Gender in Brazilian Diplomacy:
conservative, rational and international forces and the 1938 prohibition of women in Foreign Service

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical and social structural contexts around the changes in the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations that resulted in prohibiting the access of women to the diplomatic career in 1938. Using feminist and constructivist perspectives of International Relations, it investigates the social and institutional forces that converged so that the decision was made possible and publicly accepted as natural. The article demonstrates that, within the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo (1937-1945), characteristics associated with femininity would be seen as counterproductive to the state. Thus, not only would the diplomatic career undergo an identity change — valuing masculine traits —, but the decision would also reflect broad modernization and rationalization reforms in the public administration, along with a domestic conservative reactionary climate that would sponsor traditional gender roles, and an international order socialized reticent to female participation. This research has been financially supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).

INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations (also known as Itamaraty, or MRE), under the direction of Osvaldo Aranha[1] between 1938 and 1944, began with an important administrative reform that would amalgamate the consular and diplomatic careers into one, establishing the diplomat as the main formulator of Brazilian foreign policy from then on (Castro, 2009).[2] This reorganization, however, would also prohibit women to register for the Ministry's entrance examinations. This article explores how this decision was made possible and considered natural within its historical and social structural context, employing a feminist perspective to explain the subordination of women and the routine aspects that would sustain the "unjustified asymmetry" between women's and men's social positions (Tickner, 2001; Wendt, 1987). The paper also represents the initial steps towards my Master's dissertation, which will further explore this decision through archival research of primary documents in order to understand the motivations and perceptions of key actors in this process.

The decision is significant in three fundamental aspects, which will guide the sections of the paper. First, it symbolizes a paramount change in Getúlio Vargas' regime. Ascending to power by means of the so-called "Revolution of 1930" and imposing an Interim Government, Vargas employed a critical rhetoric against the previous oligarchic republic, defying its corrupt and archaic practices and claiming to truly represent the Brazilian people (Gomes, 2013). After being indirectly elected president by Congress in 1934, he staged a coup d'état in his last year in office, 1937, largely supported by the Armed Forces and the middle class, which instituted an authoritarian regime loosely inspired by fascist European models. He then named it Estado Novo (New State) as an imitation of Salazar's rule in Portugal (Levine, 1980, p. 231). This would last until 1945, when the government's censorship and repression would become incompatible with the decision to participate in the Second World War alongside the Allies, fighting for democracy in Europe (Fausto, 2013). The 1938 Itamaraty reform, therefore, would be conducted under the consolidation of Estado Novo as an authoritarian dictatorship, which

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[1] Osvaldo Aranha previously held posts as Minister of Justice and of Economy, as well as an ambassadorship in the United States from 1934 until 1938. He would later preside the United Nations General Assembly in 1947.

[2] This followed a global diplomatic trend. The US State Department had merged its diplomatic and consular services in 1924 and the British Foreign Service would do so in 1943 (Calkin, 1978; McCarthy, 2009).

incorporated conservative values that viewed the coup as "the final victory of stability over forces of dissention and subversion" (Levine, 1980, p. 231). Although the Vargas administration was initially open to the struggles of the incipient feminist movement of prior decades, instating the women's vote in 1932 and promoting favorable labor laws, such as equal pay and maternity leave, the government would then sponsor traditional family values and women's role primarily as mothers and wives, which meant their presence working outside of the home would not be well-accepted (Besse, 1999).

The second reason for the significance of the decision lies in the series of administrative reforms promoting modernization, efficiency and meritocracy within the state bureaucracy, as the new regime tried to break away from past patronage practices, which would deem characteristics associated with femininity – and the presence of women, as the personification of these characteristics – as counterproductive (Graham, 1968; Tickner, 2001). The Ministry of Foreign Relations, already internationally recognized for its professionalism, represented a core institution within the Brazilian administration and "the right of women to hold posts in [it] had long helped to determine their position elsewhere in government service" (Hahner, 1990, p. 177; Rosembaum, 1968). As the first ministry to allow women to take part in its entrance examinations in 1918, it consequently opened public service jobs to female labor. In turn, in 1938, Itamaraty's prohibition, pleading women's instability and fragility, led a domino effect in other agencies. The Ministries of War, Navy, Economy, the Bank of Brazil and the Post Office were among those who also closed positions to women during Estado Novo (Cannon, 1944, p. 8; Hahner, 1990, p. 178).

Lastly, the justifications used in the decision could be easily corroborated internationally at the time, as women would have a particularly challenging time being incorporated into foreign services around the world because of the diffuse assumption that the "representation of national interests abroad is the only career for which women are totally unsuited," as stated by Britain's Ambassador to Persia in 1945 (as cited in McCarthy, 2009, p. 286). Historically, there would be a strong connection between the image of the soldier and of the diplomat, as "the right to participate in the making of a country's foreign policy has been conditioned by the ability to fight in a country's wars" (McGlen & Sarkees, 1993, p. 35). A woman, thus, would not be suited for diplomacy (or war, for that matter) because she had been portrayed as non-aggressive, peace-loving, and

compassionate, traits believed to be incompatible with the necessity to take a strong stance in negotiations (*ibid*).

For feminist scholars of International Relations (IR), it is not possible to speak of processes of state formation, war, foreign policy or institutions without observing the relationship between gender and power (Tickner, 2001). As in IR constructivist theories, feminist discussions cherish understandings on the development of social structures – norms, languages and perceptions –, and their reproduction through the practices and interactions of agents. State identity would be constructed, according to them, under the logic of power using gender concepts to create structures of precedence and subordination, and, in practice, subjecting women (Locher & Prugl, 2001). The acceptable collective meanings in the 1930s would reinforce that women and diplomacy were incompatible, as the field's male predominance "has enabled them to structure institutions, create laws, establish moral codes, and shape culture in ways which perpetuate their power over women" (McGlen & Sarkees, 1993, p. 27).[3] This would establish Foreign Services as institutions of hegemonic masculinities – "institution" both in the sense of the formal organization with a set of rules, objectives and defined responsibilities and of the "less formalized but nonetheless sustained set of practices, relationships and behavioral patterns" (Aggestam & Towns, 2018, p. 10). Consistent with the international order of hegemonic masculinity, Itamaraty would choose to impede the female presence in the diplomatic career out of concern for maintaining "the manliness values upheld by Brazil's international image" (Farias, 2017, p. 51). In order to gain respectability, demonstrate autonomy and achieve national development goals, officials would understand that the state should act as a man, and not as a woman.

Literature Review

The studies about women in Brazilian diplomacy are few, but there is a growing interest in the subject. Considering that today only 22,6% of Brazilian diplomats are women (MRE, 2017), most research focuses on the current struggles they face within Itamaraty, recognizing it as a "masculinized institution" (Brandão et al., 2017), whereas

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[3] Wendt (1992) argues that there are "collective meanings" in constant formation and reformulation that would construct a certain type of structure in a set international system. Mechanisms of reinforcement and discouragement created and implemented by actors would contribute to reproduce and consolidate the acceptable meanings, making them routine qualities.

very few try to understand the historical process that led to this commonly accepted assumption.[4] Friaça (2018) and Brandão et al. (2017) are among the few who look in this direction, and although they have greatly contributed to the field, their studies present limitations. With a narrow focus on Itamaraty, they mostly neglect the greater context, socially, bureaucratically and internationally. Brandão et al., for instance, see the 1938 reform as an aberration against the advancement in women's rights in the first half of the decade, not considering the repressive impact of Estado Novo, the general reforms within the public administration, and the international context.

This research builds on that literature, expanding on Farias' (2017) understanding of the changes occurred in framing the diplomatic profession in the first decades of the twentieth century. The author argues that, when women pioneers entered the Brazilian Ministry, they attempted to link feminine aspects to diplomacy as justification for their presence, employing "discriminatory gender stereotypes to succeed," such as the needs to be elegant, polite, discrete and detail-oriented (p. 39, 45). The world was changing during the inter-war years, however, and a new diplomatic profile would ask for a "more business-oriented approach to foreign policy," with a "new model of manliness", refuting "the association with values considered feminine" (p. 47). This change, according to Farias, could have contributed to the decision to prohibit women at Itamaraty, and this article aims to observe what other social and institutional factors were at play when framing diplomacy as a male profession at the time. The focus is on the forces that converged so that the 1938 decision was made possible and publicly accepted as natural. Thus, not only the diplomatic career underwent an identity change – more masculinized –, but this change also reflects broad modernization reforms implemented in the public administration, along with domestic conservative forces that defended a sexual division of labor as the nation's foundation, and with the acceptance of such attitudes within an international order reticent on female participation in diplomacy.

Reactionary Intellectual Climate

At the turn of the twentieth century, prior isolated feminist voices begun to gather around institutionalized organizations. The Brazilian Federation for the Advancement of

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[4] Research focusing on more contemporary struggles for Brazilian women in diplomacy include Balbino (2011), Delamonica (2014), Steiner & Cockles (2017), Teixeira (2017) and Farias & Carmo (2018).

Women (FBPF), launched in 1922, became the most important and well-known organization in the fight for women's political rights. It was led by Bertha Lutz, Brazil's most famous suffragist who had a network of international feminist contacts such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Mary Wilhelmine Williams (Marino, 2014; Marques, 2016). Unfortunately, the Estado Novo coup would put a brutal end to feminist discussions in politics, and the literature presents some possible arguments for this demobilization of women's movements and achievements.[5]

First, their elitist nature might have contributed to its lack of mass societal support, possibly creating a gap between the political successes and daily lives of middle- and lower-class women (Besse, 1999; Hahner, 1990; Marques, 2016). Second, the changes proposed might have been rather superficial. The victories, which were crucial in their historical context, would have, at the time, contributed merely to a modernization of gender relations, with no greater impact on the "organization of the social and political inequality" between men and women (Besse, 1999, p. 12). Besse (1999) asserts that gender relations had not been truly democratized and mostly upper-class women benefitted, whereas Marques (2016) affirms that the achieved constitutional guarantees achieved in 1934 were fragile and did not promote structural societal changes. Bertha Lutz would later write to Catt recognizing that women in Brazil were incapable to hold on to all that was accomplished, as visible by the loss of rights in the 1937 Constitution and beyond (Hahner, 1990, p. 179). For instance, the guarantee to equal pay would be alleviated in 1940, the practice of sports "incompatible with [women's] natural conditions" would be forbidden in 1941, and secondary education would segregate teaching for boys and girls.[6]

In this sense, the feminist victories would easily be suppressed within an authoritarian context in which "the power of political persuasion of other forces were infinitely superior to Lutz's and her collaborators'" (Marques, 2016, p. 144). The third argument, consequently, suggests that these forces would have created a "reactionary

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[5] There is a consensus among all the scholars cited in this section that the new government depoliticized the organized feminist movement. However, some prominent women continued to be invited to missions abroad. Bertha Lutz, for instance, became an important figure in international events, representing Brazil at the San Francisco Conference, in 1945, and being one of four women to sign the United Nations Charter (Roth, 2017).

[6] Decretos-Leis: 2.548/1940, 3.199/1941, and 4.244/1942. The Ministry of Education would explain, in 1937, that men should be prepared for "businesses and fights", whereas women should be educated for "home life" (Schwartzman, Bomeny & Costa, 1984, p. 107).

intellectual climate" defending that "the perfection and the organization of the State depend fundamentally on the moral and legal conditions of each one of the families that constitute it" (Besse, 1999, p. 219, 4). Even as the feminist movement yearned to redefine gender roles, discussions around "women's issues" would also help materialize the existence of a "family crisis." Defenders of this viewpoint acclaimed social modernization, but only accepted female labor insofar as it did not generate revolution or scandals and that women's fundamental role in the family were not disturbed, as their lifestyle would be closely associated with the "society's and the nation's destiny" (Ostos, 2012, p. 318; Besse, 1999, p. 145).[7] This perspective found eco in three main social forces: in the Catholic Church, which regained political strength with Vargas; in intellectuals who used science and eugenics as justification to assign women the supposedly higher purpose of homecare and maternity; and even in women's magazines that proclaimed to be the defenders of "the pure feminism, Christian, supported by our traditions," affirming that "without God, Nation, Honor and Family, there is no possible feminism" (as cited in Besse, 1999, p. 204).[8]

Scholars have called this social transformation process "conservative modernization" (Draibe, 2004; Schwartzamn et al., 1984) and Cowan (2016) explored precisely this dichotomy between "conservatism" and "modernism" in greater detail, affirming that the Vargas regime would cooperate with "conservatives only insofar as doing so was expedient" (p. 15). The author argues that the Estado Novo, even though influenced by "right-leaning hard-liners" (p. 3), would not aspire for morally superior citizens in accordance with the traditions defended by the Catholic Church and the Integralists.[9] The regime sought, instead, to prepare an "army of workers" prepared to serve the nation with discipline and efficiency, under a moral code geared towards a

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[7] Women's labor, according to this view, should be an extension of the feminine stereotypes such as altruism, suiting women for positions as elementary school teachers, nurses and social assistants (Besse, 19990, p. 145).

[8] This complex situation bares some similarities with what women were experiencing in Germany under the Nazi regime. The basic principles of liberalism and social-democracy of the Weimar Republic were rapidly put aside by an active anti-feminist force based on militarism as an "organizing principle of social life", which clearly specified roles for each individual, men and women, and on the racialist movement, which would see women's procreative role as crucial to advance and maintain the purity of the race (Mason, 1976, p. 87-91).

[9] The rightist group Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB) incorporated fascism and conservative Catholicism in the political climate of the 1930s. Self-defined as nationalist, it had a cultural purpose – rather than an economic one – that focused on the formula: God, Nation and Family. It hoped to have a greater role in Estado Novo, but it was readily ignored by the new regime and lost political clout (Fausto, 2013).

"productive citizenship," emphasizing that "masculinized 'men of action' and appropriately feminine, working mothers would fulfill these duties, which revolved around service to the nation's material and productive progress" (p. 34). This understanding endorses Farias' (2017) argument that diplomacy would have undergone an identity shift during this time, valuing a more "business-like" and masculinized approach to foreign policy. We will see next that this trend travels along the entire public administration.

Modernization and Rationalization

The Itamaraty reform also needs to be understood as part of a wider process of modernization and rationalization of the Brazilian public service, which found on Vargas' Estado Novo its main exponent and motivator. Assembling characteristics of a statesman with those of a "common man," Vargas would assume the role of the people's guide and the incarnation of their sovereignty, concentrating authority in the executive and strengthening the state as the main promoter of national development (Gomes, 2013). The new government would claim to directly represent the will of the people, through a leadership able to absorb demands from distinct social groups, as well as silence dissonant voices and accommodate old and new ways of conducting politics (Carone, 1977; McCann, 1995).

Under Weffort's (2003) concept of a "state of compromise," the 1930 Revolution is understood to have formed a government in which no one interest group had the capacity to exert complete political hegemony. Thus, to construct the idea of a "national interest" within an "unstable equilibrium," the state would execute its authority through a number of new highly normative institutions that would incorporate the interests and members of the productive classes, presuming that the capacity to govern "efficiently" with a modern, ordered and rational bureaucracy was a primordial element for the nation's development (Draibe, 2004; Siegel, 1978). One of these new government institutions was the Federal Council of the Civil Public Service (CFSPC), created in 1936 and modeled after the United States Civil Service Commission, to subsidize enhancements in the public administration and to disseminate a meritocratic system of personnel recruitment via public examinations (Graham, 1968; Siegel, 1978).

The CFSPC and its heir, the Administrative Department of Public Service (DASP), would, nonetheless, exemplify how the separation of administration and politics was in fact more difficult than the technical elite would portray it to be. Graham (1968) argues that the agency would be instrumentalized by the modernizing elite as "a convenient means for central control over the national administrative system" (p. 29), using the quest for efficiency and rationalization as a pretext to promote a bureaucracy that would act according to its interests. As the Itamaraty reform of 1938 was influenced by CFSPC and DASP reports, the decision to prohibit women should not be considered "apolitical," as such policies were "devoted to the common good as interpreted by a select number of individuals" (p. 184) whose purpose was to install a cohesive unit of state administration that legitimized its own authority.

President Vargas understood that the Brazilian international position demanded skilled and efficient diplomats, capable of adapting to the unique situations of the foreign service (Romero, 1951).[10] According to Cheibub (1985), the reforms implemented particularly between 1930 and 1945 aimed to structure MRE as a rational institution and project diplomats as versatile decision-makers of the highest quality, granting the Ministry a growing autonomy and also a certain continuity of Brazilian foreign policy for years to come (p. 123). Before the 1930s, Itamaraty's career structure was divided into three branches: the diplomatic, consular and bureaucratic service, with women employees only allocated as domestic bureaucratic officials.[11] The Ministry eliminated the third career in 1931 and transferred four women to the consular service, already delimitating the diplomatic corps as an exclusively male space (Brandão et al., 2017; Cheibub, 1985; Friaça, 2018). Osvaldo Aranha, in 1938, finally amalgamated the diplomatic and consular paths into one. Even though the 18 women consuls were transferred to the now sole

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[10] The Vargas foreign policy of the 1930s had the purpose of efficiently achieving national development within a global political dispute between two antagonist power systems: the first lead by the United States and its liberal-democratic push, and the second by Nazi-Fascist Germany. Scholars affirm that Vargas attempted to maximize economic and commercial gains in this context, bargaining its neutrality. Vargas did obtain some concrete advantages for Brazil, the most significant being an Eximbank loan deal to build the first National Steel Company in 1942. (Hilton, 1977; Moura 1980).

[11] Feminist scholars have discussed this idea that men, supposedly, are more apt to take on public roles, while women would act in private and domestic settings (Saffioti, 2013). Farias (2017) has pointed out that this might also have been the case in the dichotomy between domestic and foreign positions within the Ministry, suiting men to act internationally and to be seen abroad, whereas women were relegated to domestic, in country, labor.

diplomatic career, the reform determined that, from then on, only male candidates were allowed to register for the entrance exams (Castro, 2009).[12]

The government would promote the democratization of access to public service to avoid patronage, aspiring a modern administration capable of legitimizing what it understood as "national interest," but, to achieve this, it would need to debilitate the participation of certain groups (Draibe, 2004; Graham, 1968). As women defied social norms and reached higher rates of success than men in diplomatic examinations, unexpectedly proving to possess the "essential attributes for [the] speciali[z]ed career" (Farias, 2017, p. 45), the modernizing elite might have feared a female takeover – supported by a panic in the media –, which could explain the reframing of diplomacy to profess preferences for masculine traits and the use of DASP as a "scape goat" to justify the maintenance of the status-quo and that "the men called upon to serve the state were essentially the same as in the past" (Graham, 1968, p. 188).

International Order

Scholars such as Scott (1986) propose the use of gender as a useful category of historical analysis to provide a different understanding of power relations, emphasizing the existence of a group of symbols – identified as "hegemonic masculinity," or an ideal type of "masculinity" – capable of determining the men's place as hierarchical superior. Transferring this concept to state actions, feminist IR scholars defend that pre-conceived ideals of masculinity prevail in inter-state interaction, being rewarded and valued, whereas feminine traits – supposedly understood as weakness, irrationality and dependence – would be presented as something to be avoided (Tickner, 2001). The Ministry of Foreign Relations and Brazilian diplomacy, as acting agents in the international system, would not escape this socialization process. It is plausible to assume that women and presumed feminine characteristics were eschewed in the Itamaraty Reform of 1938, as Osvaldo Aranha affirmed that women would cause "unpleasantness and difficulties" and "embarrassments to their own government and to those of other nations." A CFSPC document went even further, arguing that the female presence could provoke "comments in detriment of the country's representation," and also that "the

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[12] Itamaraty would only allow women again in 1953, when Maria Sandra Cordeiro de Mello registered for the exams after a judicial injunction (Friaça, 2018).

female sex fragility [would] inhibit the women of concrete and effective action" and "neither the service […] [would] be the most adequate to the physical constitution of women" (as cited in Friaça, 2018, p. 147; 153).

This image would corroborate international shared meanings around the incompatibility of women with diplomacy, as similar arguments were used by other Foreign Services. Indeed, women in diplomatic positions was not a regular practice in the first half of the twentieth century, even though that is when most countries began appointing their first female diplomats to posts abroad.[13] A particular complication in the 1930s, according to Herren (2016), was the increase in totalitarian regimes across the globe, marked by "the antifeminism of their authoritarian governments" (p. 188). The common reasoning for believing women should not be diplomats encompassed three main obstacles: marriage and the assumed professional unavailability as an outcome of being a wife; women's supposedly physical weakness to cope with hardships and "unfavorable climatic conditions;" and the prejudices they could face when serving abroad. Nevertheless, there seemed to be no objection to send women clerical personnel to foreign posts that would otherwise seem "unsuitable for women officers because of social, political or climatic reasons" (Calkin, 1978, p. 106, 54).

Even though there was not a common agreement within the State Department of the United States on hiring policies for women, a male Consul General positioned himself against the incorporation of women into the Foreign Service in 1921. He believed women could cause "inconvenience and embarrassment" and "bring the whole arrangement into ridicule [and] destroy her usefulness," while "inevitably they would fail to command in the foreign communities […] that respect without which they could not effectively discharge their duties." In addition, assistant Secretary of State Wilbur Carr would also point out in 1924 that a female Foreign Service officer "would find herself hopelessly handicapped in the sense that she would be unable to overcome the practical disabilities

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[13] Although Itamaraty had its first female officer in 1918, only ten years later did it send its first female abroad to the Brazilian consulate in Paris. Uruguay was the first country to have a woman abroad, in 1912, whereas the USSR was the pioneer in appointing a woman Head of Mission, Alexandra Kollontay, to Stockholm in 1923 – one year after the United States appointed Lucile Atcherson as the first woman Foreign Service officer. In Brazil, the first woman to reach the top of the career was the vehement anticommunist Odette de Carvalho e Souza, in 1956, some decades prior to the appointment of the first British female ambassador in 1976 (Calkin, 1978; Friaça, 2018; McCarthy, 2009).

which her sex would impose upon her in accomplishing the work […] in the face of adverse customs and social restrictions" (as cited in Calkin, 1978, p. 60, 68).

In the United Kingdom, where the conditions for women to become diplomats were particularly unfavorable, they were officially not allowed in the Foreign Office until 1946. Prior to this directive, a commission was implemented in 1933 to consult British diplomats and most responses mentioned the difficulties women would face in "cultures unaccustomed to women holding positions of authority," arguing they would not be taken seriously, becoming "an object of derision" within "masculine spaces of chanceries, clubs, golf courses and less salubrious haunts where valuable information was to be had." Consequently, it had the potential to affect negatively "the prestige of His Majesty's Government abroad and the respect which the opinions and influence of [the government] at present command in international relations," and, therefore, men "were simply better placed to deal with civil wars, revolutions and natural disasters" (as cited in McCarthy, 2009, p. 300-301).[14]

The insignificant number of women holding positions in international politics would be used as reinforcement evidence of the prejudice they could face and of their incapacity for the job. Even as the women's experiences abroad did not justify their banishment, such justifications formed a set of acceptable meanings in the international system, which would favor women's exclusion and the consolidation of the field as a male-dominated place.

Conclusion

This article attempted to decipher the historical and social structural motivators behind the decision to prohibit women's access to the diplomatic career by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1938, after the establishment of the Estado Novo authoritarian regime. Three preeminent influences could be identified as playing a significant role in framing diplomacy as a profession not suitable for women. The first would be the moral conservative climate that acquired sufficient strength in Estado Novo to suppress feminist movements and achievements, disseminating traditional family values that saw women's role in the household as their greatest contribution to the nation's advancement. The

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[14] The Commission decided in 1936 against the admission of women. Thus women would only be allowed in the Foreign Office after the Second World War, a crucial factor that balanced the scale favorably towards women's presence in the labor force, and in diplomacy in particular, according to McCarthy (2009).

second influence would be the idea that the state bureaucracy was in need of a new operational model that emphasized rationality in detriment of characteristics associated with femininity – weakness, dependence, emotionality. Finally, the third influence would be a result of an international socialization process, in which few women officially acted in diplomacy, and foreign services reproduced the male-dominated system of international politics. This scenario led to a struggle in the following decades for women to legitimize their voice both domestically and internationally.

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