

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: (IN)VISIBLE CHALLENGES AND COUNTERMEASURES

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## **ABSTRACT**

In international relations discourse, there are primarily male leaders, experts, theorists, and authors. In the world of diplomacy, women are underrepresented in high-level positions, whether that is leader of a nation-state, international organization, or non-government organization. In every process of leadership status, women endure challenges, specifically gendered discrimination. Academic literature locates struggles women have while obtaining a leadership position, but their fight during their occupation is often hidden. This research investigates whether women's experiences provide evidence on the hardship and challenges, and if faced with gendered and societal norms in leadership roles, how they overcome gender discrimination while in a leadership position. By conducting interviews with 16 female leaders in international organizations, domestic governments and non-government organizations, through a discourse analysis, women's actions are uncovered. In this research, there is evidence that women around the world in different credible organizations experience common gendered discrimination. These struggles include gendered societal and cultural norms and biases, mansplaining and being overlooked, as well as micro-aggressions limiting women's capacity as a leader. To counter these challenges, women perform small, micro-level, actions that help not only themselves but other women in their office further pushing the gender equality agenda.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women in society have the struggle of breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ to achieve success. The glass ceiling is a metaphor “used to describe the difficulties faced by women when trying to move to higher roles in a male-dominated hierarchy.”<sup>1</sup> Women are marginalized in leadership positions throughout the world of diplomacy, whether it is *inter alia*, an ambassador, diplomat, director of an office, or founder of a non-government organization (NGO). In every process of leadership status, women endure challenges. In international relations discourse, there are primarily male leaders, experts, theorists, and authors. It is not because women are inadequate or incompetent, but rather because they are limited and restricted due to gendered power.<sup>2</sup> Women also tend to be absent in traditional IR theory and practice, which is seen in the “marginalization from decision-making and in the assumption that the reality of women’s day-to-day lives is not impacted by or important to international relations.”<sup>3</sup> Once women have achieved leadership status, it does not imply the glass ceiling has been shattered because even though “increasing the number of women in political and public positions is important, ... this does not mean they have real authority or autonomy.”<sup>4</sup> Women face (in)visible challenges while in leadership positions, especially in the diplomatic world.

Even after achieving leadership status, women endure challenges for the duration of their profession. Throughout history, leadership has been defined through masculine characteristics. Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince* presents leadership in a gendered light dictating a ruler as ‘masculine’ with qualities such as aggression, dominance, authority.<sup>5</sup> The same gendered norms are in place today as leaders are typically portrayed as male authority figures (in culture, society and

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kagan, 2020, “Glass Ceiling,” Investopedia, last modified August 28, 2020, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glass-ceiling.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Smith, 2017, “Feminism,” *International Relations Theory*, e-International Relations, 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> Tam O’Neil and Pilar Domingo, 2016, “Women and Power: Overcoming Barriers to Leadership and Influence,” *Overseas Development Institute*, February 2016, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, 1985, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (University of Chicago Press), vii-124.

media). This is not because men are the best leaders but “because ... men have held most leadership positions in society for so long, the concept of leadership has been infused with stereotypically masculine traits.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to the need to adhere to gendered norms (masculine qualities) for success, there is also a gendered bias – especially in leadership – that women have to overcome. Growing up, women have been steered away from certain occupations (politics) that are typically thought of as masculine. There is an instilled bias that men should be in charge, especially of nation-states and international organizations.

In diplomacy, it is important for women leaders to have representation, but encounter barriers. Using feminist IR theory (deconstructing gendered norms, marginalization, etc), I will analyze (in)visible gendered societal norms and bias discrimination in leadership positions in the world of diplomacy. In international relations and diplomacy discourses, women are in the minority, especially in leadership roles. The puzzle of this research is how women overcome gender discrimination in the workplace, on the micro-level, despite having already achieved leadership status. Mainstream media uncovers common ways to overcome challenges such as gender quotas and training seminars. Micro-level explores the small, individual scale, and in this research indicates the struggles that tend to be hidden to the public, as well as the daily actions women do to help overcome obstacles in their job.

In international relations, representation in organizations is vital since significant decisions are made that affect everyone. International institutions, such as the UN, have been thought of as gendered institutions where women are underrepresented.<sup>7</sup> Feminists have found that “peacekeeping, as security-seeking behaviour, is shaped by masculine notions of militarised security.”<sup>8</sup> Women tend to be excluded in peacekeeping decisions, negotiations, deals, and even

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<sup>6</sup> American Association of University Women, 2016, “Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership,” 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ingvild Bode, 2020, “Women or Leaders? Practices of Narrating the United Nations as a Gendered Institution,” *International Studies Review*, 22, 347–369.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, “Feminism,” 66.

post-conflict situations. Since most mainstream literature covers the limitations of women getting high-level positions, this research focuses on what women endure during their leadership careers and how they overcome them. Instead of emphasizing how women got into leadership positions despite challenges, investigating women already in leadership will show how women are still subjected to barriers despite having an authoritative role. Women in diplomacy tend not to speak out on such struggles due to the scarcity of female (inter)national or organizational leaders.

To investigate, I interviewed female leaders from various organizations to seek out gendered challenges and the actions taken. My research question was whether women's experiences provide evidence on the hardship and challenges, and if faced with gendered and societal norms in leadership roles, how they overcome gender discrimination while in a leadership position. Most literature about female leader hardship<sup>9</sup> depicts the common struggles; however, it does not provide a comprehensive analysis of primary sources (interviews) to demonstrate a worldwide commonality. By collecting and constructing a variety of women's experiences together, it shows a global struggle and perhaps guide future female leaders on how to identify and overcome hardship. In addition to macro-level struggles (gendered norms and bias), the interviews provide evidence of micro-level struggles in the workplace. After identifying the hardship women endure, I investigate what the women do to overcome gender disparity in their workplace.

Women are often invisible in international relations. By making women visible, "feminism (IR) ... highlights women's absence from decision-making and institutional structures."<sup>10</sup> In society, there are gendered norms and biases everywhere: societal and cultural. Deconstructing socially constructed gendered norms is the main priority in feminism international relations theory as "feminism has demonstrated the construction of gendered identities that perpetuate normative ideas of what men and women should do."<sup>11</sup> I use academic literature from feminist IR scholars

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<sup>9</sup> Inter alia Smith; Cohn; Enloe.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, "Feminism," 63.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

such as Cynthia Enloe, Carol Cohn, and Sarah Smith. Cynthia Enloe argues that “it is not just patriarchy that proved sustainable, it was many experts’ lack of feminist curiosity that had persisted.”<sup>12</sup> Carol Cohn investigates the gendered language in diplomacy as “sexual imagery has ... been a part of the world of warfare since long before nuclear weapons were even in the gleam of the physicist’s eye.”<sup>13</sup> Women become objectified without even being in the room as the language reduces women’s worth. Examining the work of prominent feminist IR scholars provides a more comprehensible analysis of this feminist issue: gendered challenges for female leaders. Given the literature on struggles and challenges, one still does not truly know how women leaders deal with struggles while in leadership on a day-to-day basis.

The research question is answered through the interviews and the interviewees’ experiences.<sup>14</sup> Concrete examples are provided as well as solutions women have found to overcome them daily. Discourse analysis will analyze the interviews of the high-level women that spoke about their own experiences. These women represent a diverse range of women in high-level positions around the world undergoing the same types of discrimination. Since these women are in high-level positions for institutions that are highly established and credible, I utilized women in various positions from different backgrounds to create a more diverse set of results. I examine for the same commonalities: each women’s experiences are different, but all covered the same struggles.

This research paper is constructed in the following order. Chapter One provides a background to women in diplomacy and a synopsis of statistics and illustrations of measures/policies adopted to tackle gender inequality. Chapter Two consists of a literature review of IR feminists’ work on the marginalization of female leadership. Chapter Three begins the

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<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Enloe, 2017, “The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy,” *Univ of California Press: Social Science*, 193: 53.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Cohn, 1987, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” *Signs*, 12 (4), 687-718: 693.

<sup>14</sup> Lee Ann Fujii, 2017, “Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach,” *Routledge Series*, 114.; Fujii helps with the method of interviewing.



empirical work from the interviews focusing on personal experiences of the interviewees and uncovers that women worldwide experience gendered discrimination. Chapter Four demonstrates the actions women take every day and analyzes the results.

# CHAPTER 1: GENDERED DIPLOMACY

Throughout history, men have become the standard for leadership positions. Even though women are qualified, they are often overlooked as society tends to designate women as caregivers. Despite this, women have been breaking the mold and making history by becoming the first woman in their fields, leading movements, and creating a path for women. Women have been agents of diplomacy for decades - even centuries; however, few are mentioned in history books. This chapter will include a brief overview of the history of women in diplomacy, statistics, and gender policies adopted by governing agencies. Chapter One aims at introducing the historical background of women in leadership positions, which allows further analysis of how women have been limited throughout centuries. Exploring the gender policies of institutions and governments gives insight into the progress made in addition to the impact of the measures in given establishments.

## 1.1 The Herstory of Female Leadership

When analyzing the leadership of women in diplomacy, it is important to distinguish what diplomacy leadership is. For my research, I focus on women in government agencies, international institutions, and non-government organizations. Around the world, women began advancing their careers realizing their potential for leadership and success even if the world did not. When women were excluded from the political realm, they were still able to influence and infiltrate politics through gatherings in salons and networks of friends and family. The secret influence of women was everywhere.<sup>15</sup> Friends and wives of diplomats and politicians were able to build and maintain relations, intervene on husbands' behalf, input their beliefs through engagements, parties and more. It was said "it was through their pacifist and often feminist engagement that women tried

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<sup>15</sup> Julie Anne Demel, 2020, "Female Diplomats in Europe from 1815 to the Present," Encyclopédie pour une histoire numérique de l'Europe, last modified June 22, 2020, accessed March 1, 2021. <https://ehne.fr/en/node/12323>

to subsequently exert pressure on diplomatic positions.”<sup>16</sup> After World War One, the diplomatic profession opened up to women allowing a more direct approach in influencing policies.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the years, more and more countries lifted gender bans that prohibited women diplomats and politicians, allowing women to become leaders.

The first recorded official female ambassador recorded was in 1920s from Russia, Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai, and the first female U.S. Ambassador was Helene Eugenie Moore Anderson in 1949.<sup>18</sup> Today, there are still ‘firsts’ being achieved – a recent one being U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Women have become CEOs and founders of NGOs all over the world. Margaret Chan is the Director-General of the World Health Organization for the second time and is “the most powerful person in global public health.”<sup>19</sup> There are multiple NGOs worldwide that were founded by women who saw a need for women empowerment in their field.

In 2021, the world population ratio is 50.5 / 49.5 % male to female.<sup>20</sup> Given the world is almost equal, women are still disproportionately represented. Around the world, more women started realizing their capability for leadership; however, many countries still have unequal numbers. The Council of Foreign Relations created a Women’s Power Index, which “analyzes the proportion of women who serve as heads of state or government, in national legislatures ... and in local government bodies, and visualizes the gender gap in political representation” in the 193 U.N member states.<sup>21</sup> They found that out of 193 countries, 171 do **not** have female head of states or government, 178 do not have at least 50% of women in the national cabinet and only 4 have at least 50% in the national legislature.<sup>22</sup> Russia, who had the first female Ambassador, is ranked 170<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Demel, “Female Diplomats in Europe.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “The First Woman Diplomat Alexandra Kollontai Born,” 2017, Presidential Library, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619133> ; U.S. Department of State, 2021, Accessed February 17, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> “A Historical Perspective to Women in Leadership,” 2014, InPower Coaching, <https://inpowercoaching.com/historical-perspective-women-leadership/>, Accessed February 17, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> “World Population,” 2021, *Countrymeters.info*, Accessed February 18, 2021, <https://countrymeters.info/en/World>.

<sup>21</sup> “Women’s Power Index,” 2020, Council on Foreign Relations: Women and Foreign Policy Program, last modified September 18, 2020, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/article/womens-power-index>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

out of 193 with more men in office now. In terms of the countries interviewed, Finland is 5<sup>th</sup>, France 12<sup>th</sup>, Austria 22<sup>nd</sup>, Germany 33<sup>rd</sup>, United States 43<sup>rd</sup>, and Azerbaijan 115<sup>th</sup>.<sup>23</sup> According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020, there is a "31.4% average gender gap that remains to be closed globally."<sup>24</sup> It was found that political empowerment had the largest gender disparity, with only 24.7% of the gap closed meaning it is the biggest area where women are misrepresented.<sup>25</sup> In the following section, I will present some policies and measures that focus on gender equality that were brought up by organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) and countries from which I interviewed high-level position women.

## 1.2 Policies and Measures

International, regional, and domestic institutions have implemented or started implementing gender equality policies and initiatives. This section will look into different organizations and government measures on gender equality.

Since a large percentage of the interviewees are security-based (UN, OSCE, etc), looking into the security sector provides a clearer picture of relevant struggles. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security. It "urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions..."<sup>26</sup> The adoption of Resolution 1325 initiated the "Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, designed to address and resolve the disproportionate and unique impact on women of conflict and violence."<sup>27</sup> Despite this, WPS agenda has been not seen as urgent and put to the side due to new world crises, conflicts and movements. To help with the

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<sup>23</sup> "Women's Power Index."

<sup>24</sup> "Global Gender Gap Report 2020," 2020, World Economic Forum, accessed February 21, 2021. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Women, Peace and Security: Resolution 1325 (2000)," 2000, United Nations Security Council, October 31, 2000, accessed February 2, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Melissa Labonte and Gaynel Curry, 2016, "Women, Peace, and Security: Are We There Yet?" *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 22, (3), August 19, 2016, 311–20: 311.

coordination, implementation and cooperation with Resolution 1325, the Interagency Network of Women and Gender Equality created the ‘Interagency Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security’, with representatives from various organizations.<sup>28</sup> The Taskforce created an Action Plan, and as of December 2020, around 89 countries have enacted a National Action Plan to support UNSCR 1325.<sup>29</sup> Countries such as Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, France and Germany have initiated a National Action Plan within their government.<sup>30</sup>

With women being highly underrepresented in security areas, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) has pushed a gender equality agenda. The OSCE Secretariat has a ‘Programme for Gender Issues’ which is “dedicated to making gender equality a reality everywhere.”<sup>31</sup> The OSCE Gender Parity Strategy was created to evenly spread gender equality within the organization. Even though the OSCE implemented a gender strategy, the organization came last in the “Internal Justice Systems of International Organisations Legitimacy Index 2018”, which ranked international organizations on internal justice systems.<sup>32</sup> As the OSCE ranked last out of 33 IOs, this demonstrates that OSCE is not up to standard with access to justice, right to appeal, and more. This indicates that when a colleague is harassed or discriminated, the internal justice system may fail them.

Within governmental sections, some interviewees came from the U.S State Department, US-based NGOs, and institutions. The United States created the ‘National Action Plan for WPS’ in 2011 and then in 2019, the ‘WPS Strategy’ was implemented. However, since the U.S. is ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> in the global ranking in the Women’s Power Index,<sup>33</sup> this implies that women are still

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<sup>28</sup> “Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (Security Council Resolution 1325),” 2021, United Nations, accessed March 4, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> “National-Level Implementation,” 2021, PeaceWomen: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, last modified February 26, 2021, accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>.

<sup>30</sup> “Advancing Women, Peace and Security,” 2020, *United States Institute of Peace*, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/programs/advancing-women-peace-and-security>.

<sup>31</sup> “Gender Equality,” 2021, OSCE, accessed March 4, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/gender>.

<sup>32</sup> Renuka Dhinakaran and Alex P Haines, 2018, “Internal Justice Systems of International Organisations Legitimacy Index 2018,” Report, *International Administrative Law: Center of Excellence*.

<sup>33</sup> “Women's Power Index.”

marginalized in society and in the diplomatic world. In addition to the WPS Act, the U.S instigated the State Department Implementation Plan, which “has strengthened the U.S. priorities of protecting and supporting women in efforts to prevent conflict, promote peace, and countering violent extremism.”<sup>34</sup> With non-government organizations, gender equality is more accessible within a smaller organization run by a female. A few females that were interviewed are CEO’s, founders or directors of non-government organizations that dedicate themselves to a gender equal workplace and women empowerment.

By analyzing the historical evolution of women in leadership and the measures taken, one can see how dire and recent the situation is. Women are still largely marginalized in society, especially in leadership roles. Even though many countries have created government legislatures and organizations have passed laws and resolutions, the actual practice of gender balancing is different. This is demonstrated through the interviews as the interviewees have all had gender challenges and discrimination within their career. Chapter Two focuses on international relations feminist scholars’ critiques of mainstream IR as well as the challenges they have discovered for women.

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<sup>34</sup> Women Peace and Security,” 2021, US Department of State, accessed March 6, 2021, “<https://www.state.gov/women-peace-and-security/>.”

## CHAPTER 2: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Feminist IR theory “challenge(s) women’s near complete absence from traditional IR theory and practice.”<sup>35</sup> Feminist IR clarifies the feminist understanding of gender inequality, gender norms, and gendered identities in world politics. The sections include feminist IR critiques of mainstream IR and what is said of the typical challenges faced by women leaders. By utilizing feminist IR, this research will be a more comprehensive analysis of international relations and feminism.

### 2.1 Feminism in International Relations

Feminist IR scholars deconstruct gender in international relations. This entails “recognizing and then challenging assumptions about masculine and feminine genders roles that dictate what both women and men should or can do in global politics.”<sup>36</sup> IR feminists claim traditional international relations is gender blind as women are often invisible and disregarded. One core element that feminist IR scholars challenge is “the exclusionary focus on areas that are considered ‘high’ politics – for example, sovereignty, the state and military security.”<sup>37</sup> With men predominately in charge of high-level positions, traditional IR tends to overlook women’s contributions in other fields. This gendered exclusion demonstrates that mainstream IR not only ignores gender but justifies women’s exclusion. IR feminists argue that the divide traditional IR has made between public and private is false. The public being states and relations and private as the home – a norm that dictates women belong in private rather than the public sphere.

IR feminists challenge, expose and deconstruct socially constructed gender norms.<sup>38</sup> In IR and diplomacy, “masculinity is often associated with rationality, power, independence and the public sphere. Femininity is often associated with irrationality, in need of protection, domesticity

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, “Feminism,” 62

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>38</sup> Since gender is socially constructed, this research focuses primarily on male-female work dynamics.

and the private sphere.”<sup>39</sup> Boys are rewarded for aggressive behavior, whereas girls are taught and expected to be nurturing and protective. Since women were not always full members of society in history, the “women’s sphere was defined as the motherly nurturing space of the private household.”<sup>40</sup> Feminism IR aims at deconstructing these gender norms that hinder women’s success. These “socially constructed gender identities also determine distributions of power, which impact where women are in global politics.”<sup>41</sup> Socially constructed gender norms dictate what power women have as they become limited in society due to these norms restricting them. Even in leadership and decision-making positions, women are deterred and constrained.

Feminist IR contains multiple different strands and generations of critiques, claims and issues. Intersectionality has recently gained momentum showing the importance of highlighting not only the marginalization of gender, but other aspects such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. Feminism in international relations dives into gendered violence, peacekeeping and women’s marginalization in global politics. By emphasizing women’s roles in global politics on all levels, a more holistic picture is given. Furthermore, women are marginalized in decision-making processes “in reconstruction efforts and have limited access to economic resources.”<sup>42</sup> IR feminists have begun discussions on the marginalization of women in international relations and this research continues and expands the discussion to women in leadership positions in diplomacy.

## 2.2 Gendered Diplomatic Limitations

In international relations, the security sector is critical to highlight where women are more frequently underrepresented as security is dictated as a masculine subject. Melissa Labonte and Gaynel Curry argue that

despite the overwhelming evidence that the exclusion of women from matters of peace and security often leads to more and not less instability, fragility, and violence, little progress has been made to

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, “Feminism,” 64.

<sup>40</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin, 2018, “Women as Foreign Policy Leaders: National Security and Gender Politics in Superpower America,” *Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, “Feminism,” 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 66



implement reforms that potentially would help the Security Council in its work and also fulfill its duty as a guarantor of the WPS agenda.<sup>43</sup>

Even with Resolution 1325, the actuality of implementing the WPS agenda is more complicated. Aiko Holvikivi argues that “conflict prevention requires addressing normative frameworks that valorize aggression and violence as a desirable form of masculinity.”<sup>44</sup> Violence and aggression have become gendered to reflect masculinity. In addition to females being marginalized in the security realm, women are sidelined in the decision-making processes. With outside pressure and “external insistence on reaching a predetermined target”, it may “lead to women predominantly being set to do administrative tasks by the security leadership and not being part of decision making or implementation.”<sup>45</sup> For those women who reach a decision-making level position, they endure discrimination and gendered challenges within.

Carol Cohn, a prominent feminist IR scholar, discovered that the security and military world is highly gendered through gendered language and practices. Defense intellectuals gender military language through sexual imagery and female degradation such as “assigning a woman’s name to each of the craters they gouge out of the earth.”<sup>46</sup> Cohn demonstrates how a sector such as the military is masculinized limiting women’s representation. When someone enters a high-level position, they are expected to understand the position fully and command the sector around them. When a female is put in a high-level position that demoralizes and objectifies women as part of their language and practices, there are obstacles to even demand authority. With competition already intense for high-level positions, “‘the law of increasing disproportion’ predicts that the number of women will decrease with each step upward towards the apex of power.”<sup>47</sup> As “an individual is more likely to emerge as a leader when he or she is seen by followers to have the

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<sup>43</sup> Labonte and Curry, “Women, Peace, and Security,” 315.

<sup>44</sup> Aiko Holvikivi, 2015, “What Role for the Security Sector? An SSR Approach to Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 14 (3): 31–44.

<sup>45</sup> Eirin Mobekk, 2010, “Gender, Women and Security Sector Reform,” *International Peacekeeping*, 17:2, 278-291: 286

<sup>46</sup> Cohn, “Sex and Death,” 693.

<sup>47</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin, 2014, “Numerical and policy representation on the international stage: Women foreign policy leaders in Western industrialised systems,” *International Political Science Review*, 35(4) 409– 429: 411.

characteristics that match their followers' leader prototype,"<sup>48</sup> women representation is crucial. Due to men's long-standing dominance, women are limited before, during and after leadership.

Even though "feminist international relations (IR) scholars have shown that countries with greater gender equality have foreign policies that are less belligerent," there is an instilled bias that women are unfit or unworthy for leadership.<sup>49</sup> On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen got 'snubbed' due to her gender at a meeting at the Turkish presidential palace in Ankara, Turkey. While the two men (Turkish President Erdogan, and Charles Michel – the European Council chief) took the only two seats front and center, von der Leyen was left standing and forced to sit on the couch on the side.<sup>50</sup> As von der Leyen is the first female president, this reflects the humiliation women face in leadership with men disregarding and belittling them. Mrs. Von der Leyen blames the incident, 'sofagate', on sexism as in previous meetings there was no shortage of chairs, as well as noting no women present.<sup>51</sup>

There is the claim that women are more associated with peace due to biological evolution; therefore, becoming a liability as many nation-states are not peaceful in the competitive world. Feminist IR theorists like J. Ann Tickner argue that "IR feminists do not equate women with peace" and that "associations of women with peace, idealism, and impracticality have long served to disempower women and keep them in their place, which is out of the 'real world' of international politics."<sup>52</sup> While women may be less likely to support use of force, they are able to find different and more efficient solutions, not due to being weaker and feeble-minded. However, "whatever women may finally do once wars have begun; women don't start them. Men are the first cause,

<sup>48</sup> Soo Min Toh and Geoffrey Leonardelli, 2013, "Cultural Constraints on the Emergence of Women Leaders: How Global Leaders Can Promote Women in Different Cultures," *Organizational Dynamics*, 42: 191-197.

<sup>49</sup> Kristen P. Williams, 2017, "Feminism in Foreign Policy," *Clark University: Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.368>, 1-22:1.

<sup>50</sup> Suzan Fraser and Samuel Petrequin, 2021, "Turkey Rejects Claims of Sexist Snub towards Von der Leyen." *Associated Press*, last modified April 8, 2021, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-ursula-von-der-leyen-europe-0aaede96f2feaf058b6aa63a2200960c>

<sup>51</sup> "Sofagate: EU Chief Ursula Von Der Leyen Blames Sexism for Turkey Chair Snub," *BBC News*, last modified April 26, 2021, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56896734>.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, "Feminism in Foreign Policy," 5.

the prime movers, of war.”<sup>53</sup> Despite women being strong and powerful, men are rewarded for starting wars, whereas women are labeled as emotional.

### 2.3 Cultural and Societal Setbacks

In diplomatic leadership, women are hindered by societal and cultural norms and biases. They are discriminated through society, different cultures, norms and self-installed prejudices. Feminist IR scholars focus on different norms and biases that are gendered towards women. Cultural norms are very prevalent in diplomacy as different cultures come together to build relations, discuss issues and matters and create potential alliances. Women in leadership face cultural and societal norms in societies where women are restricted, and gender equality is not as important. When a woman in a limited society becomes a leader, there are more obstacles. Soo Min Toh and Geoffrey Leonardelli examine the cultural norms women face when becoming a leader; and in society there is a cultural tightness, which “refers to the degree to which a culture has strong norms and low tolerance for deviance.”<sup>54</sup> It is discovered that loose cultures allow more women to become leaders since there are less norms. Since “cultural tightness tends to reinforce and perpetuate existing norms that favor male leaders,”<sup>55</sup> women are underrepresented.

When a female leader coexists with a culture with strong norms, there is an inadequate work environment for them to be successful in comparison to male leaders. According to Sylvia Bashevkin, women “feel pressure to conform to existing norms and thus adopt stereotypically masculine perspectives.”<sup>56</sup> Wei Zheng, Ronit Kark and Alyson Meister investigate how women manage gender norms in leadership as women are faced with paradoxes while in a leadership position. Four paradoxes that women find themselves in are: women must be demanding yet caring, authoritative yet participative, advocating for themselves yet serving others, and maintain

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<sup>53</sup> Bashevkin, 2018, “Women as Foreign,” 36.

<sup>54</sup> Toh and Leonardelli, “Cultural Constraints,” 191.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 194

<sup>56</sup> Bashevkin, 2018, “Women as Foreign,” 34.

distance yet be approachable.<sup>57</sup> By having to create a certain personality to fit in the stereotype of what a leader is, women are restricted.

Gendered bias has been intertwined throughout the media, social media, society and more. Since women are underrepresented in most places, there is a bias that women are not enough to fill a leadership position. Women are discriminated against and “the more powerful the role, the less likely a woman is to fill it.”<sup>58</sup> In politics and diplomacy, women endure discrimination through hostile work environments, sexual harassment, stereotypes and micro-aggressions. Women are often discouraged, sabotaged and excluded from applying for high-level positions. Due to the fact that “female leaders are seen as gender norm deviants who threaten the gender status hierarchy,” they receive more backlash from those who are trying to preserve the status quo.<sup>59</sup> Leadership roles entail a sense of agency, for which women are stereotyped as unfit and illegitimate. With the bias that women depend on men, many are unable to see women are independent with agency. When women exhibit agency “(ambition, independence, assertiveness), they are exhibiting masculine competencies.”<sup>60</sup> One of the biggest challenges for women is this gender bias that women are incompetent to be in a leadership position. Not only is this integrated within society, but girls are also taught this growing up, therefore creating this bias within their own beliefs and mind.

There are many IR feminists that discuss the broad reasons why women are discriminated and marginalized in leadership positions. This section looked over the main critiques of mainstream IR through feminist IR as well as challenges women face such as gendered norms and societal biases and gendered discrimination. The following chapter will use firsthand interviews of

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<sup>57</sup> Wei Zheng, Ronit Klark and Alyson Meister, 2019, “How Women Manage the Gendered Norms of Leadership.” *Harvard Business Review*, November 22, 2019, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership>

<sup>58</sup> American Association of University Women, “Barriers and Bias,” 11.

<sup>59</sup> Victoria L. Brescoll, Tyler G. Okimoto, and Andrea C. Vial, 2018, “You’ve Come a Long Way . . . Maybe: How Moral Emotions Trigger Backlash Against Women Leaders,” *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 74 (1), 144-164.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 147

female leaders in high-level positions in non-governmental organizations, government jobs and international institutions to uncover personal experiences of gendered discrimination and shed light on smaller micro-aggressions that main literature does not cover.

### CHAPTER 3: STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES

In order to determine whether women's experiences reflect the hardship academic literature claims, interviews were conducted to gather primary evidence. For my research, I interviewed 16 female leaders in domestic, regional and international organizations. The women are from various organizations such as NGOs, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the OSCE, the U.S. State Department, the United Nations, and others. For the ones that remain anonymous, code names are used: NGO# if a non-government organization, IO# if it is an international institution and GOV# if it is a government job in a country. The women also come from different countries: Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, France, Germany, USA and others.

Out of the 16 interviews, seven chose to be anonymous with two having partial anonymity.<sup>61</sup> For the anonymous interviewees, letters are used instead of names (A, B, C...) with no relation.<sup>62</sup> The choice of anonymity provides evidence that women face discrimination as there was a fear of reprisal such as losing one's job for speaking out against the organization. This itself shows the scale of the problem. The types of positions are ambassadors, directors, heads of offices, founder and/or CEO of NGOs, deputy coordinators, senior advisers, international consultants and more. The interviews were conducted throughout the fall of 2020 and winter of 2021. Most of the interviewees expressed how they do have some sort of privilege, whether it is race, class, sexuality, or nationality. This chapter will cover challenges discovered through interviews demonstrating a common struggle worldwide. The first section will cover different challenges found in the interviews reinforcing what feminist IR scholars claim. The second section uncovers more hidden challenges that are very prominent every day for female leaders but are not discussed as much.

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<sup>61</sup> Partial anonymity means their name or organization will remain anonymous. This was to ensure safety for their jobs as interviews were candid.

<sup>62</sup> Names, descriptions, and information of the interviewees are found in the Appendix.

### 3.1: Different Paths, Same Struggles

Female leaders in international organizations, institutions and nation-states face gendered bias and societal norms that hinder their achievements. For interviewee G, now an international consultant who works with multiple organizations worldwide, she “really didn’t understand the full extent of challenges that women face in the world until I was in a leadership position.”<sup>63</sup> Dr. Sandra Sacchetti explained the obstacles become greater the higher up you go. In diplomacy, “it’s perfectly accepted to be an assistant or a secretary to an ambassador as a woman, and the struggle started really when I wanted to move out of that area.”<sup>64</sup> Prominent struggles highlighted throughout feminist IR literature that was supported through the interviews are gendered norms and visible and hidden biases among women leaders.

Every culture has norms and female leaders encounter new challenges in different countries. Cultural norms have an impact on women leadership.<sup>65</sup> Gendered biases and norms are ingrained into society and have become standardized. In countries where women are foreigners, the country’s norms are in addition to workplace biases. Feminist IR demonstrates that intersectionality plays a role and “for people that work in countries that are not their country of origin, they have this added aspect of intercultural exchange and differing cultures, differing norms, the influence of religion, (etc).”<sup>66</sup> Women are treated differently such as being considered the weaker sex or perceived as incompetent children. Since the *de facto* favors men, treatment is not equal for everybody from the start.<sup>67</sup>

For female leaders, they must challenge dictated gender roles that limit their success.<sup>68</sup> For interviewee A, as a Programme Support and Grants Manager for NGO1 in a developing country, she experiences a traditional society with very strong gender and age norms. Women are treated

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<sup>63</sup> Interviewee G. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, March 8, 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Sandra Sacchetti. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, November 11, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Toh and Leonardelli, “Cultural Constraints.”

<sup>66</sup> Interviewee A. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, September 3, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Christine Fages. Interview by author. Personal interview. In-person, October 27, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, “Feminism.”

as more fragile and in need of more protection due to the possible inability of defending self. Upon arrival, she was instructed to not take taxis for two months for ‘security’ reasons with no other way to get around; however, she claimed, “I’m very confident that a male (intern) would not have been asked to avoid taking taxis for two months.”<sup>69</sup> As described by J. Ann Tickner, women tend to be more equated with peace; therefore, perceived as unable to defend themselves.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, female leaders are often thought of as gender deviants.<sup>71</sup> Joanna Sherman, the director of Bond Street Theater (BST), faces gendered norms when her organization goes into foreign countries. In a country such as Pakistan or Afghanistan, male and females are separated (female living rooms and male living rooms) and Joanna stated that she was able to go into both rooms as “foreign women are kind of a third sex ... we were kind of male-ish and kind of female-ish.”<sup>72</sup> The casual ease shown between foreign men and women is sometimes seen as a threat to cultural norms but, just as often, it provides an example that men and women can be friends and equals.

In some countries, women are treated as incompetent children instead of giving them the respect they deserve.<sup>73</sup> In Azerbaijan, where interviewee E is from and works, the norms are very strict. She states discrimination is not only based on gender as “they don’t see young people, especially young woman, as competent and someone who can do the work. So, they approach you in a way that you’re still a kid.”<sup>74</sup> Interviewee E works for the Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines (AzCBL), a civil society organization, where she is a Youth Advocate. With Azerbaijan, there are strict gender and cultural norms where women are expected to be in the field of education or health and not work in security, the military, or humanitarian disarmament. Since working in these fields “is not something that women can do and should do, this makes people have lack of

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<sup>69</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, “Feminism in Foreign Policy,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Brescoll et al., “You’ve Come a Long Way.”

<sup>72</sup> Joanna Sherman. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, November 13, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Brescoll et al., “You’ve Come a Long Way.”

<sup>74</sup> Interviewee E. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, February 22, 2021.



interest and lack of trust in your work.”<sup>75</sup> Gendered norms and biases limit women’s success in the workplace; and another aspect of gendered limitations is gendered language.

Language can be gendered in diplomatic organizations.<sup>76</sup> By using gendered language, female leaders lose authority and respect from subordinates and colleagues. Ambassador Christine Fages, the French Ambassador to the OSCE, stated that there is gendered language in organizations where women are treated as younger if they raise their voice to create authority.<sup>77</sup> Women leaders must decide which sector they will go into as the language is gendered where the divide between public and private sector plays a huge role. As illustrated by Sylvie Bashevkin, the women’s sphere is outlined as the private sphere.<sup>78</sup> If a female leader is a good professional (public), society dictates she must not be a good woman (private: wife, mother, etc).<sup>79</sup> Women must be careful and extra calm in order not to be labeled as hysteric, a child or even as a girl. When Dr. Sacchetti went into her first leadership position, she was referred to as ‘the girl’ behind her back even though she was in her late 30s.<sup>80</sup>

A huge challenge feminist IR scholars discuss is the security sector becoming masculinized, where men dominate the discussions and field. For those working in diplomatic positions, the ‘manly’ topics include security, the military, disarmament, etc., whereas the female topics tend to be more peacekeeping and gender issues. The OSCE Ambassador of Finland, Ambassador Päivi Laivola de Rosière, stated that when the dialogue is about ‘manly’ topics, men tend to take over the discussions. Ambassador Laivola de Rosière mentioned that since spring 2020 there was a “women in first dimension (politico-military issues) group because that area is man-dominated” to incorporate female expertise e.g., by creating a roster of female expert speakers.<sup>81</sup> In institutions

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<sup>75</sup> Interviewee E.

<sup>76</sup> Cohn, “Sex and Death.”

<sup>77</sup> Fages.

<sup>78</sup> Bashevkin, 2018, “Women as Foreign.”

<sup>79</sup> Fages.

<sup>80</sup> Sacchetti.

<sup>81</sup> Päivi Laivola de Rosiere. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, February 8, 2021

such as the United Nations, diplomatic talks were typically male-led and there was difficulty inserting a female perspective; however, the dynamics have changed over the years.<sup>82</sup> Cherith Norman-Chalet, during the time of the interview, worked for the U.S. State Department in the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. As an ambassador in the United Nations, one is in a room with ambassadors talking about all topics, especially security, politics, economics, etc. Since there are a lot of male-centric practices, men typically try to control the narrative as that has been the norm.<sup>83</sup> She pointed out that with more females in leadership roles, the dynamics shifted creating a different tone in negotiations. This reflects arguments made by feminist IR scholars that women are excluded in security decision-making processes.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to being excluded, women tend to get assigned secretarial work and omitted from decision-making processes, especially in the security sector.<sup>85</sup> Interviewee D commented she gets assigned secretarial work even though she is a chief of mission. Her current organization, IO2, corresponds with the UN where she has experienced a senior UN colleague comment about her age as well as assigning her secretarial work. Despite being a chief of mission where she does “not have to edit papers or collect comments from mid-level staff at other agencies,” men allocate administrative work and remark about her gender and age.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2: Hidden Injustices

This section highlights the challenges women face that are more hidden and not in the mainstream media. The interviews showed struggles women face that may be overlooked or not frequently talked about.

Almost all women have experienced mansplaining or being overlooked. For women in leadership positions, they are experts in their fields. They have the knowledge and experience

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<sup>82</sup> Cherith Norman-Chalet. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, November 10, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Norman-Chalet.

<sup>84</sup> Smith; Holvikivi; Mobekk; and Labonte and Curry.

<sup>85</sup> Mobekk, “Gender, Women and Security.”

<sup>86</sup> Interviewee D. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, February 17, 2021.

without the need for someone explaining (mansplaining) typical things to them, especially a man. Interviewee C works for a national media organization (GOV1), where she is the Chief of a Team of about 25 Reporters/Editors. She explains that mansplaining happens every day in meetings. Even when C has approached her boss to tell him, the next day it happens again as if it was not addressed.<sup>87</sup> Julia Stanley worked for the U.S State Department as a Foreign Service Specialist- a General Services Officer before retiring. When asked if she had been mansplained to before, she stated “I think that I've had some of that, but I've also been blessed that I have an engineering background.”<sup>88</sup> With experience in male-dominated fields such as engineering as well as serving in the military, Julia was able to gain more authority and respect from her male peers. She was able to lead meetings and ask direct questions where no man explained the concept to her.

The notion of being overlooked is common for women but not spoken enough about. Overlooked is defined in this research as men not recognizing a woman's authority, credibility, or work. Being overlooked devalues women leaders as they are not getting the recognition deserved. Interviewee B, who is a senior adviser in an international organization, has come across “where you say something in a meeting, (and) no one acknowledges it. Then five minutes later a guy says the same thing and they've said, ‘oh what a great idea’.”<sup>89</sup> Ambassador Laivola de Rosière explained one instance where she was working as a young diplomat with own responsibilities in an office with only men and one day many of them were traveling for work. When asked by a senior man (in superior posting) where her colleagues were, and responded they were away, he stated “OK. So, then there is nobody here’ and he left. I never forget that I was ‘OK, I didn't exist for him’.”<sup>90</sup> Even though she had the same expertise, due to the fact she was a female, he overlooked her despite knowing her. Julia explained “there's one guy that had told my boss that he was looking

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<sup>87</sup> Interviewee C. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, November 10, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Julia Stanley. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, September 15, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Interviewee B. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, October 23, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Laivola de Rosiere.

forward to getting rid of me as soon as he could. One day he came over to me and said, ‘you’ve really been very successful’, and I said I always was.”<sup>91</sup> Women are constantly overlooked in their leadership position. A different form of being overlooked is belittling. Dr. Colleen Thouez, who works for the Open Society Foundations as the Director of the Welcoming and Inclusive Cities, stated in meetings with a male supervisor, women are continuously belittled. The expression being, “Oh, you’re right, you’re right,” for which she explained it as the final arbiter on whether a female is right or wrong regardless of credentials.<sup>92</sup> By having that final say, men challenge women’s expertise and experience.

Women get overlooked in promotions as well as job applications. When a man and a woman are up for the same position, the man tends to get the job due to potential rather than experience. Potential, in this instance, refers to the possibility of success for the male worker: he has the potential to gain the skills and become successful rather than having the skills like most qualified women possess. Interviewee A gave an example of where one boss most likely got hired due to his potential, rather than a qualified woman who worked in the relevant region for 15 years with knowledge of the language. Even though there is no concrete evidence about discrimination, the man never worked in the region and did not speak the language, but probably was hired due to the hiring employer potentially seeing himself in the candidate, which the hiring manager shared at one point. Interviewee A said “I think he was rewarded based on his potential. He’s a very strong team member and he’s good in the role - that’s not to say that he shouldn’t have gotten the job, but I do not think a woman in the same position would have been given the role.”<sup>93</sup> Cherith Norman-Chalet agreed that “it’s the potential ... (whereas) for us, you have to go even deeper and farther to prove that you’re qualified.”<sup>94</sup> Interviewee F works as a director in an international

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<sup>91</sup> Stanley.

<sup>92</sup> Colleen Thouez. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, March 17, 2021.

<sup>93</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>94</sup> Norman-Chalet.

organization and argued that there is a “bias in terms of underestimating our female qualities to be highly professional. We are still perceived as somebody who is used to working twice as hard as men to bring the same results.”<sup>95</sup> By getting constantly overlooked, women are labeled as incompetent, when in reality they put in twice the effort.

One struggle that was prominent in the interviews is discrimination and limitation by other women. Society pits women against women in films, novels, music, etc and women leaders have experienced other women being a big obstacle for them. Even though she did have male supervisors that did not respect her, interviewee D described that it was not men that were her biggest challenge but the older females because they “challenged my authority by gossiping about how they can't report to someone that's so much younger- telling me how to do my job.”<sup>96</sup> Interviewee D's opinion is that females should support females; however, the “mean-girl attitude is definitely still prevalent and it's really hard to address.”<sup>97</sup> To her, this is much more difficult to address than dealing with difficult men.

For some women, they prefer to utilize men's dominance and find success through male allies. Interviewee G experienced a female leader that preferred to be in a mainly male workplace because “she felt like she was stronger and more powerful if she had a man at her side than a woman.”<sup>98</sup> Interviewee G faced female supervisors who were obstacles in her path as they discouraged, blocked, and mistreated not only her, but most of their employees. The “dynamics between women are not always easy. I don't know if it's just hundreds of thousands of years of women playing second fiddle and not being in positions of leadership. Just in reality, there are not enough women who support each other, and it's not by accident.”<sup>99</sup> When women isolate

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<sup>95</sup> Interviewee F. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, March 5, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Interviewee D.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Interviewee G.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

themselves from the other females in their office, it hardens the concept that female leadership is not achievable without men.

Discouragement comes in all types of forms for women in leadership. One form of discouragement is self-discouragement. A majority of women have an internal bias within arguing that they are not good enough for their position. Despite having the credibility, experience and knowledge, women believe they are an imposter in their job position. There is an instilled bias in women that they are not good enough for their job and if they own their success, it is bragging. It is the “internal struggles that a woman creates for herself that are the hardest ones to actually overcome.”<sup>100</sup> Elmira Bayrasli explains that even when women create an NGO or become a leader, a “lot of them still question ‘am I the right person to be here? Do I deserve this? Am I good enough?’ And I think that’s the hardest struggle.”<sup>101</sup> Women experience imposter syndrome as they do not believe they are in the correct job placement, position, or career. Discouragement is also more subtle now than it was years ago, Ambassador Fages exclaimed. The job requirements are different as there is hinting and the expression: ‘are you sure?’ to the women that apply.<sup>102</sup> By asking this question, women are discouraged from applying to leadership positions, and if in one, they may feel like an imposter.

In addition to feeling like an imposter, women feel the pressure of conforming to a certain way female leaders must behave. Wei Zheng et al. described different paradoxes women have (authoritative but participative, demanding yet caring, etc). There is pressure for women to behave, in addition to a leader, as a mother figure for the office, which limits them. It also discourages them from being their true self and achieving the most they can do. Dr. Sacchetti explains that

all women are struggling to get rid of that idea that the female leader must be perfect. Men can just be leaders and they have good features and bad features, and they can make good decisions and bad decisions, and that's just accepted. But women have so much scrutiny and pressure to be perfect and perform extremely well, because they act on behalf of all the women.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Bayrasli.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Fages.

<sup>103</sup> Sacchetti.

Since women are in the minority, there are limited examples for women in leadership and many may rely on masculine leadership qualities. With an underrepresentation of female leaders, there is a lack of recognition of the success of female leaders.

There is a general shortage of recognition for female leadership. Women are taught to be humble and not speak about achievements as it is perceived as boastful and conceited. Consequently, many women do not share their success nor celebrate each other's hard work. This is a huge challenge as "there is an under recording of accomplishments of women by women."<sup>104</sup> Due to the way women are raised, they are less motivated to own and speak about their own achievements, successes and wins. Dr. Thouez uses language such as "*I created, I influenced, I brought*" to make her achievements shine through, and people have bristled at such terms not used to women owning their wins.<sup>105</sup> Interviewee D agreed that "women aren't as good at accurately promoting themselves."<sup>106</sup> By not recognizing one's hard work, there is an underrepresentation of women's success in leadership.

There are numerous challenges and barriers for women in leadership. Feminist IR scholars argue there are gendered and cultural norms and biases for female leaders as well as gendered language, masculinized sectors and an absence of women in decision-making processes. The first section looked at typical challenges by feminist IR scholars, and the second section investigated more hidden struggles that women face every day but are not spoken about. Chapter Four covers the actions women take to counter these challenges.

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<sup>104</sup> Thouez.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Interviewee D.

## CHAPTER 4: THE WAYS IN WHICH WOMEN FIGHT BACK

While feminist IR literature examines the struggles and challenges women encounter in leadership, few discuss the actions women take to counteract the gendered discrimination. In the interviews conducted, the interviewees not only explained how they face gendered discrimination but the things they do that helps overcome it. Chapter Four demonstrates that women are more than capable and competent as they can do their job in addition to combatting these challenges.

Women all over the world have developed different strategies in their efforts to reduce and diminish gendered discrimination in the workplace. To counter gendered challenges, women “need to be analytical, strategic. To do it gently but stubbornly ... We need to be more daring, innovative and creative in our approaches to professional issues.”<sup>107</sup> One common theme found in the interviews was (unofficial) female mentors and role models. Although not an official mentor, Interviewee F claimed, “I am mentoring each and every moment in my managerial career, even for my female colleagues.”<sup>108</sup> Since there is an underrepresentation of women in leadership, there is an inadequate amount of female role models. Interviewee C agreed, affirming female mentors are valuable.<sup>109</sup> By either having a mentor or being one, women feel encouraged and stronger because they know they are not alone. For Julia Stanley, mentoring and empowering young women are a priority. Throughout her career, she would always “try to empower young women that helped me.”<sup>110</sup> By giving young women resources to be independent and safe, they become strong and confident. Dr. Rebecca Mark, the Director of the Institute for Women’s Leadership at Rutgers University, is an unofficial mentor herself as she encourages her students, colleagues, and young women around her.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Interviewee F.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Interviewee C.

<sup>110</sup> Stanley.

<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Mark. Interview by author. Personal interview. Zoom, October 29, 2020.



Even being an informal role model helps provide representation of strong women in leadership. For interviewee G, “I’m conscious that I’m a woman, so I try to behave in such a way that to the outside world, I could be a role model at the same time.”<sup>112</sup> Providing a role model for younger women allows them to see representation. Dr. Thouez recognizes that “there’s a lot of work to be done with girls to encourage them, to acknowledge their accomplishments, to be proud of them, to vocalize them to support other girls.”<sup>113</sup> By allowing women to embrace themselves and the “defiant leader they are,”<sup>114</sup> young women can utilize resources given to them by older females with experience.

By creating support groups, women have found allies in their workplace. Cherith Norman-Chalet emphasizes the importance of support, whether it is formal and informal, networking, mentoring, etc. She states one fundamental countermeasure is to “create informal support groups. Whether it’s the women DPR’s (Deputy Permanent Representative) or the women PR’s and making sure that we all can support each other in the different meetings.”<sup>115</sup> Just referencing another woman’s speech, such as in a meeting in the General Assembly, has an impact in enhancing their comments and role which empowers them. Interviewee B described how “one of my close colleagues and I decided we were going to create a group of women to try to advocate for paying attention to all of this and doing something.”<sup>116</sup> They picked women who represented all departments and different staffing levels, such as general support services to directors to bring a more diverse and holistic group. The group offers advice to senior management, serving as a sounding board and advocate for new policies and initiatives, and as an accountability mechanism to help ensure that policies are implemented effectively.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Interviewee G.

<sup>113</sup> Thouez.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Norman-Chalet.

<sup>116</sup> Interviewee B.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Since women are pitted against each other in society, it is important to have women back each other in the workplace. For Dr. Thouez, “I support a new generation of women leaders in ways that I would have wanted to be supported.”<sup>118</sup> By creating an ‘alliance’ with other women in the office, it helps ensure women get encouragement and heard. Dr. Sacchetti agrees that a female support system is a great way to achieve success. To help women, some best ways include “amplifying women in meetings, repeating what they said and giving them credit for what they said. Talking positively about other women and their achievements. Supporting, referring, and recommending women for jobs.”<sup>119</sup> Interviewee F claims “informal networking is just one of the most efficient things to be done in terms of really struggling for gender equality and gender mainstreaming.”<sup>120</sup> Women allies help lift women up and encourage them. In addition to a female support system, women have found male allies useful. Having allies from both men and women help female leaders break through the barriers.<sup>121</sup>

Another important action women recognize is speaking up. While this may seem basic and fundamental, since women are often overlooked, speaking up is a challenge to receive respect and acknowledgement. In life there are two choices: stay silent or speak up. Choosing the latter, Ambassador Fages says it is important to set an example for other women as women are the priority.<sup>122</sup> For interviewee C, it is important to speak up and make your point. For the young ladies she hires and coaches, “I want to encourage them to take part, to speak more openly, to make clear their critiques; if they have critique, we have to even criticize our (boss).”<sup>123</sup> Elmira Bayrasli stated “I think that's one of the reasons that people do take me seriously. They know that if they don't treat me with respect and they're not careful about how they're behaving with me, I will say

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<sup>118</sup> Thouez.

<sup>119</sup> Sacchetti.

<sup>120</sup> Interviewee F.

<sup>121</sup> Interviewee D; Interviewee B.

<sup>122</sup> Fages.

<sup>123</sup> Interviewee C.

something about it because I'm not shy about it.”<sup>124</sup> Speaking up not only lets the offender aware of the situation but allows the women to understand the commonality of discrimination. Due to gendered language and actions becoming a norm and a habit for many, by putting a stop to it, female leaders demand respect and authority.

Smaller, micro-level, actions help produce a domino effect that inspires women in the workplace. In Joanna Sherman's organization, they “always are pulling the girls forward and having them have more of a place and feeling free to speak out in a group.”<sup>125</sup> Interviewee D described the hardship of speaking out to a boss as they have more authority than you. When she called one of her supervisors out, there became a strain in their work relationship. She explained that

People approached me and said, ‘he's treating you so poorly because you're a young female’. I had a private meeting with him, and I alluded to his behavior that was sexist, and he did not like that. Then it kind of started into him yelling at me and then me really crying. So, it's definitely harder with supervisors.<sup>126</sup>

There is a strong power dynamic between bosses/supervisors and female staff, especially when the female is also in a leadership position. Interviewee G experienced this power dynamic when speaking up as well. In a previous job at a high-level meeting, there was a discussion of the future boss with only men in the room, besides her and a woman taking notes. The men kept referring to the future boss with male pronouns, disregarding the possibility that a woman may get hired. Interviewee G spoke out saying ‘or her’ to acknowledge that option and faced backlash from most of the men in the room.<sup>127</sup> However, by just saying those two words, she spoke up for women. Speaking up helps women stand up for each other and women leaders found this one of the most successful tools.<sup>128</sup>

The interviewees explained individual things they do that allow them to see the impact of their actions. Each female leader has found her own way in facing gendered comments or actions.

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<sup>124</sup> Bayrasli.

<sup>125</sup> Sherman.

<sup>126</sup> Interviewee D.

<sup>127</sup> Interviewee G.

<sup>128</sup> Laivola de Rosiere; Mark.

When approached with a sexist comment, Ambassador Fages does not laugh it off. Instead, she asks for clarification of the joke allowing the commentor to realize it is not a joke but rather degrading.<sup>129</sup> For interviewee A, it is the opposite. In a country with strict gender norms, “humor is a very important part of it. And people joke a lot. It's a very, very joking type of culture, and (correcting people) has to be in a joking way, especially if it's men who are above me in the hierarchy.”<sup>130</sup> She has found success by correcting them but making it a bit of a joke. Interviewee B agrees, stating “a lot of times the most effective way to do that sort of thing is to try to do it with humor.”<sup>131</sup> Women leaders adjust their countermeasures based on their job, geographic location and surrounding.

Another effective method is expanding their network by sending gratitude's to those who have helped. Elmira Bayrasli takes the time “sending out thank you's and acknowledging when someone's done something.”<sup>132</sup> By recognizing someone's effort, whether it is a woman's work or men creating a space for women, one expands their network and connections. Interviewee B “always thank(s) whoever it was and that's for men and women, but I think that's especially important to do for women.”<sup>133</sup> Thanking someone goes a long way for female leaders. As mentioned earlier, there is an under recording of women's accomplishment by women.<sup>134</sup> To combat the struggle of women not acknowledging their own successes, interviewee D has pushed her female national staff to write about their hard work. They tend to write “simple things like ‘I achieved my goals this year’, and I'll state, ‘no, you did a great job, I'm rejecting this. Explain to me how you did a good job, because I know you did so many amazing things’.”<sup>135</sup> She motivates them to apply to jobs, promote themselves and acknowledge their success.

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<sup>129</sup> Fages.

<sup>130</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>131</sup> Interviewee B.

<sup>132</sup> Bayrasli.

<sup>133</sup> Interviewee B.

<sup>134</sup> Thouez.

<sup>135</sup> Interviewee D.

With women constantly being overlooked and disregarded, women find unique solutions and an applicable one is finding a seat at the table. By making oneself seen, women are able to get their expertise across in discussions. Interviewee A makes sure she “always sit(s) at the table. I go to the meeting early to make sure that I am at the table, and I make one of the female, at least one of the female interns, join me.”<sup>136</sup> In meetings men typically dominate the discussions, so participating in meetings is something female leaders must do to ensure they are heard and respected. Ambassador Laivola de Rosière explains that something she does to counter challenges such as misrepresentation is making some online actions such as for “women peace and security issues, we've done e.g., some small films that women are active also in that field.”<sup>137</sup> For example, if there is an anniversary or event, they have all the female ambassadors create a slogan and they stitch it into a video and put it on Twitter. Or make a Tweet campaign.<sup>138</sup> An action Dr. Rebecca Mark takes is determining the gender balancing in meetings. She clocks every meeting she attends to measure how many minutes the men speak versus the women. She notes it tends to be 70/30 men speaking where it needs to be 50/50.<sup>139</sup>

Women have different approaches to every situation. Women in international institutions, non-government organizations, and state jobs all have methods that help them succeed. As feminist IR scholars argue, women are often disregarded and invisible in international relations as well as the diplomatic world.<sup>140</sup> There are challenges of organizing a fight back against gender discrimination as women have the additional task of overcoming struggles in addition to their work. By breaking the gendered barrier and countering challenges, women fight for their right in the world.

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<sup>136</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>137</sup> Laivola de Rosiere.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Mark.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, “Feminism.”

## CONCLUSION

By interviewing various women in high-level positions, one can see even after breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ and receive a leadership position, women endure gendered challenges. By facing gendered discrimination, women are limited. It is harder to receive respect, authority, promotions, success and even allies. Feminist IR scholars argue that international relations is gender blind as women are often excluded.<sup>141</sup> By intertwining feminism with international relations, it challenges the concept of absence of women in decision-making processes as well as in leadership. Feminist IR was utilized in this research to find what challenges women endure in not only international relations discourse but the diplomatic world.

The research question, whether women’s experiences provide evidence on the hardship and challenges, and if faced with gendered and societal norms in leadership roles, how they overcome gender discrimination while in a leadership position, is answered through interviewing 16 female leaders in different organizations. By discourse analysis of the interviews, evidence was found that female leaders experience gendered hardship despite being in an authoritative position. Through interviewing female leaders from various organizations, different struggles came to light. Gendered cultural and societal norms and biases affect women everywhere: foreign countries, home countries and workplaces. The international relations and diplomacy discourse is masculinized, especially the security sector, where women become objectified, invisible and excluded.

In addition to challenges feminist IR scholars argue, the interviews uncovered more hidden injustices. Women explained how they are often mansplained and overlooked whether it is in a meeting, or in the general workplace. Furthermore, women are often limited by other women. Many have found their biggest obstacle comes not from men, but other women as some women

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<sup>141</sup> Smith, “Feminism.”

believe the best way to get ahead is having men by their side and not supporting other women. Imposter syndrome was discovered throughout the empirical research as there is an instilled bias within women that they are not good enough despite having the credentials, experience and knowledge. Women in leadership experience numerous challenges daily despite being in a leadership position.

Addressing the second part of the research question, what actions they take to overcome gendered bias, shows women create unique measures that help counter this discrimination. Common mechanisms are informal female alliances, mentors and role models. Whether it is having a women support system, or encouraging women, they have found one of the best tools for success is having each other's backs. Some stated male allies help tremendously as well. Speaking up is another small but effective action that women in leadership need to use to gain a voice, authority and respect. Women found small micro-level countermeasures more effective because the leaders can see their impact in the workplace.

For a more thorough analysis, one should include more voices of minority women to inquire the differences between races, ethnicity, nationality, and more. Another dimension of this research could be further integrating other genders struggles via work dynamics. Additionally, further research would require a wider network including women from organizations in different regions around the world. However, this research contributes to the debate on the struggles for female leaders in addition to providing a comprehensive collection of firsthand experiences. Furthermore, it analyzes the (in)visible challenges and countermeasures on a more micro-level scale, finding the smaller more hidden hardships. Ultimately, these women's voices demonstrate a worldwide commonality of hardship.

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES

### Elmira Bayrasli

*Organization:* Foreign Policy Interrupted

*Position:* CEO and Co-Founder

*Description:* Created a non-government organization that focuses on female experts in foreign policy. FPI provides a platform for journalists to find female foreign policy experts through panels, workshops, weekly newsletters, and databases. Elmira is the author of the book 'From the Other Side of The World: Extraordinary Entrepreneurs, Unlikely Places.' Elmira is also Director of Bard Globalization and International Affairs Program for Bard College, NY.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* February 15, 2021

### Ambassador Christine Fages

*Organization:* Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe

*Position:* Ambassador, representative of France to the OSCE

*Description:* Ambassador Fages has been the French Ambassador to OSCE for just under two years. Before, she worked in the French Ministry for 30 years.

*Type of Interview:* In-person Interview

*Interview Date:* October 27, 2020

### Ambassador Päivi Laivola de Rosière

*Organization:* Ministry for Foreign Affairs / Embassy of Finland in Vienna

*Position:* OSCE Ambassador of Finland

*Description:* Became Ambassador in 2017 and heads the Finnish OSCE delegation. Worked in the Foreign Ministry for 35 years, with first posting in the disarmament office.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* February 8, 2021

### Dr. Rebecca Mark, PhD

*Organization:* Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University

*Position:* Director

*Description:* IWL is a consortium of 10 units that is dedicated to the study of women and gender and to the promotion of women's leadership locally, nationally, and globally. Started in January 2020 as director.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* October 29, 2020

### Cherith Norman-Chalet

*Organization during interview:* US Mission to United Nations (USUN), U.S. State Department

*Position held during interview:* Deputy Permanent Representative and Ambassador for United Nations Management and Reform, USUN.

*Position as of March 2021:* Assistant Secretary for General Assembly and Conference Management; United Nations

*Description:* In the position at the USUN, she led the US Mission to the UN's Management and Reform Section, serving primarily in UN Fifth Committee as the US Representative.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* November 10, 2020



Dr. Sandra Sacchetti, PhD

*Position:* International Consultant

*Former Organization:* Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe

*Former Position:* Head of External Cooperation

*Description:* Worked in the OSCE for 10 years where her last position was the Head of External Cooperation in the Office of the Secretary General. She was responsible for external relations of the chairmanship and the Secretary-General and the organization at large with other IO's and partner countries. Her first position was in the Luxembourg delegation to the OSCE as the assistant to an ambassador.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* November 11, 2020

Joanna Sherman

*Organization:* Bond Street Theater

*Position:* Founder and Director

*Description:* She founded a non-government organization which initiates theatre-based projects for conflict resolutions around the world. BST uses theater to carry information, making it accessible to everyone –those without electricity, access to media, or to women who are isolated by tradition, location, or incarceration. Has done projects in Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Myanmar, and others. BST travels to places where there are extreme situations (repressive military dictatorship, refugee camps, hurricanes, war, and more). They collaborate with local groups in these countries.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* November 13, 2020

Julia Stanley (Retired)

*Organization:* U.S. State Department

*Position:* Foreign Service Specialist

*Description:* Worked as the Head of the General Service Office in Ljubljana, Slovenia at the US Embassy. Served in the military before entering the foreign service with a background in engineering. In Slovenia, her job was service-oriented as it was the operations and logistics support for the embassy. Her first job in the US State Department was in the Embassy in Moscow, under a contract.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* September 15, 2020

Dr. Colleen Thouez, PhD

*Organization:* Open Society Foundations (OSF)

*Position:* Director of Welcoming and Inclusive Cities

*Former Organization:* United Nations, UNITAR

*Description:* Dr. Thouez received her PhD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Medford Massachusetts at the age of 27 in migration governance, and immediately started working with UNHCR. There she worked in the evaluation and policy analysis unit and the department of international protection, where she authored the CISCONF evaluation, which was a five-year evaluation of UNHCR, IOM and OSCE support to post-Soviet states in advancing migration and refugee support and protection and authored the legal guidelines for minimum standards regarding detention practices for asylum seekers at European points of entry. She pursued a post-doctoral fellowship in Eastern Europe focusing on the (former) Debrecen refugee camp in eastern Hungary, with an IREX post-doctoral grant from the United States. Dr. Thouez joined the UN in 1999. She served as deputy director for policy research on the UN's first Global

Commission on International Migration in 2003. The following year, she was appointed to lead the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Office in New York. In this D-1 position, she was responsible for the training of the diplomats at all 193 missions. She left the UN in 2010 to focus on elevating the role of cities and mayors in advancing new approaches to migration governance. In 2013, with the World Bank and IOM, Dr. Thouez launched the Mayoral Forum which ultimately led to the creation of the Mayors Mechanism – the first mayors advocacy arm within the inter-state system. When she joined OSF as the inaugural director of its Welcoming and Inclusive Cities Division in 2018, she founded the Mayors Migration Council in 2019. She currently oversees a portfolio of work focused on strengthening city leadership on transnational challenges – that totals \$60M.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* March 17, 2021

#### Interviewee A

*Organization:* NGO1

*Position:* Programme Support and Grants Manager

*Description:* Works for an international non-governmental, humanitarian aid organization in a foreign developing country. She first arrived in her organization as an intern, transitioned to full-time in March 2020, and started her current role in April 2021. She has four main areas that she focuses on in her job. First in program development as she research, writes, and supports proposals. Second is grants management and reporting, for which coordinates, writes, and leads most donor reporting requirements. Third is program management, which includes monitoring and evaluating program performance as well as conducting assessments. Fourth is gender and inclusion technical support. This includes training workshops as well as operational support (hiring, workplace practices).

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* September 3, 2020

#### Interviewee B:

*Organization:* IO1

*Position:* Senior Adviser

*Description:* Works for an international organization with a focus on security. She provides political advice to head of organization as well as writes speeches and talking points for the boss. In addition to heading the policy team, she facilitates internal cooperation within her department and with other departments. Interviewee B has been at this job for roughly 8 years.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* October 23, 2020

#### Interviewee C:

*Organization:* GOV1

*Position:* Chief of a Team of about 25 Reporters/Editors

*Description:* National media organization. She works for a country's media service where she focuses on politics. She has worked alongside politicians, journalists and more.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* November 10, 2020

#### Interviewee D:

*Organization:* IO2

*Position:* Chief of Mission

*Past Organization:* United Nations

*Description:* The organization, at the time of the interview, is an international organization that works with refugees. She has worked in her career in an NGO, lobbying advocacy groups in DC and the U.S State Department in different countries worldwide (mostly in Africa). She is currently working in an organization in the South-East Asian region.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* February 17, 2021

#### Interviewee E:

*Organization:* Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines

*Position:* Youth Advocate

*Description:* Works for a non-government civil society organization to ban landmines in countries. As a Youth Advocate, she implements small scale local projects to carry out mine victim assistance and risk education. Moreover, she works closely with decision-makers, civil society, and media to help Azerbaijan accede to the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) and Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). Interviewee E works with Azerbaijan and Geneva allowing her to face different cultural norms. As Azerbaijan has strict gender norms, Geneva incorporates gender equality and intersectionality into their work.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* February 22, 2021

#### Interviewee F:

*Organization:* IO3

*Position:* Director

*Description:* Works for an international organization with a focus on security. Her title is Ambassador, and she focuses on transnational threats in her sector. In her career, she has worked with international organizations such the UN, and OSCE, the Foreign Ministry, as well as been Ambassador for her country in numerous places.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* March 5, 2021

#### Interviewee G:

*Occupation/Position:* Consultant

*Former Organization:* Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe

*Former Position:* Deputy Coordinator

*Description:* In addition to being an international consultant, Interviewee G is the President of a Rotary Club (as of July 2021) and involved with female-led NGOs.

*Type of Interview:* Zoom Interview

*Interview Date:* March 8, 2021

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