above and countless hours of discussions, it seems clear that:

- (a) the concept of a role for women as diplomats is accepted by all of the countries surveyed, even those in which women cannot or do not at present play such a role;
- (b) the number of countries in which women do actively participate in foreign affairs, and the number of women so engaged, is increasing at an increasing rate; although
- (c) the principal limiting factor is a continuing reluctance on the part of large numbers of women to prepare for and/or apply for service in their nation's diplomatic establishment;
- (d) the Governments of several of the countries have been in the forefront of the social changes which must undergird the acceptance of women in this profession; and,
- (e) on average, women have fared better in their national Foreign Services than in the international organizations.

APPENDIX

LIST OF COUNTRIES SURVEYED

Algeria	Iran	South Africa
Argentina	Israel	Sudan
Barbados	Ivory Coast	Swaziland
Bolivia	Jamaica	Tanzania
Botswana	Jordan	Togo
Brazil	Kenya	Trinidad and Tobago
Burundi	Lebanon	Tunisia
Cameroon	Lesotho	Turkey
Central African Republic	Liberia	Uganda
Ceylon	Libya	Upper Volta
Chile	Madagascar	Uruguay
Colombia	Malawi	Venezuela
Costa Rica	Mali	Zaire
Cyprus	Mauritania	Zambia
Dahomey	Mauritius	
Dominican Republic	Mexico	
Ecuador	Morocco	
Egypt	Nepal	
El Salvador	Nicaragua	
Ethiopia	Niger	
Gabon	Nigeria	
Ghana	Pakistan	
Greece	Panama	
Guatemala	Paraguay	
Guinea	Peru	
Guyana	Rwanda	
Haiti	Senegal	
Honduras	Sierra Leone	
India	Somalia	

# At the U.N., Polite Feminism

By KATHLEEN TELTSCH

Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, N. Y. —There is ferment these days in the ranks of women employees here.

The recent appointment of Mrs. Helvi Sipilä of Finland to be the first woman Assistant Secretary General in the United Nations' 27-year history seems to have encouraged a fledgling equal rights group here to be more outspoken in its demands for key jobs, promotions, equal pension rights and other benefits.

"Certainly we welcome the appointment of Mrs. Sipilä," said one woman, "but we don't want tokenism." Mrs. Sipilä, a lawyer, takes over this fall as an administrator of social and humanitarian matters.

On the whole, women's lib, United Nations-style, tends to be a polite and low-keyed affair conducted without noisy demonstrations, threats of strike or even a flamboyant international bra-burning. The very suggestion evokes a delicate shudder from one activist in a silken sari.

But there are petitions going the rounds. A resolution has been sent to Secretary General Kurt Waldheim objecting that of the 2,250 non-clerical, or professional, posts in the organization women hold only 385.

### Examples of Bias

Many of the women's grievances talked about over coffee are peculiar to the United Nations: One woman employee insists that discrimination literally extends to the grave.

"If the wife of a male staff member dies," she said, "the United Nations will pay to send home her body for burial. If my husband dies, I pay."

On pensions, the widow of a male employe automatically collects his entire pension; a surviving husband gets only what his wife is paid and no matching sum from the United Nations.

Moreover, a little-known provision says that if a man has more than one wife, they share the pension—a rule included to accommodate Islamic countries where men are permitted four wives.

Probably the most controversial ruling permits men to take their wives on home leave at the expense of the United Nations but denies the same privilege to women workers (the United Nations pays for biannual trips so that employes can maintain their ties with their homelands).

"The choice for me is a tough one," says an Australian married to an American. "Either I take my holiday without my husband, or we dip into our savings for \$2,000 to pay his fare."

One woman has retained a lawyer and means to challenge the staff regulations as violating the provisions of the United Nations Charter prohibiting discrimination on the

basis of race, religion or sex.

Grievances often involve that intangible element that the women call "attitude."

One staff member here objects that she is required each afternoon to brew tea for her superior and his guests and then wash the cups. She says, "He insists on the tea ceremony — he isn't even Japanese."

Another says she sympathizes with the secretaries who are directed to be "go-fors," meaning to get the boss's coffee. But she objects more, she says, to being a "go-to." Each morning, she is expected to walk eight blocks to deliver her boss's children to the United Nations International School—and pick up the coffee on the way back to the office.

At a recent meeting of the equal rights group, Margaret Braun, who prefers Ms. to Mrs., complained that the United Nations was practicing "sexual apartheid" and her 80 listeners got the message:

### Advice on Grievances

For years, South Africa's practice of separating the races — called apartheid—has been denounced regularly here as a sinister scheme for keeping the blacks in inferior and subservient positions.

Mrs. Braun, an American, argues that prejudice against women began in the Garden of Eden. "Wasn't Eve sup-

posedly made from recycled material when no other creature could satisfy man's needs?"

Mrs. Patricia Tsien, who heads the informal equal rights group, says that the new, militant spirit of women outside the United Nations enclave has influenced the women on the staff to act. But she says she wonders if the United Nations should be content to be a follower instead of a leader in promoting human rights.

She has advised her co-workers to give top priority to grievances on which they are more likely to win their point—such as home leave—rather than on complaints about bias in the matter of promotions or jobs offered to women, which are harder to prove.

Women employees acknowledge that they have had sympathetic supportive help from some male administrators.

One woman remembers going to Paul Hoffman, then the head of the United Nations Development Program to complain that his foreign aid operation had 97 men but only two women in the higher job echelons.

"He sounded surprised, agreed there should be more and said he heard plenty about job equality at home"—he is married to the former Anna Rosenberg, long an ardent advocate of equal rights.

Often women, not men, are blamed for indifference about women's rights.

More than two years ago,

the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women made up of women delegates from 32 countries called for a job survey by sex knowing it would support their case about job inequality within the United Nations.

When the survey came up for debate last fall in the General Assembly, not one of the commission members turned up to participate and the matter was dropped without even a discussion.

Later, one of the commission members told women staff members that she regretted the seeming apathy of women delegates but suggested there might be reasons for it.

Conditions within her own delegation had grown strained since she became an outspoken defender of women's rights, she confessed. Her Ambassador had not criticized her but he had become cool ... very cool.