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Gender, Feminism and Diplomacy: Analysing the Institution through the Lenses of Feminist International Relations

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Abstract

The feminist agenda in International Relations has recently drawn attention to gender issues in diplomacy, focusing mainly, though not exclusively, on analysing the trajectories of female diplomats in the institution. Though scarce, these studies approach the topic primarily via national case studies, resorting to the concept of gender to examine the power structures based on ideals of masculinity and femininity, which establish patterns of inequality and discrimination within the institution. In this article, we review national and international studies on gender and diplomacy, aiming to map the theoretical and methodological articulations underlying the gender analysis of diplomacy, which sees it as a gendered institution where gender-based hierarchies of power operate. In terms of methodology, we discuss the main concepts and theoretical frameworks of this research agenda, unraveling their connections to the broader feminist agenda in IR. We map the most recurrent methods and point out both theoretical and methodological gaps that need to be addressed in future research. Furthermore, we briefly review the main studies on gender and diplomacy conducted by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and academia, attempting to bridge national and international studies on gender and diplomacy. We conclude that the research agenda on gender and diplomacy has a rich conceptual and theoretical arsenal that establishes multiple dialogues with institutional feminist theories and with feminisms in IR. However, important gaps

persist both in terms of the incorporation of intersectionality and cross-national comparative approaches, which are paramount to advancing gender analyses of diplomacy as an institution.

Keywords: gender and diplomacy; female diplomats; feminist IR.

Introduction

In 1918, Maria José de Castro Rebelo Mendes, from Salvador (BA), became the first official diplomat in Brazilian history. Her admission to the diplomatic career was not an easy process: her registration to the exams was initially rejected and Rui Barbosa's personal intervention was necessary for it to be accepted (Schumaher & Brazil, 2000). The reversal of the decision gave Mendes a chance to demonstrate her brilliance before the examining board, which approved her in first place for the diplomatic career (Ministério das Relações Exteriores do Brasil, 2020). However, although her pioneering role in diplomacy resulted in praise from public opinion, newspapers and personalities at the time criticised the presence of a woman in a public position traditionally occupied by men, underscoring how that would negatively impact the role of women in the home and how it represented a "feminist march" in Itamaraty (Schumaher & Brazil).

Mendes's emblematic case anticipated not only the reality of women's absence in diplomacy, but also debates about the meanings of women's presence in political and bureaucratic posts. A century later, the numbers of female diplomats in Brazil and elsewhere, and the number of women in politics, remain low. According to ONU Mujeres (2020), on 1st January 2020 only 6.6% of heads of state and 6.25% heads of government were women; 20.5% of speakers of parliament and 25.3% of deputy speakers of parliament were female leaders. Similar tendencies are observed in all continents, ranging from 16.6% of women in Middle-Eastern parliaments to 43,9% in Nordic countries (ONU Mujeres, 2020). In diplomacy, the situation is no different for female ambassadors: they constitute 25% of the ambassadorship in North America; 18% in South America; 14% in Europe (except for the Nordic countries) [1]; 17% in Africa; 6% in the Middle East; 10% in Asia, and 25% in Oceania (Towns & Niklasson, 2018).

These staggeringly low figures of women's representation in politics and bureaucracy reflect the gender hierarchies that still persist in society. Despite the wide recognition of the importance of the agenda of gender equality and women's rights, especially thanks to the efforts of the United Nations, the data collected annually by various institutions demonstrate that we are still far behind from a minimal level of gender parity that could guarantee adequate political representation for women (Fraser, 2013). A similar situation is observed in diplomacy, where the number of women representing their countries in embassies, consulates and international organisations remains below the ideals promoted by women's rights and equality agendas (Aggestam & Towns, 2018).

Feminist theories in international relations point out different motives for this absence of women in the international sphere. One of the most frequent answers to the persistent exclusion lies in the inherently masculine character of the international system, which is defined by ideals of

aggression, competition, and domination (Tickner, 2001; 2006a). Women, therefore, would have no place in such a world, for their essence is founded on cooperation and stereotypes associated with care and domesticity (Biroli, 2018; Okin, 2008; Pateman, 1993). These hierarchies of gender, which are cemented in roles and preconceptions about masculinity and femininity, "shape expectations and practices of individuals" (Aggestam & Towns, 2018, p. 11) into relatively stable patterns concerning the places each gender shall occupy – and *if* they shall occupy them. As a consequence, the few women holding ministerial positions (ONU Mujeres, 2020) and posts in international organisations (Lenine & Pereira, 2021; Martins, 2018) are frequently responsible for issues associated with *low politics*, which reflect conceptions about the private sphere of domesticity and care.

Nonetheless, after three decades since the inaugural milestone of feminist international relations, namely the dossier published in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*[2], studies about women in diplomacy are still scarce, which can be verified not only by the output of academic publications,[3] but also through the impressions of those writing about the topic and who need to reference their research in previous research (Aggestam & Towns, 2019; Farias, 2019; Minarova-Banjac, 2018; Towns, 2020). The lack of received knowledge confirms that "diplomatic studies have long been the poor child in international relations theory" (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015, p. 297), which *per se* worsens the scarcity of analyses about gender and diplomacy, as well as gender and its intersectionalities (Standfield, 2020). In Brazil, few studies have been published, having been primarily conducted by members of the diplomatic corporation (Balbino, 2011; Friaça, 2018), but, in recent years, a new literature originated in academia has emerged (Balestero, 2017; Brandão, Amaral, Euzébio, & Gregório, 2017; Farias & Carmo, 2018; Lima & Oliveira, 2018). A similar trend has been observed in the international literature, which has focused on national case studies and international organisations. However, this agenda has been advancing in the past few years, which has allowed us to identify general patterns in female diplomats' trajectories stemming from the analysis of national, isolated case studies. For, if nowadays female diplomats are able to climb the ladder of the diplomatic career, there still persists a powerful glass ceiling that obstructs their advancement, preventing women from entering traditionally masculinised domains.

Thus, this paper aims to provide a panorama of recent works on women's presence in diplomacy, discussing the findings of recent research, whilst establishing connections with feminist theories of international relations. More importantly, we aim to examine the theoretical and methodological articulations underlying the gender analysis of diplomacy, which sees the institution as a gendered one, where gender expectations are projected onto its members, establishing, as a consequence, patterns of discrimination and material and symbolic obstacles in the diplomatic career. By returning to the emblematic questions "where are the women" in diplomacy, we seek to emphasise how gender hierarchies structure the international arena, unequally distributing power, recognition and prestige between male and female diplomats. Therefore, the feminist gaze transcends the "meanings of masculinity and femininity", investigating "how those meanings

determine where women are and what they think about being there", offering thereby an understanding about power itself (Enloe, 2014, p. 8).

The paper is divided into three sections, followed by the conclusion. In the first section, we discuss studies on gender and diplomacy, focusing, primarily, on research agendas and their general findings. Next, in the second section, we locate diplomacy within feminist theories and perspectives, discussing key concepts tailored to comprehend and reveal gendered power structures in the international arena. These theories talk directly to agendas and research questions, which is paramount to understand the methods and findings of studies in this field. In the third section, we briefly analyse the current status of Brazilian female diplomats' presence and trajectories.

Studying gender and diplomacy: agendas and findings

The first studies about women's presence in diplomacy were based on the liberal feminist tradition (Tickner, 2001). Subscribing to the rationalist and empiricist ideals of the social theories of the early 20th century, liberal feminists sought to highlight the absence of women in institutions, such as diplomacy (McGlen & Sarkees, 1993) and the military forces (Mathias, 2009). These foundational works attempted to strengthen institutions through legal means, i.e. by eliminating the barriers that made it difficult for women to be admitted in formal political spaces. Evidently, the limitations of merely counting numbers and proposing legal solutions were harshly rejected by post-liberal feminist theories, which we shall address in further detail in the next section.

Historically, the advent of revolutions in the end of the 18th century and 19th century resulted, despite profound limitations, in the integration of women into political processes. The manifestations for the recognition of women's rights and the extension of liberal tenets to women emerged in different works, namely Mary Wollstonecraft's (2016) and Olympe de Gouges' (2020). However, even in face of the victories of feminist movements in granting women space in the public sphere, namely that of politics, diplomacy still remained a profession primarily occupied by men. As Tickner (2001) stresses, "[i]n the West, the image of a foreign-policymaker has been strongly associated with elite, white males and representations of hegemonic masculinity", which responds, hence, for the current low female presence in the international arena and the exclusion of women's perspectives in global politics.

The field of diplomacy and female participation, in turn, has developed with great impetus from the 1990s onwards, both in academia and diplomatic schools, seeking to fill in the gaps about female presence in the structures of foreign policy negotiation, formulation and implementation. In the field of diplomatic history, several studies addressed gender issues through a historicist perspective, describing how (the few) female diplomats' professional careers developed (Aggestam & Towns, 2019; James & Sluga, 2016; McCarthy & Southern, 2017). From mere wives of diplomats and ambassadors, to unofficial envoys, or even as informal "spies", women have historically

engaged with the international works of diplomacy, even if their role was assumed to be as the companionship of male diplomats (Enloe, 2014).

This scenario began to change more significantly at the beginning of the 20th century, as a result of the bureaucratisation of ministries of foreign affairs. The adoption of admission exams opened diplomacy up to all sectors of society, breaking with the traditional image of diplomacy as an activity developed primarily by members of the elites and nobility (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Nevertheless, the admission of women to diplomacy was neither immediate nor irreversible: it had to be negotiated in face of social prejudices based on gender stereotypes, and it faced bans for certain periods (such as the Brazilian case, where women were prohibited from accessing the career from 1938 to 1954) (Farias & Carmo, 2018). National experiences are diverse, but when examined together they demonstrate that women's claim for accession to the diplomatic career is characterised by obstacles and setbacks.

It is not surprising, thus, that the literature about women in diplomacy is marked by the findings of individual case studies, for the institutional trajectories of women's access to diplomacy are particular to each national experience. Papers and doctoral theses (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Balbino, 2011; Farias, 2019), as well as edited volumes (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Cassidy, 2017; Sluga & James, 2016) offer a comprehensive picture of female presence in the profession. Furthermore, this research field encompasses not only the ministries of foreign affairs, but also international organisations and negotiations (Fliegel, 2017; Martins, 2018; Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2017; Naurin & Naurin, 2018; Paffenholz, 2018; Rimmer, 2017; Tryggestad, 2018). In this context, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which established the *Women, Peace and Security* (WPS) agenda, is a landmark in the incorporation of women in the arena of international diplomacy. In short, the resolution urges, among various issues concerning women's rights, for women's participation in peace negotiations (as well as in key posts designated by the UN), aiming to promote gender perspectives in post-conflicts settings (United Nations Security Council, 2000).

In this scenario, the research agenda revolves around two fundamental axes. The first axis refers to the latent preoccupation with quantifying women's presence, which requires various strategies to collect data whose access is often restricted. The second axis focuses on the gender hierarchies that obstruct female diplomats's performance, their career advancement, their participation in international security and economic negotiations, and their confining to areas associated with feminine roles. Aggestam and Towns (2018) emphasise three urgent questions in this research agenda: (a) where are the women in contemporary diplomacy? (b) to what extent does hegemonic masculinity structure institutions and obstruct women's presence? (c) how are diplomatic activities associated with ideals of masculinity and femininity?

The first question echoes the persistent concern about the figures of women's presence, but without losing sight of its qualitative dimension. Though the numbers of diplomats have been increasing in various countries and international negotiations, gender parity is still restricted to a few places (such as Sweden) (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Niklasson & Robertson, 2018). In Brazil,

approximately 25% of the national diplomatic staff is composed of women, a share that decreases the more one climbs the ladder of prestigious posts in the career (Farias & Carmo, 2018). To be sure, this is the qualitative dimension of gender and diplomacy: despite increasing numbers, an apparent glass ceiling still persists up to the point that only 15% of all embassies in the world are headed by female diplomats (Towns & Niklasson, 2018) and 10% of peace negotiation staff are composed of female negotiators (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2012). Evidently, the glass ceiling is only one of a myriad of questions underlying women's presence in diplomacy, one that can be traced back to the liberal perspectives that count women in political spaces. Feminists in international relations postulate that the advancement of these agendas necessarily requires further interrogating gender issues in the international arena (Tickner, 2001).

This brings us to the second question, which attempts to reveal the gender structures operating in the diplomatic institution. Hegemonic masculinity confers certain attributes, values and roles to men and women: the former are bestowed with rationality, objectivity, decisiveness; the latter are associated with kindness, empathy, care and in need of security (Duriesmith, 2018; Hawkesworth, 2019). Institutions, according to feminist perspectives, reproduce the gender hierarchies underlying hegemonic masculinity, constituting the inequalities of power that privilege men in the international arena. Diplomacy, as a formal state institution, is no exception to such gender construction, which impacts directly on the trajectories of female diplomats, and on how they must adjust to posts and norms intrinsically imbued with masculine values. To be sure, research demonstrates that female diplomats occupy positions that reinforce gender roles and ideals, such as social issues and other areas framed as low politics (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Cassidy, 2017). As a result, the sexual division of labour in ministries of foreign affairs and international organisation persists.

Finally, the third question investigates how the increasing female presence in diplomacy subverts international categories and practises which are shaped by notions of masculinity and femininity. Gender diversity in diplomatic activity – understood not only through the binary categories of men and women, but also, and more importantly, through gender expectations and performances that structure the institution – broadens our perspectives about international phenomena by questioning the solutions architected for conflicts, as well as negotiations of various kinds (Cohn, 2013; Duriesmith, 2018; Goldstein, 2003; Paffenholz, 2018). In this sense, a pressing agenda on peace negotiations investigates how masculinity imbues post-conflict situation with power structures associated with security and militarism, and how the presence of female diplomats (as well as other female authorities) may disrupt this negotiation logic (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Furthermore, gender diversity itself is a driving force for the transformation of power hierarchies in their varied intersectional manifestations within ministries and international organisations, allowing new norms to emerge and guide the international arena.

The aforementioned questions are informed by a variety of feminist theories, stemming from the disciplines of international relations, political science, sociology, anthropology etc. In the next section, we shall discuss key concepts and theories in the literature on gender and diplomacy.

Theoretical and methodological perspectives: investigating diplomacy through feminist lenses

The theoretical field of feminisms is, without any doubt, one of the most fruitful in human sciences, being characterised by intense dialogues between disciplines that analyse society, politics, economy and international affairs. This field "grows through imaginative interdisciplinary work and critical political engagements", and at the same time "feminist theory is not only about women, although it is that; it is about the world, engaged through critical intersectional perspectives" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 270). As a result, the discipline of international relations is deeply influenced by the concepts, questions, interpretations, and provocations of feminist theories as manifested not only in academic debates in anthropology, sociology and political science; but also in national and transnational feminist movements, which subvert the so-called natural order by revealing the gender hierarchies that structure social life.

The history of feminism is traditionally told through the idea of three waves, which instead of confining momenta and goals to certain periods of time, rather portray debates that have arisen in feminist movements. According to Carol Hay (2020) and Linda Zerilli (2006), the first wave, which began in the end of the 18th century, is associated with the vindications of early feminists such as de Gouges and Wollstonecraft, as well as with philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, whose concerns revolved around basic political rights and legal protections. The second wave defined an agenda that aimed to understand the oppressions women faced beyond social, political, and economic institutions, investigating how society and its formal and informal norms structure power inequalities, which would be later defined as unequal gender structures. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* are important landmarks of the second wave (Pinto, 2010). Finally, the third wave questions previous feminist analyses for their centring in experiences of one single type of women, those of white, cis, heterosexual and middle-class women, drawing attention instead to the plurality of experiences of black women, latinas, women of the Global South, transwomen. This conceptual and analyitical subversion opened doors for new problems to be discussed within feminist debates, expanding the intertwining of gender with other social and identity cleavages, such as race, class, and sexuality.[4]

Drawing inspiration from this feminist trajectory, feminist debates enter IR through the Third Great Debate, which informed new epistemological approaches to knowledge production (Monte, 2013). Central to this process was the critique of neopositivist analytical models of international phenomena that had been proposed in previous theoretical debates (realism v. idealism, in the first debate; methodology and the neorealist-neoliberal/neoinstitutional synthesis, in the second

debate) and consolidated during the Behaviouralist Revolution, resulting in alternative approaches based on a sociological and interdisciplinary reading to address the plurality of international issues and agendas (Brown & Eckersley, 2018; Schmidt, 2006). Feminist perspectives, as mentioned previously, had already had a long tradition in other disciplines, which can be traced back to the expansion of rights and liberties through the 18th and 19th centuries (Mill, 2017; Wollstonecraft, 2016); the development of the concept of gender and the subsequent questioning of symbolic and material injustices produced by roles attributed to men and women (Fraser, 2013; Hawkesworth, 2019; Zerilli, 2006); and, finally, the debates on gender performativity (Butler, 2016; Lloyd, 2018), gender and its intersectionalities with other social cleavages (Collins, 2019; Hancock, 2016), and the place of women from the so-called Third World or Global South within the logic of transnational feminist movements (Ballestrin, 2017; Lugones, 2010; Mendoza, 2018; Spivak, 2010). Once feminist theories entered the discipline, they began to act in different fronts, seeking to understand the social construction of meaning if the face of gender; to discuss the historical variability of the concept of gender in different societies; and to theorise about gender and power, unravelling their invisible structures (Enloe, 2014; Tickner, 2001). As Joan Scott sums up:

> "Gender" opened a whole set of analytic questions about how and under what conditions different roles and functions had been defined for each sex; how the very meanings of the categories "man" and "woman" varied according to time, context, and place; how regulatory norms of sexual deportment were created and enforced; how issues of power and rights played into definitions of masculinity and femininity; how symbolic structures affected the lives and practices of ordinary people; how sexual identities were forged within and against social prescriptions. (Scott, 2010, p. 9)

In this context, in feminist interventions in international relations not only the state is interrogated as a central structure in the perpetuation and promotion of gender inequalities, but also its underlying masculinity (which echoes in all social and political dimensions) constitutes a fundamental concern in research agendas (Hawkesworth, 2019). As MacKinnon affirms, "The male perspective is systemic and hegemonic... In this context, objectivity–the non-situated, universal standpoint, whether claimed of aspired to–is a denial of the existence of sex inequality that tacitly participates in constructing reality from the dominant point of view" (1983, p. 636, quoted in Hawkesworth, 2019, p. 126). Characterising masculinity and its implications to forging gender roles informs the theoretical agenda on gender and diplomacy, to the extent that it allows one to understand the state and its institutions as gendered structures (Aggestam and Towns, 2018). This means that certain spaces and functions are unequally reserved for men and women, affecting their professional careers within the institution. In other words, as a structural power relation, gender operates "a central set of distinctions between different categories of people, valorizes some over

others, and organizes access to resources, rights, responsibilities, authority, and life options along the lines demarcating those groups" (Cohn, 2013, p. 4).

This gender-based division is cemented on conceptions about what are/should be men's and women's social roles in respect to public and private life. Men's dominant presence in the public space is justified through the associations of masculinity with universality, objectivity, rationality, and ambition, all of which are perceived as essential characteristics to navigate in politics and the labour market. Women, on the other hand, are associated with the private sphere of the home, for femininity is constructed upon ideals of domesticity, which determine women's roles based on care and family (Hawkesworth, 2019; Okin, 2008; Pateman, 1993). These ideals of femininity and masculinity – which are protected and promoted by the state itself through its institutions and legal system – inform how (the few) women in the international arena operate, establishing patterns of unequal access to politics (Tickner, 2006b). The division between public and private spheres within national borders spills over to the international arena, being questioned by feminist theories of international relations, and, for that reason, Enloe (2014) invites us to think about how "the personal is international"[5].

Therefore, subjecting the personal and the international to scrutiny under a feminist perspective means tackling the gender configurations that constitute the gender order, which, in turn, reflects the hierarchical arrangements of that social cleavage. According to Duriesmith:

> These hierarchical arrangements are also situated internationally, as the gender configurations that the state privileges are situated within global hierarchies of power. (...) For one gendered mode of engagement to exist, it needs to be defined against others; in the case of states, the relationship between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities is essential to the construction of the international gender order. (...) the configurations of meaning that construct particular masculinities (heterosexual, white, rational, militarist, etc.) are necessarily defined against stigmatized others (real or imagined) that fail to satisfy this criterion. (Duriesmith, 2018, pp. 55-56)

This relational constitution of hegemonic masculinity constructs women's subordination in the international arena, whether in the context of the recognition of their rights as women, or in their insertion in formal institutions of the international system. The idea of hegemonic masculinity, as originally postulated by Raewyn Connell, is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity underlies the gender order operating multidimensionally on social structures, from norms to individuals' bodies (Connell, 2005). The arena of international politics does not escape its effects: Tickner (2006b) suggests that "[w]hen women enter politics, particularly in areas of foreign policy, they enter an already constructed

masculine world where role expectations are defined in terms of adherence to preferred masculine attributes such as rationality, autonomy, and power" (p.39). In the context of diplomacy, the institutional element is also underpinned by the gender order, affecting the trajectories of female diplomats since their admission to the career and throughout its different stages of development.

For this reason, the bulk of the literature on gender and diplomacy has resorted to interactions between feminism and institutional studies in order to confer meaning to diplomats' experiences, on the one hand, and to overcome the characteristic liberal counting of figures, on the other hand. Celeste Montoya (2018) points out that feminist theorists analyse institutions by mobilising, in specific ways, feminist debates and concepts: liberal feminists are fundamentally concerned with women's presence in quantitative terms, frequently ignoring the roles they play in institutions; socialist feminists focus on broader cleavages (race, class, gender, and nationality) that constrain individuals' actions; post-modern and post-structuralist feminists concentrate on discursive and performative elements of institutions; and intersectional feminists emphasise the simultaneous interactions between cleavages and how they produce new and multiple forms of oppression. Underlying these approaches, different conceptions of institution coexist (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; North, 1990; 2005; Pierson, 2004; Skocpol, 1985). Although conceptualisations are diverse, one can resort to a more comprehensive definition of institutions according to which institutions are

> building-blocks of social order: they represent socially sanctioned, that is, collectively enforced expectations with respect to the behavior of specific categories of actors or to the performance of certain activities. Typically they involve mutually related rights and obligations for actors, distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate, 'right' and 'wrong', 'possible' and 'impossible' actions and thereby organizing behavior into predictable and reliable patterns. (Thelen & Streeck, 2005, p. 9)

According to feminist perspectives of institutions, gender constitutes a building-block of social order, defining and sanctioning individuals' actions. As Kronsell states (2006), "[i]nstitutions both organize and materialize gender discourses in historically dynamic ways, while simultaneously enabling and restricting the individual involved in institutional activities" (p. 109). Hence, feminist institutional analysis brings to the spotlight the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is deeply debated by feminist international relations (Duriesmith, 2018; Peterson & True, 1998; Zalewski & Parpart, 2008). Political institutions in the international arena (such as diplomacy and defence) are profoundly marked by male presence, which sets the behavioural norms for individuals. Such norms are foundational to the naturalisation of gender identities (Peterson & True, 1998), playing a crucial role in demarcating certain spaces as masculine only (even though a generalised silence frequently prevails, it reveals how self-evident it is to have masculine bodies heading those institutions) (Kronsell, 2006). Femininity, therefore, is depreciated in these institutions, for it subverts essential

and universal values, as well as the gender structures that privilege male presence in these spaces.[6] As Mona Krook and Fiona Mackay sum up:

> To say that an institution is gendered means that constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture or 'logic' of political institutions, rather than 'existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring whole to the institution'. While constructions of masculinity and femininity are both present in political institutions, the masculine ideal underpins institutional structures, practices, discourses, and norms, shaping 'ways of valuing things, ways of behaving, and ways of being'. (Krook & Mackay, 2011, p. 6)

In this context, where masculinity is the norm, women occupy marginal places within institutions, which are deeply characterised by an antagonism toward notions of femininity. Silence, hence, prevails, which requires specific strategies to conduct research in such an environment, strategies capable of revealing what is hidden under the veil of normality. From a theoretical standpoint, deconstructing concepts and discourses is an important strategy used by feminists in international relations (Enloe, 2014; Peterson & True, 1998; Tickner, 1992; 2001), and its methodological materialisation results in the analysis of texts, discourses, images, and individuals' trajectories (D'Costa, 2006; Kronsell, 2006). In-depth interviews, for instance, are an useful instrument to break through silences (Balbino, 2011; Soss, 2015)[7], even though the difficulties imposed by institutions characterised by hegemonic masculine involve concerns about one's own career, and the destabilisation that breaking through the silence may cause in the institution itself (Kronsell, 2006). Alternatively, ethnographic approaches, provided institutions grant permission, allow for collecting information about practises, symbols, rituals, and procedures in the field (Cohn, 2006; Pader, 2015).

In the case of studies on gender and diplomacy, the challenge consists in combining multiple quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to advance institutional feminist analyses. Both "counting the numbers" (which is frequently hard due to the absence of quantitative data in ministries of foreign affairs) and the unravelling of female diplomats' experiences are fundamental to make visible the gender hierarchies operating in the institution. The underlying goal consists in tailoring a *gender analysis*, which sees gender as a multifaceted and structuring element of social reality (Davies & True, 2015), leading to the recurring use of case studies as the preferred methodological approach. However, even though case studies are a chief approach in this research agenda – with the aid of statistical data, archival data, historical analyses, interviews and hermeneutics –, Aggestam and Towns (2019) acknowledge the need for putting national experiences into perspective. Comparing cases allows to assess patterns of exclusion, forms of discrimination, and career obstacles faced by female diplomats, making of a token (i.e., analysed locally) phenomenon into a more general one that reflects global gender hierarchies. Thanks to such an approach, one can resignify women's experiences in diplomacy, as well as the institution itself,

whilst questioning discourses of gender parity, and more importantly, hegemonic masculinity. Thus, recent research on gender and diplomacy mobilise quantitative information (usually, scarce) on the diplomatic corps staff, as well as qualitative information about the institution's internal norms in order to advance multidimensional understandings of the consequences of the gender order on male and female diplomats alike. Therefore, resorting to feminist analytical lenses, in its various forms and approaches, is particularly efficient at theorising and empirically analysing diplomacy as a gendered institution.[8] As True states:

> (...) bringing women into the foreign and international policymaking does not just add new voices to existing, and historically gendered, states. Bringing diverse women *as women* engaged in struggles against local and global patriarchies into the debate about common values is crucial to averting the rise in global discord, violence, and conflict as well as to redressing globalized, gendered injustices. (True, 2018, p. 47; emphasis in original)

In face of True's invitation to bring women into the international scene, it is paramount to draw attention to another theoretical and methodological aspect of the research agenda on gender and diplomacy: intersectionality. The heterogeneity of women's identities constitutes a crucial element of their lived experiences, influencing international processes (Paffenholz, 2018). Even though this has been acknowledged in feminist studies in international relations, the incorporation of heterogeneous identities into the debates on gender and diplomacy remains marginal. Such silence is denounced by Standfield in her critique of Cassidy's and Aggestam and Town's volumes, emphasising that "[t]he volumes would have benefited from more investigation into the intersectional dynamics that create hierarchies among women", especially in terms of the premises and practises of feminists from the Global North vis-à-vis feminists of the Global South (Standfield, 2019, p. 153). However, it is important to note that there exist efforts, though limited, to fill in this gap by recognising intersectionalities of gender and class (Neumann, 2008), and gender and sexuality[9] (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Bashevkin, 2018; Dean, 2012) in diplomacy. In Brazil, the recent disaggregation of socioeconomic and identity-based data reveals the differences of access and trajectories in Itamaraty (Lima & Oliveira, 2018), allowing for the assessing and subverting of the institutional self-image of the male, old, and white diplomat (Farias & Carmo, 2018). Incorporating intersectionality as a key concept, hence, constitutes a double challenge: from a theoretical perspective about gender and diplomacy, it aims to question the diverse and complex structures of the gender order; methodologically, it provides an innovative approach capable of transcending the research agendas previously discussed. In both cases, the literature on gender and diplomacy may benefit from drawing attention to these issues.

Brazilian diplomats: a brief assessment of the current state

Maria José de Castro Rebelo Mendes's pioneering role, whose history was briefly presented in the Introduction, marks the beginning of a trajectory characterised by institutional discontinuities at Itamaraty in respect to the formal access of women to the diplomatic career. The ban on women's admission and its later lifting,[10] as well as structural changes in the diplomatic career produced various gender inequalities at the house of diplomacy, some of which were made invisible due to the apparent equal formal treatment (Brandão et al., 2017; Farias & Carmo, 2018). It is true that recent institutional initiatives, such as the creation of a committee for gender and racial issues – namely, to deal with abuses and harassment –, promote debates about female presence at Itamaraty, as well as about various forms of discrimination that affect female diplomats. However, despite such efforts, gender hierarchies still persist. As a gendered institution, Itamaraty reproduces specific ideals of diplomacy, which are founded on a masculinised perspective of the profession (Balbino, 2011; Farias & Carmos, 2018).

These ideals manifested themselves, in the beginning of the 20th century, through the designation of less prestigious posts to women, namely those of consular services (Brandão *et al.*, 2018). Traditionally, consular posts are more technical and bureaucratic, and at that time it decreased one's prospect of being assigned for diplomatic missions abroad, which are considered more meritorious and prestigious (Friaça, 2018). By the time consular and diplomatic services were merged into one single career, which took place in the mid-20th century, conflicts about the role to be played by career diplomats emerged, and the ban on women's admission was envisaged as a solution for such conflicts.

Another element that deserves attention in this context refers to the systems of incentives and disincentives that were particular to married women. Their admission to the career brought to the spotlight the issue of marriage between diplomats, which was adjudicated by Decree 24.113/1934. Article 108, § 3, declares that the marriage contracted between two officials of the diplomatic or consular service would result in "one of them switching to unpaid regime, according to a written declaration in which both parties express the couple's preference as to which of the spouses should be affected by this measure" (Brasil, 1934). Farias and Carmo (2018) note that the effects of the decree disproportionately affected female diplomats, for they were more likely to resign from their career once they got married. The legislation was changed in 1966: Decree 69/1966 established career freeze instead of complete resignation. Nonetheless, and even though couples of diplomats can nowadays be assigned together to the same diplomatic mission, the history of obstacles due to marriage, as well as due to other leaves, resulted in discontinuous trajectories for women in Itamaraty (Farias & Carmo, 2018).

In the contemporary scenario, where internal revolutions inspired by the feminist movements of the 1950s and 1960 brought women back in diplomacy after decade-long bans, formal barriers have succumbed and formal treatment prevails not only for admission, but also in the labour routine. Nevertheless, while equal treatment is enforced by law, gender hierarchies reveal a

different scenario from what one sees on the surface. Female diplomats' trajectories in Itamaraty are characterised by various idiosyncrasies, some of which reflect patterns observed in other international diplomatic schools, whereas others are specific to Brazil. Low female presence is, undoubtedly, the most evident parallel one can trace between the Brazilian case and other countries (Balbino, 2011; Brandão *et al.*, 2017; Farias & Carmo, 2018). However, in terms of prestigious posts (such as high-level advisory bodies, cabinets of the secretary-general and minister of foreign affairs, sub-secretariats and activities outside Itamaraty), quantitative data demonstrate that there is almost no apparent difference between women and men at the ministry, even when posts at embassies in the Elizabeth Arden circuit[11] are accounted for (Farias & Carmo, 2018).

Nevertheless, these figures make invisible the gender inequalities that affect female diplomats' trajectories in Itamaraty, which can only be unravelled once alternative methodological approaches are combined with quantitative data. The system of incentives and disincentives, which is cemented on symbols of femininity and masculinity, obstructs women's progress in the career, influencing their prospects of remaining in office, or the opportunities they get offered. According to Farias and Carmo (2018), few women reach the top posts in the career (i.e., Minister of First Class), for most female diplomats abandon the profession prior to reaching them. The authors call this phenomenon "leaking" in the diplomatic career, and claim that its origins can be traced to various practises within the institution, namely: (a) the aforementioned ban on marriages of diplomatic couples that lasted until 1966; (b) retirement laws, which allow women to retire earlier than men; (c) a meritocratic environment that punishes whoever privileges his or her personal life (for example, family) instead of the diplomatic service and the sacrifices it requires (Farias & Carmo, 2018). Moreover, there still persists the symbolic ideal that diplomacy is an intrinsically masculine job, which is projected onto diplomats and reaffirmed by Itamaraty itself (Farias & Carmo, 2018; Lima & Oliveira, 2018).

For instance, Balbino's (2011) interviews reveal deeper experiences that transcend the quantitative counting of female diplomats. If it is true that there are no formal obstacles nowadays, gender hierarchies still persist and condition the possibilities of accession in the career, as well as the daily routine in office. In her study, Balbino identifies seven factors that draws an analytical picture of the conditions faced by female diplomats in Itamaraty: (a) the low percentage of women occupying the highest posts, which inhibits the visibility of female diplomats and their prospects of development in the career, whilst generating an environment of internal competition between women in the institution; (b) lack of political support for promotion in the career; (c) fewer applications; and (d) fewer approved female candidates in admission exams, which concurs with Farias and Carmo's (2018) findings; (e) difficulties in reconciling personal life (especially, marriage and family) with the career; (f) family ties with diplomats, which demonstrates that the career produces specific incentives for those women who have relatives working in diplomacy; (g) preferential insertion in chancellery posts, which reinforce roles of assistance. Taken as a whole,

these factors characterise the ways in which the gender structure of Itamaraty punishes female diplomats, both in material and symbolic dimensions.

This brief overview of Brazilian diplomacy draws a picture of the specific experiences of the few female diplomats. However, some research gaps are still present, which make more complex gender issues invisible. We stress that incorporating an intersectional approach that takes into account class, race, sexuality and regional origin is a desideratum in the agenda on gender and diplomacy in Brazil, for it allows to put in evidence how these cleavages, when coupled with gender, set new forms of oppression within the institutional gender order. Lima and Oliveira (2018), through disintegrating statistical data of this sort, indicate – even if they do not necessarily depart from an intersectional approach – the importance of resorting to intersectionality as a key concept to generate new understandings about Itamaraty and the diplomatic career. As the authors suggest, Brazilian diplomacy remains a predominantly white space, with low female presence, and composed of a staff whose origins can be traced back primarily to the same geographical regions and universities. Making sense of Itamaraty and its diplomats' image necessarily requires the introduction of an intersectional gender analysis capable of diagnosing internal hierarchies, whilst identifying its spaces and attempts to transform the institutional reality.

Therefore, advancing national research on gender and diplomacy requires the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to shed light on the invisible patterns of exclusion and oppression in the diplomatic career. Although scholars resort to different methodological approaches and research techniques (in-depth interviews, statistical data, correlation tests, hermeneutic analysis of legislation, historical analysis, and archival analysis), studies still lack an articulation with theoretical tools of the specialised literature, namely with gender and feminist international relations. This challenge may be overcome in future research (Farias & Carmo, 2018), and it must so, because a genderless theoretical framework faces the risk of reproducing the insensitivity to gender issues in diplomacy. Perhaps, this is the most urgent appeal for future research on gender and diplomacy in Brazil, especially for it to commence a dialogue with international studies on the issue, contributing, ultimately, to developing cross-national comparisons (Aggestam & Towns, 2019). Resorting to the theoretical frameworks we have discussed throughout the text – with special attention to institutional feminist approaches – is paramount to conducting analyses capable of revealing the power structures underlying the gender order of diplomacy.

Conclusion

The agenda on gender and diplomacy is still in its infancy. In spite of recent efforts to collect and examine case studies, the agenda still lacks broader analyses capable of putting into perspective national trajectories. This does not mean that we should ignore the specificities revealed by deep scrutiny of national cases, but rather the desideratum of making sense of institutional developments

in diplomacy as a phenomenon where gender hierarchies operate in similar ways in different countries.

Throughout this paper, we mapped studies on diplomacy that are concentrated in three main agendas: (a) quantifying women's presence; (b) revealing the structures of hegemonic masculinity; (c) identifying and subverting the conceptions of masculinity and femininity in diplomacy. By exploring the underlying theoretical elements of this research agenda, we examined key concepts of feminist theories that allow us to advance the study of diplomacy beyond case studies. There is a brand new research horizon yet to be explored, which may benefit from comparative analysis. In this context, feminist theories, especially their interactions with political theory and international relations, not only provide the conceptual framework for comparison, but also encourage the interpretation of broader phenomena that cut across national experiences, among which inequalities of power between men and women in the diplomatic career and the gender hierarchies engendered in the institution stand out.

Despite progress, diplomacy is still an eminently masculine and masculinised space, characterised by gendered norms, rituals, and traditions. Making visible the presence and work of female diplomats is paramount to transform an institution pervaded with gender inequalities. By shedding light on the experiences of women occupying one of the most prestigious professions in the international arena, one can resignify the profession and reinvent the ways through which international relations are architected. However, a crucial step in the process of revealing diplomacy's gender hierarchies consists in advancing intersectional analyses capable of challenging the conventional wisdom cemented on the binaries of men and women. For ideals of masculinity and femininity operate vis-à-vis other social cleavages, producing new forms of oppression, which if ignored may make invisible a substantive part of individuals' experiences within the institution. Therefore, future research based on gender analyses of diplomacy face the challenge of adopting an investigative sensitivity towards intersectional hierarchisation and institutional oppression, which *per se* requires establishing innovative theoretical and methodological dialogues.

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Notes

1. Nordic countries have specific policies for women's empowerment in their political institutions, and Sweden in particular declares it has a "feminist foreign policy" (Niklasson 2018).
2. The dossier was published in 1988, and is considered the first engagement of feminist debates in IR, serving as a reference for studies on gender and diplomacy. For more details on how feminism entered IR, see Grecco (2020).
3. In our research on Scielo, Periódicos CAPES, Jstor and Google Scholar databases, searching for the terms "diplomacy", "gender", "women", "female diplomats", and their respective translations into portuguese yielded the same references mobilised in this paper. The scarcity of references in Portuguese is blatant: less than 10 (ten) articles on Scielo and Periódicos CAPES deal specifically with gender and diplomacy. Therefore, we decided to conduct a systematic review of this literature based on the theoretical and methodological elements under discussion in these texts.
4. It is important to note that the tale of three waves, though traditional, has been contested by other authors. Hawkesworth and Disch (2018), for example, suggest an alternative approach that consists in describing feminist history through themes, attempting to

incorporate diverse feminist experiences all around the world. Pinto (2010) locates the waves within Brazil's specific dictatorial momentum, dating back to 1964, and showing how it influenced local feminist movements. Mekgwe (2010) tells the history of African feminism by taking colonialism as a starting point instead of talking about waves. These examples demonstrate that there is not one single historiography of feminism, and invite us to reflect about alternative narratives about feminisms in the world.

5. This slogan was adapted from "the personal is political", which was evoked by second wave feminist movements. Its meaning refers to the silencing of issues of the private sphere that demand political discussion. Issues related to race, sexuality and privacy in the family used to be confined to the private sphere, yet they require political debate for they encompass violations of autonomy, intimate violence and various forms of injustices. For further details, see Heberle (2018).
6. Likewise, the ideals of hegemonic masculine reject the presence of homossexual men, for they are perceived as bearing a defective masculinity. Diplomacy, hence, does not elide this kind of discrimination (Bashevkin, 2018; Towns, 2020).
7. According to Soss (2015, p. 177): "Interviews offer a superb way to learn how individuals knit their own conceptions together and put them to use. They can be used to uncover logics of integration (widely shared or idiosyncratic) and sources of disintegration. On both sides of this ledger, the value is that we can explore the substantive connections that link beliefs and sentiments."
8. Evidently, studying diplomacy does not necessarily require a feminist approach, even when gender is used as a key concept. Lima and Oliveira's (2018) recent study of Brazilian diplomacy makes an invaluable quantitative contribution to studies in this field, but they do not depart from feminist approaches nor intersectionality to reflect upon their findings about gender and race. The danger of a gender-insensitive analysis lies in treating gender as a merely dichotomous variable aimed at assessing causal relations without questioning how it structures social and political order (Davis & True, 2015).
9. Bashevkin (2018) and Towns (2020) describe how the persecution of homossexuals during the Cold War impacted the American diplomatic corps: between the 1950s and 1960s, approximately a thousand individuals were fired from the Department of State on the basis of their homosexuality. The reasons behind this witch-hunt rest on the masculinised character of the institution, which projects an image of femininity onto male homossexual diplomats. Those images are incompatible with diplomacy. Some elements of this image are hysteria, propensity to gossiping, and fragility. Although the institution nowadays is not "aggressively homophobic", these images of the homossexual diplomat still remain (Towns, 2020, pp. 591-592).
10. In 1938, due to Oswaldo Aranha's Reform, which merged diplomatic and consular services into one single career, women were formally banned from the diplomatic career. The ban was formally lifted in 1954. For furhter details, see Brandão *et al.* (2017).
11. This term refers to the most prestigious embassies and multilateral missions, which are located in cities of greater interest to Brazilian and world diplomacy: Berlin, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, London, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Vatican and Washington.

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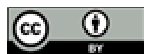

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