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Glass Domes and Lucky Breaks: A Study of Gendered Dynamics in Portuguese Diplomacy

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Executive Summary

The 1974 Revolution that ended over 40 years of authorianism in Portugal brought about the deletion of the male gender as a prerequisite to access the diplomatic career (MUD@R 2023). Despite these milestones, 50 years later women still represent only 32% of Portugal's diplomatic corps, their access has diminished in the last 10 years, and they still have a slower career progression compared to men (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 6, 17–18).

This research investigates the challenges faced by female diplomats and their perceptions of institutional change and impact. Through eight in-depth interviews with Portuguese women diplomats and an analysis of literature on diplomacy and gender, feminist institutionalism, and gendered organizations, this study seeks to highlight women's experiences and deconstruct "the silence of gender relations" in institutions (Kronsell 2006, 108).

This study identifies three main challenges: balancing private and professional life in an international career, leading to a 'glass dome' effect; gendered norms and hierarchies resulting in remedial work (Gherardi and Poggio 2001); and the invisibility of gendered behaviors and equality policies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It concludes with insights from interviewees on priorities for gender equality and their roles in fostering institutional change, including perspectives on the newly established Portuguese Women's Diplomatic Network, MUD@R. This exploratory work aims to map potential issues and avenues for further analysis and policy research, contributing to the broader literature on gender and diplomacy.

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Maria Ruiz, candidate for Master of Arts in International Public Affairs, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research.

All sources have been properly credited in the text, notes, and the bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. Furthermore, I declare that no part of this thesis has been generated using artificial intelligence (ChatGPT).

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form as coursework for credits or to another institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Introduction

The "carnation revolution" of 1974 put an end to more than 40 years of authoritarianism in Portugal. With it, came the deletion of gender as a prerequisite for accessing the diplomatic career (MUD@R 2023). In 1975, the first women were selected to be a part of the diplomatic corps, and by 1998, the first woman had become the first full-fledged Ambassador, to Windhoek in Namibia (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 1).

Almost 50 years later, women still only make up 32% of all diplomatic corps in Portugal (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 6). Furthermore, the past decade bears witness to a decrease in women accessing the diplomatic career, and they are promoted less and later than their male counterparts (2023, 17–18).

In this work, I aim to explore the challenges faced by women performing diplomatic work, and inquire on their own perceptions on institutional change and views on their own impact in this change. To achieve this, I have conducted 8 in-depth interviews with Portuguese women diplomats – operating in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), in their internal and external services –, and utilized operational concepts from the literature on diplomacy and gender to guide my analysis, interpreting them with the aid of theoretical concepts on gendered organizations.

Through in-depth interviews, I aim to go beyond the numbers, thus contributing to the wider literature on gender and diplomacy, taking the case of Portugal, as one of the latest additions to the list of countries to allow women to perform diplomatic work for the first time (Aggestam and Towns 2019, 14–15; Demel 2020; Podgorny and Alves 2023). This makes the country an interesting case study for the challenges that remain for gender equality policies in institutions

and how these challenges may be surpassed or resisted. Furthermore, qualitative studies on women's perceptions inhabiting the gendered organization of diplomacy are scarce, and, to my knowledge, non-existent in Portugal.

Through this research, I have identified three main thematic areas regarding the challenges of women in diplomacy. Firstly, the difficulties of conciliation of private and professional life in an international career, that, coupled with a progression path in which placement in visible posts is key, might lead to a dynamic which I name the 'glass dome', combining the effects of the glass ceiling and glass border. Secondly, the prevalence of gendered norms and hierarchies in social situations that might be leading women to perform remedial work in the institution. And finally, the invisibility of gendered behaviors and gender equality policies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lastly, one chapter is dedicated to ideas on change in the institution, specifically what the interviewees believed to be the main priorities for change on gender equality, what they perceived to be their own roles in this transformation and their thoughts on the recently established MUD@R – the Portuguese Women's Diplomatic Network.

Literature Review

Gender and Gendered Organizations

The first step in exploring the challenges and the ways in which transformation is possible in institutions, is to define what is meant in this study by gender. After all, if one believes that distinctions based on sex are biologically determined, what space might there be for change? In this, I join Scott (1986, 1053) in rejecting such a proposition, and instead defining gender as the "social organization of the relationship between the sexes". This definition of gender rests on two key characteristics: the socially constructed nature of sex-based differences and a locus on relational aspects (Scott 1986, 1054).

Gendered organizations and institutions have largely been theorized about throughout the years. In one of the earliest and most widely cited contributions, Acker (1990) defines a gendered organization as one where patterns of action, vantage and disadvantage and identity are set along the lines of gender differences (1990, 145), leading to inequalities in income, images, identity and the segregation of work (Acker 1990, 140).

These inequalities become particularly difficult to overturn, as they are inscribed in the very fabric of the organization, starting with the ways in which the unit of work – a job – is conceived as (Acker 1990, 149). Acker theorizes on the conception of a job, which is thought of as something neutral and separated from any one person, or, disembodied (1990, 149). This disembodiment, however, is typically a prerogative of a male body, one which is unencumbered by outside responsibilities. Moreover, though thought to be neutral, ideations of a job are associated with ideas of certain responsibilities, tasks, complexity, rules and hierarchies, all of which can be related with conceptions of masculinity or femininity (Acker 1990, 148).

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As Britton (2000, 423–24) posits, many have taken the view that jobs and organizations are gendered only to the extent that they are dominated by one of the genders (2000, 423). The author claims that this might be a reductive approach, since it obscures the underlying processes that make a job gender appropriate (2000, 424). If women flooded factories like they did during World War II, would we think of these jobs as feminine, or still masculine?

This 'nominal' approach (Britton 2000, 424) to gendering is reminiscing of the struggles for women's political representation that brought about the 'critical mass' argument. According to this idea, substantive representation – a representation that goes beyond numbers and leads to action in line with women's interests (Celis and Childs 2008) – is contingent on a certain minimum of representation of women in institutions, usually 30% (Dahlerup 2006).

Dahlerup (2006) criticizes the idea that change becomes irreversible once this threshold is accomplished, but nods to the importance of the argument (2006, 511-12). On the question of whether the presence of "women politicians make a difference", the author draws an important distinction between the 'policy outcome' perspective and the notion of 'politics as a workplace' (2006, 512). The first perspective takes the idea that the outcome of policies regarding women's issues or feminist issues will change due to the presence of women (2006, 517). For instance, Rossetti's (2015, 287) study of women's presence in Australian diplomacy takes this perspective by inquiring into the practices that facilitate diplomats' ability to advocate for women.

This notion is, however, critiqued by Dahlerup, who believes the importance of the critical mass theory lies on the second perspective (2006, 518). According to the author, it is foremost

relevant that women can perform their tasks effectively and as they prefer, unencumbered by their status as a minority. This notion of 'politics as workplace' is of importance since women who might want to push their agenda – whether it is a feminist one or not –, might simultaneously need to fight for their rights as parliamentarians or councilors, thus impeding them from carrying out their duties freely (Dahlerup 2006, 519–20). Though my work touches briefly on the potential for different policy outcomes, I mostly take the perspective of 'politics as workplace' in this thesis.

Taking the gendered nature of organizations and placing the workplace as central concepts, it is important to observe the institutions in which this work takes place. According to MacKay and Krook (2011), understanding the ways in which institutional practices are structured along the lines of gender, can provide valuable insight into the reproduction and reinforcement of gender inequality within institutions (2011, 6).

Though feminist institutionalism is plural in practice and research, Mackay (2011) identifies two fundamental tenets that guide it: that institutions are gendered and that institutions have themselves gendering effects (2011, 182). North (in Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 576) defines institutions as "the rules of the game in a society or […] the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction". Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010, 576) claim that the literature on institutionalism tends to focus on formal institutions, namely formal rules. However, more recent work has delved into the ways in which informal normative arrangements can emerge within institutions. Informal institutions may emerge in settings where formal institutions might be incomplete, when a formal solution is unviable or when the goals pursued are not publicly acceptable (Mackay 2011, 576). Mackay (2011) further points to the potential of informal rules to work in a complementary and reinforcing manner to formal

norms, as well as, contrarily, as a venue of resistance or contradiction to formal institutions when these are not open to change (2011, 184).

In understanding the informal manners in which the rules of the game might be negatively stacked against women, Krook's (2022) concept of semiotic violence proves relevant. The author claims that semiotic resources are used to deny women's full participation in political life (2022, 372). This can be carried out in two main manners: rendering women invisible – denying their right to speak or interrupting them, misrecognizing them for other less prestigious roles when in leadership positions, not being listened to attentively –, and rendering women incompetent through ridiculing, objectification or seeing them as aberrations when they deviate from the expected gender norms. This, Krook argues, not only impedes individuals from carrying out their duties but sends a message to others of what the prevailing norms are (2022, 377).

Change in Gendered Organizations

Mackay (2011, 186) further identifies perspectives on continuity and change in institutions as a key research theme in feminist institutionalism. Specifically, the author identifies Kathleen Thelen's concept of 'bounded innovation' as a valuable tool to understand the ways in which actors utilize their agency while operating within institutional constraints that emerged from path dependent outcomes. According to the author, change is driven by the mechanisms of ongoing contestation within the organization and through the daily 'enactment' of institutions, leading variable outcomes such as layering (placing new rules on top of old ones), conversion (co-optation of old norms for new purposes), displacement (removal of old norms) and drift (old norms put aside or co-opted) (Mackay 2011, 186–87). As such, Beckwith (2005) contends that while institutions are gendered they also "*can be* gendered" (2005, 133). This means

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strategic behaviors by actors such as activists, social movements, and others can "*regender*" institutions (Beckwith 2005, 133).

Gherardi and Poggio (2001, 245) observe the ways in which gender asymmetries in organizations are produced and reproduced through cultural and symbolic practices (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, 248), in order to understand the phenomenon of occupational segregation in the labor market in situations where women entered occupations that had been dominated by men.

According to the authors, the symbolic order of gender in these institutions is challenged through the mere access of women to a traditional male position (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, 252). As one gender enters the symbolic space of another, gender is 'done' or practiced through the necessary conditions to be respected within an organization – working longer hours to the detriment of family life, for instance (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, 252). Additionally, it is done through the behavior women must display to be successful – shedding attributes considered traditionally feminine and displaying masculine behaviors –, and through the attitudes used to survive within the organization – avoiding competition to not be seen as a threat, for instance (2001, 254).

As such, ambiguous gender behaviors are demanded of women through ceremonial work, the processes through which the symbolic order of gender is transmitted and performed in accordance with men and women's gender identities, and remedial work, which helps "render the presence of women discreet and possibly invisible" (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, 256).

Diplomacy as a Gendered Organization

The topic of women in diplomacy has been fruitful, though rather scattered. Marilyn Séphocle's (2000) work is largely credited as one of the first visible works on the issue of women underepresentation in diplomacy. Struck by the "sea of male suits" (2000, 2) that dominated the United Nations, Séphocle set out to interview the twelve women Ambassadors appointed in Washington D.C. – a large number by the times' standards (2000, 1). Later contributions such as Towns and Niklasson's (2016), continue to observe this low number of women in ambassatorial roles worldwide, accounting for only 15% of women ambassadors. Within these, the authors argue, women tend to take on less prestigious missions, following a "glass ceiling" pattern (Towns and Niklasson 2016, 538).

Adler's (1984) study on women in international management provides important insights on women in international careers, which can be useful in understanding the gendered nature of diplomacy. The author argues that, despite myths on the contrary, women are, indeed, interested in international careers – even more than their male counterparts (Adler 1984, 76–77). It has been found that companies may be reluctant to appoint women, perhaps because they believe women might not want to go abroad or that they would not be effective if they did (Adler 1984, 77).

The issue of "dual-career" couples, where both parts of a couple have careers of their own, was identified by the author as a potential deterrent in pursuing international careers for married respondants, though no significant differences were found between men and women (Adler 1984, 78). On this matter, Linehan and Walsh's (1999) use of the concept of the "glass border" proves useful. Coined initially by Mandelker (1994, in Linehan and Walsh 1999, 264), it

described the stereotypical assumptions that domestic management had about women's suitability, availability and interest for international appointments.

Linehan and Walsh (1999) identified some imporant difficulties for female senior managers in international deployment. Specifically, the perceived need to sacrifice personal time, leisure and marriage for career gains (1999, 267). Importantly, the authors found that the difficulties of arranging long distance care or the problem of the "trailing spouse" had become a strain on personal relationships (1999, 267–68). Family management issues stick out as an overarching theme, an issue that is perceived to be more prevalent in women than in men (Linehan and Walsh 1999, 268; Linse 2004). Men have been found to develop their career unencumbered by family responsibilities, and typically show less availability to put their professional life in a secondary place to accompany women in international missions (Casaca and Marques 2023, 42). Deviation from the pervaling norm in the division of caretaking and domestic work is still seen like an individual trait, as having a "really good husband", as has been demonstrated by Connell (2005, 373).

Aggestam and Towns (2019) posit that the historical overrepresentation of men in diplomatic practice has created environments where masculine social scripts, norms and practices dominate, thus leading to the need for increased attention to the gendered nature of diplomacy (2019, 20). As observed by the authors, what is deemed masculine and feminine determines whether one is deployed to militarized countries or works on "soft" policy areas (Niklasson and Towns 2017; Aggestam and Towns 2019, 21).

According to Marriott (2017), one of the main challenges presented to women in diplomatic postings abroad pertains to situations where contact between men and women is not culturally acceptable, thus making communication with local authorities complicated (2017, 123). On the

other hand, some respondents reported being the target of comments about their physical appearance (Marriott 2017, 123). This is further confirmed by Linse's (2004, 257) account of the main challenges women face in overseas diplomatic positions, which states that "chauvinistic treatment from men was considered par for the course".

Furthermore, many authors (Neumann 2012, 133; Marriott 2017, 127; Turunen 2022) see diplomacy as a largely homosocial environment, where men usually prefer the company of other men. This is consistent with the perceived experiences of the diplomats interviewed by Marriott (2017, 127), who find it difficult to be let into traditionally all-male events (football matches, for instance). On establishing contact and networking, the author has observed that respondents felt expectations from interlocutors on them were lower and that pressure to do well in these contacts was higher (Marriott 2017, 125–26).

It is important to note that Marriott (2017) also observed that women at times felt supported by their male counterparts in accessing spaces they were not privy to (2017, 127) and that women tend to make use of the opportunities given, even if bothersome. This includes networking in women only events – even if they are not among peers, but among their peers' wives (2017, 127) – and using their underestimation to get more forthcoming answers from their interlocutor (Marriott 2017, 128).

Gender and Diplomacy in Portugal

In Portugal, issues of gender and diplomacy have been left largely untouched by academia. Until recently, Isabel Lemos' 2009 Master Thesis remained the main consolidated study on this matter. Lemos (2009) breaks down the historical development of women's representation in diplomacy in the country from 1974 to 2004, focusing mainly on trends regarding admissions

and career progression, and briefly touching on women diplomat's perceptions on their careers. Before this, Maria Paiva's (2005) short overview of the issue of underrepresentation of women in the Portuguese career stood as one of the only pieces of literature on the issue.

According to Lemos (2009), women's interest in the diplomatic career was high from the beginning, with 25% of applicants in the first admission contest being women, a number that has increased over time (Lemos 2009, 59). Since 1991, women have applied in greater numbers than men, and although their acceptance rates initially matched their application rates, from 1993 onward, the percentage of women accepted has been lower than that of men (Lemos 2009, 62-63). In terms of career progression, Lemos (2009) found no significant gender disparities in the average time it takes to reach certain categories, with a minimum of 18 years required to become an ambassador, contingent on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' evaluation and vacancy openings (2009, 68). At the time, no women had achieved the title of Ambassador, possibly due to insufficient time in service (Lemos 2009, 70, 72). Additionally, a survey of women diplomats revealed that factors such as childcare, reluctance to relocate, and spouses' careers were perceived obstacles to their career advancement (Lemos 2009, 79-80).

The past year has proved rather prolific in the matter due to the publication of the special issue of *Negócios Estrangeiros* – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' biannual publication – on women in diplomacy.

Firstly, Podgorny and Alves (2023) take stock of how many women are admitted into the diplomatic career and how and at what rate they are promoted within the diplomatic career, using data from 1975 – when the first women were accepted into the diplomatic corps – to 2023.

Since Lemos' analysis, there has been an improvement in the number of women accessing the diplomatic career from 2013 to 2015, followed by a steep decline in subsequent years, nearly matching the low levels seen in the first decade of women's access to the profession (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 16). Additionally, the average age at which women enter the career has increased over the past four years, potentially affecting their progression prospects (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 17). This underrepresentation at the entry level, coupled with the significance of service time for career advancement, suggests that underrepresentation in top categories will persist (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 17). Within the Ministry, a high percentage of women occupy internal service roles in Lisbon, often in higher categories and mid to upper management positions, while they are underrepresented as Heads of Mission in overseas posts, indicating a possible preference for women in senior roles to remain in the country (Podgorny and Alves 2023, 18).

The second contribution to this issue is Casaca and Marques' (2023) study, commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on gender and access to the diplomatic career. In this, the authors contextualize the asymmetries and challenges in access and progression in the diplomatic career in Portugal within the field of policy instruments for equality in the country, the specificities of the diplomatic career and the international context.

The commitment to gender mainstreaming by the European Commission has led Portugal to enact its own gender policies, the clearest example being the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination for 2018-2030 (Casaca and Marques 2023, 43). This strategy is structured around three National Action Plans focusing on equality between men and women, preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. This is the latest iteration

of national plans for gender equality, following those published in 1997, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2014.

In 2008, the position of counselor for equality was created to monitor and implement equality measures within the MFA, and in 2011, an Interdepartmental Team for Equality was established to develop the Sectorial Plan for Equality (Casaca and Marques 2023, 44–45). These plans primarily gathered and updated information on gender equality indicators within the institution, although effective strategies for implementation and continuity have yet to be developed (2023, 46). While the authors do not provide definitive conclusions on the issue of low accession of women to the diplomatic career, they believe that the path to gender equality begins with consolidating the existing policy instruments (Casaca and Marques 2023, 56).

A small description of the categories of the diplomatic career in Portugal is also in order. According to the statute of the diplomatic career there are five categories: embassy attaché (*adido de embaixada*), embassy secretary (*secretário de embaixada*), embassy counselor (*conselheiro de embaixada*), minster plenipotentiary (*ministro plenipotenciário*) and ambassador (*embaixador*), and there are subcategories for each category depending on service time (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998).

Methodology

The present research is based on 8 in-depth interviews with women diplomats. According to Kronsell (2006), there is an embedded difficulty in analyzing gender in institutions of "hegemonic masculinity" – those where men have historically dominated, and norms have been created around men and perceptions of masculinity. As such, Kronsell (2006, 109) believes that in putting women's perceptions of gendered practices in the forefront of the study, interviews can serve as a vehicle in deconstructing the "silence of gender relations".

According to Thompson (2001, 63–77) interpretivist forms of research "explore the underlying issues that the positivistic approach to policy problems conceals", by having the benefit of putting the experiences of individuals inside the organization in the forefront. As the purpose of the study is exploratory, or as Thomas (2011, 515) puts it about "arriving at notions to solve", a semi-structured interview approach with open ended questions has been used, so as to allow for an insider perspective and simultaneously keep the conversation structured (Leech 2002, 665).

In order to identify potential respondents, a sign-up form was created where diplomats could leave their information to be contacted for an interview. This form was subsequently disseminated by MUD@R, who I have contacted via email, and by personal contacts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Aditionally, at the end of interviews, the participants were asked to distribute my contact or the sign-up form through their networks.

The interviews took place between April and May of 2024, over Zoom or Whatsapp, due to the geographical spread of the respondents, who could be stationed in the Ministry's headquarters

in Lisbon – in its internal services – or in a Portuguese diplomatic representation around the world – its external services.

The interviewees belonged to the following diplomatic career categories: 3 were embassy secretaries, 4 were embassy counselors and 1 was an ambassador. No participants from the embassy attaché or minister plenipotentiary categories replied to the call for interviews. Of the interviewees, 3 were currently placed in the internal services of the Ministry, and 5 were posted abroad in diplomatic representations in Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. Half of the respondents have children, three don't and one did not disclose this information.

The interviews were conducted on the premise of anonimity of responses, and audio was recorded in order for the interviews to be transcribed, with the consent of the participants. Due to interviews taking place online, consent was recorded as an audio file, as to facilitate the process. Consent was recorded and kept separately from the main body of the interview. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Portuguese, and the quotes contained in the analytical chapters were translated by me to English, so as to ensure the integrity of the interviewees' responses. The questionnaire contained one establishing question, where participants were asked to describe their career path so far, and three main groups of questions regarding their perceptions on gender equality and discrimination in the workplace, perceptions on existing policies, and potential for change (see Appendix for full questionaire).

Each interview was assigned a random numerical value, to protect the identity of the respondents. Henceforth, they will be referenced as Participant 1 to 8, or P.1 to P.8. The interviews were coded using grounded theory coding methods (Charmaz 2006, 42–70). Codes were assigned to the content based on the most relevant topics discussed on the literature or on

the most repeated topics, and then grouped into cohesive topics for analysis, which structured

the four analytic chapters in this thesis.

1. A work/life balancing act

1.1.   Glass Borders, Glass Domes

A diplomatic career is, by design, an international career. As described in the literature, the constant need to move around and adapt to new contexts harbors specific challenges.

According to the Statute of the Diplomatic Career in Portugal, diplomats must remain a minimum of three years and a maximum of four in posts classified as A or B, or a minimum of two and a maximum of three years in C posts (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998). As the latter are considered the most difficult due to quality of life, risks to health or security or due to isolation, only under narrow exceptions may a diplomat be placed in two class C posts in a row. Usually, diplomats cannot remain in the external services of the Ministry for over nine consecutive years (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998).

When inquired about the main challenges of this international aspect of the career, a variety of responses came up. Some brought up the logistical aspect of moving, reporting feeling somewhat unsupported in the search for housing and schooling for their dependents (P.7). Currently, the legislation states that the Ministry must provide an allowance for housing and for settling in when moving to another location (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998). Furthermore, the Ministry must pay for travel expenses and transportation costs for personal goods (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998).

The challenge of impermanence was also discussed (P. 1, 3, 4 and 6). On this, one of the respondents claimed:

> "I have lived abroad before and I thought it would be the same thing, and it's not. I believe one of the biggest challenges is to know you are there temporarily (…), because

one thing is leaving and migrating somewhere, not knowing how long you'll be there, and naturally there's a sort of emotional and mental openness from us (…) that allows for a lot more relationships and integration. When you are a diplomat, from the get-go you know that at the end of 3 or 4 years (…) you'll leave that place, and that restricts us a lot". (P.4)

At the same time, a permanent condition of representation of the State – knowing that whatever is done abroad may have a negative or positive impact on the country's image – has been described as a "weight" (P.4) or as "mental gymnastics" (P.5), something that is emotionally draining.

Describing the situation, one of the diplomats posited that "the diplomat is always a stranger" (P.6). The wording is reminiscing of Sofer's (1997) work "The Diplomat as Stranger". According to the author, a diplomat must be a 'stranger' to the other, to be able to detach themselves from the naturalized state of things in order to sharply observe and inhabit a 'strange land' (180). Simultaneously, to carry out the task of representation, the diplomat acts as the incarnation of the international other (1997, 184) and thus must be alienated from the self for the sake of creating and reproducing a new shifting identity (Sofer 1997, 184).

From the quotes above, this detachment from the other and the self can, at times, be felt in challenging ways. Acker's (1990) idea of disembodiment – imagining a job as something neutral, lacking a body – can be illuminating on the gendered aspects of this international component of the job. The work of diplomacy does not appear to be a gender-neutral territory. The very necessity of 'strangeness' creates an expectation of a disembodied self – a situation that is usually attributed to male bodies, as they are seen as more available (P.1 and 4).

Disembodiment is made difficult because most of the women I interviewed (P.1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8) have children that need to get to school or spouses that follow them abroad. Fittingly, one of

the most reported challenges has been the integration of the family abroad (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8).

Specifically, concerns with the safety of the country (P.3), health provisions (P.4) and, most frequently, with finding proper schooling for children (P.1 and 3) were displayed. Not only that, but the discrepancies in the school calendar proved difficult to manage for some diplomats, since normally, placements are published "until the end of June" (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 1998), but the process of enrollment may take place before that.

Some respondents had the impression, in relation to their own experience or their colleagues' (P.1, 7 and 8), that women's choices regarding posts were greatly influenced by these constraints. One respondent claimed: "The only time I felt most worried (…) was around one year ago, when it was time to apply for a new post, [about] the matter of schools. Where are there schools? There, yes, for the first time I felt limited in my choices. I can't go to the places I want to because I have my kids, and they're in a phase where they need a good school." (P.3)

As such, the choice of posts that might be considered safer, more promising to a partner's career or best suited to raise children, might lead to a division along gender or age lines. This, in turn, could open an exploratory avenue into the issue of low representation of women in higher ranks.

When asked about their perceptions on career progression, some brought up the issue of visibility (P.2 and 7). In essence, to be promoted in the career, a position must open, and one can apply once the minimum service time requirement is met. Then, a merit review is conducted. Some participants don't see it as an objective process (P.4 and 5) On this merit review, interview Participant 5 claimed:

> "The system is a bit opaque because there is one part (…) that is subjective and that can be more or less fair (…). If someone knows me and has worked with me and likes me (…) I am more predisposed to be promoted. If the jury has no idea who I am, if I have a bad reputation for whatever reason (…) it's going to go wrong, even if I have a lot of points." (P.5)

Another respondent claimed that women, and specifically mothers, "usually are not in the position to completely put aside their personal life to dedicate themselves to the professional [life]" (P.7), and as such might not pick the challenging posts that might provide visibility, and that visibility could have an impact on "people remembering you for you to be promoted" (P.7).

Therefore, a form of 'glass border' can be created due to the prevalent expectation on the division of care responsibilities between men and women regarding child-rearing. This border, however, does not end horizontally, extending itself vertically to reproduce 'glass ceiling' effect. In this case, I propose the image of a glass dome, to capture the simultaneous horizontal and vertical barriers that prevail.

Of course, the issue of lack of representation of women in higher positions in the career cannot be fully explained by this one concept. For instance, another relevant issue on this matter is the matter of access to the career. If there is so few women accessing the career, how can they be promoted (P.4)? Though the matter of access falls beyond the scope of this study – after all, I only interviewed women who are already in the institution –, many attributed this to a lack of interest in matters of international relations more indicative of society at large than of the process of selection. Participant 5 claims:

> "(…) I believe that the problem of the attaché contest has to do with a problem in Portuguese society, and not with the diplomatic career. (…) I don't believe knowledge is being tested in a way that appeals to more men than women (…), and if you ask me (…), I think I have a lot more [male] friends I can talk to about foreign policy, about international relations, than [female] friends." (P.5)

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Another explanation given for the glass ceiling in the MFA has to do with the high number of attachés that were recruited in the 1996 and 1998 (Podgorny and Alves, 2023) contests, in opposition with the low amount of promotion positions that are being opened (P.3 and 6). This, in turn, creates a bottleneck situation which, given the comparatively low percentages of women that access the profession, might prevent women from being promoted. Participant 7 believes this effect to be overstated.

This analysis does not aim, in any way, to imply that this division of care responsibilities is set in stone and is the same for all women. It illustrates, however, an expectation regarding these roles. In fact, when asked if they believed their male colleagues felt the same types of concerns regarding life/work balance, many (P.1, 2, 4, 6 and 7) responded positively, indicating a clear shift among young male diplomats in the division of care responsibilities. Still, the same respondents added the caveat that the expectation is still not the same and that there are still ways to go in that regard.

1.2. *Lucky Wives and Trailing Partners*

During interviews, there was one expression I kept hearing from married women: "I've been lucky" (P. 3, 4, 6 and 8). Describing their partners, many participants would boast about their luck in having found a partner who either quit their career, would work intermittently or has a career that allows them to work anywhere.

Not only does this present a challenge in the career goals of the spouse, but for the diplomat, it has a negative connotation. This is best illustrated by Participant 6 who claimed: "When my ambassador bosses realized that (…) my husband wasn't working they'd always say "oh, but that's great" but I understood immediately that they thought "what a simpleton that guy is"

because they couldn't conceive that they, being men, would do the same for their wife's career". (P.6)

This expectation is simultaneously reflected on women when they are single, upon choosing diplomacy as their career path. Two participants (P.4 and 5) reported having had conversations with friends and family where they have shown concern about the diplomat's ability to find a partner or form a family in this profession.

Similarly, Participant 5 described a conversation with a male colleague, in which they engaged in the following thought experiment: if they were both single, each of them went out at night, and we said to a prospective partner that they were diplomats, the responses, the Participant claims, would be very different. She goes on to state: "(…) that is obviously always a roadblock, or it's always a complication, but it's a lot less complicated for a male diplomat to start a relationship (…). Because men have another perception of what it is to give up their career (…)" (P.5).

The matter of a dual-career couple or a trailing partner, even if only prospective, are still subject a double-standard in terms of expectations. The use of 'luck' to describe the situation, shows that there is a deviation in a norm and, therefore, still an informal norm in place.

2. (Homo)sociality and remedial work

2.1. *Women Superiors, Women Colleagues and Remedial Work*

Acker (1990, 146–47) posits that one of the main characteristics of a gendered organization is the "interactions between women and men, women and women, men and men".

When asked about the occurrence of sexual harassment, some participants (P.1, 3, and 7) pointed, instead, to the problem of moral harassment. Moral harassment is defined as "undesired behavior (…) with the goal or effect of disturbing or embarrassing the person, affect their dignity, create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or destabilizing environment" (Diário da República, n.d.). Though some of it is still being carried out by men – as I will explore in the following chapter –, a surprising number of participants (P.3, 4, 5 and 7) have reported having been or knowing someone who had been harassed or undermined by other women. On this Participant 4 claimed that "women can as or more misogynistic than men".

Participant 3 explained that, mostly, women had been less supportive than men throughout her career. Here, she described a situation where she was to take over a post from another colleague and was prevented by her from acquiring the necessary information to ensure a smooth transition for the posting. She claims: "I felt sabotaged" (P.3).

Another participant (P.5) described feeling bullied by a woman colleague who had started the career at the same time as her but was older and had more professional experience. She recalls her colleague being too critical of her work, which led to a lack of confidence in these early days (P.5).

Both Participant 5 and 7 reported having been treated differently in their work by female superiors. Specifically, both recalled feeling like their work and their female colleague's work was invisible in comparison to their male coworkers'. Participant 7 recalls about a woman superior: "I clearly felt she had a preference for our male colleagues, but it was something a bit more subtle. (…) His opinion was always fantastic (…)." (P.7)

As denoted by Gherardi and Poggio (2001, 252), the mere access of women into a traditional male position disrupts the symbolic order of this space. As this occurs, women may alter their behaviors to survive or thrive in the institution. As will be discussed in the following chapter, some masculinized behaviors remain in the institution, except this time they are performed by women. This could be viewed as a form of remedial work, done by women to blend seamlessly into the space of men, and thus, rendering them discreet.

2.2. A Homosocial Environment?

Neumann (2012) has described diplomacy as a largely homosocial environment. When inquired about the social aspect of the job, women mostly denied this (P. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 6, 8). Participant 6 reported that "boy's clubs" – informal networks of men that often exclude women (Elting 2018) – do exist, though she claims they are dwindling and are almost exclusively observed within older ambassadors. However, according to the diplomat, this "informal comradery" could be problematic if these men inhabit governing structures, since discussions on other diplomats' careers can take place in these social environments women are not privy to (P.6).

Participant 1 further reported that sometimes male diplomats in Lisbon get together to play football, and that these games happen quite late at night, invertedly excluding those with care

responsibilities. Still, the participant stated that she did not feel this affected the social environment in the Ministry or led to feelings of exclusion (P.1)

Regarding relations with foreign diplomats, no feelings of exclusion or differential treatment were reported. As Participant 4 puts it, "in diplomatic environments (…), we're talking with people who have seen a lot of the world, and so are prepared to deal with things they don't know or make them uncomfortable."

On navigating the discomfort of being the sole woman in some social situations, Participants 5 and 8 claimed taking advantage of this. Participant 5 stated, "it's exactly the fact that I am a woman, and I am younger that gives me some power. The 40-year-old guy next to me is the same as another one, so things are a bit what we want to make of them, and it's not bad, sometimes it can be really good."

3. Rendering Gender (In)Visible

When asked, most (P. 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8) of the women I interviewed initially reported never having felt explicitly differentiated for being a woman. Many followed up by saying something along the lines of "I was lucky". Some would follow this up with something like "but you hear stories" (for instance, P.2 or P.5).

Here, again, the use of luck might point to the prevalence of a norm that the participants themselves have, for one reason or another been excused from. In this chapter, I explore some of the perceptions on gender equality in the institution, in their more or less visible forms, as well as on the policies that have (or have not) been implemented to address them.

Harassment, or objectification (Krook, 2022), is one of the most visible forms of discrimination. Of the interviewed participants only two have reported having been explicitly harassed (P.3 and 6). Interestingly, both participants faced similar situations where they have been invited for lunch by an ambassador when they were starting out – leading them to feel afraid of repercussions in their career if they refused. In one situation, the Ambassador confessed feeling attracted to the diplomat (P.3). In the other, he inquired about the diplomat's relationship status, to which she responded positively, to diffuse the tension (P.6). Others have reported what they have considered to be smaller instances of differentiation such as touches in the arm or back (P.1) or comments about physical appearance (P.4, 7 and 8).

Others have claimed to have felt at times questioned in her competence and expertise (P.5), being mistaken by a secretary due to being young (P.1), being taken less seriously than men (P.7) or being ridiculed when questioning an order (P.4).

Perceptions on motherhood provide another avenue of differentiation. For instance, when Participant 4 became pregnant in post, other female coworkers asked her if she wasn't afraid of being sent back to Lisbon (P.4). The matter of having children while on post is largely seen as a contentious matter. Since the number of staff is relatively small, disparaging comments are sometimes heard about colleagues who take off on maternity leave, especially more than once (P.4, 7 and 8). Still, Participant 4 asserts that there has been a positive evolution from her older colleagues' experiences, who were often asked to return to work before their license officially ended. Logistically, Participant 1 confessed dealing with breastmilk production after giving birth upon returning to work was a nightmare – she often had to shut herself off on the toilet and be interrupted when she was taking too long (P.1).

Policies on gender equality have remained mostly invisible in the Ministry, especially on implementation. Regarding diplomats' level of comfort in issuing a complaint in the event of discrimination or harassment, most responded negatively (P.1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8). Some claimed that they have the feeling that the Ministry does not take well to complaints in general (P.3 and 4), another wouldn't know who to reach out to (P.3) and one believes formal ways of denouncing are slow and difficult, and lead to a fear of repercussion (P.1). Some would rely on their own personal networks to ensure they are heard (P.5 and 8).

Though there is a general perception of formal equality, these less evident forms of rendering women invisible or incompetent (Krook 2022) establishes a clear message on the prevailing norms in the institution, to the point where deviation from it, is largely seen as luck.

4. Looking to the Future

4.1. The way forward

All the women I interviewed believed the situation is, overall, better for women now in the institution. Some believe this is partially to do with a modernizing trend, a natural tendency for those more conservative ambassadors to retire and for the institution to progress in line with society in terms of gender equality (P. 3, 4, 5 and 6). For Participant 2 and 5, for instance, policy change is not a priority since they posit that the institution itself works as it should. It is, instead, societal norms and culture – "mentalities" (P.2, 4, 5) – that need to change. Participant 1, on the other hand, sees the MFA as a "a big, very heavy machine, (…) with a limitation in human and financial resources, so it is normal that it takes more to adapt to new contexts" (P.1).

Still, most (P. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) agree that there is room for improvement. There is some disagreement in what exactly is the way forward, but the idea that garnered the most support was ensuring a better conciliation of work and personal life (P. 1, 2, 3 and 7). Recounting a time where she needed to pick up her daughter at the bus in the later part of her workday, Participant 3 said: "When I got back to the Embassy [neighborhood], all my Nordic colleagues were saying goodbye at 4 pm, saying 'I'm going home'. And I thought 'Damn, this is it, this is what we should have', that thing of 'this is done, now go take care of your family'". (P.3)

Participants 3 and 4 believed that the Ministry should put more effort in supporting the right to family, for both men and women, as they provide invaluable support in diplomats' impermanent lives. Furthermore, it is believed that more should be done to protect spouses (P. 3 and 6). Specifically, some interpretations of the applicable legislation may leave spouses without health coverage abroad (P.3). Support for the spouses' careers was also mentioned, through the implementation of locally hiring mechanisms (P.6).

Some participants also stated that diplomacy is a strenuous job regarding mental health, due to loneliness and detachment (P. 5 and 6), and that more mental health outreach instruments should be put in place (P.5).

Another suggestion was the need for easy, safe and confidential whistleblowing mechanisms (P. 5 and 1). According to Participant 1, many complaints come from lower rank employees against ranking superiors, leading to fear of career repercussion in the form of slandering. The respondent noted, however, that the Ministry is currently working on this (P.1).

Participant 1 stressed the importance of reverting the current downward trend of women accessing the career. She believes the Ministry should find a more active policy to attract women to the diplomatic career, otherwise "if today it is common to see a picture, for instance, of a bilateral meeting (…) and in the Portuguese side there is only men (…) in 20 years it will be even more common" (P.1). Participant 3 also showed concern towards the increasing number of temporary leaves – that often become permanent –, seeing retention in the career as something the Ministry should be attentive to.

Finally, some have noted the prioritization and attention given by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, João Gomes Cravinho to matters of gender equality in the institution (P. 1, 2, 4). Though this is seen as a positive development, it also is indicative of the reliance of gender equality policies to the sways of political power (P.1 and 4). At the time of writing, a new government just got into power, leaving the future of gender equality policies in the institution in the balance (P.1 and 4). In this regard, Participant 6 highlighted the importance of ensuring that participation or leadership of initiatives MUD@R or the Union Association of Portuguese

Diplomats is included in the diplomat's working hours, instead of leaving diplomats to carry on these duties in their free time.

4.2. Women's perceived role in institutional change

When asked what they perceived to be their own and other women's roles in this change, some stated the importance of continuing to speak one's mind (P.5) and being vocal about supporting other women (P.1, 4, 5 and 8). In the same vein, Participant 7 claimed that it is important to showcase women's exceptionality and giving them the visibility that is so important for promotions (P.7).

Participant 3 believed women's role is to claim the "things that men can't" (P.3). According to her, men still feel shame in demanding rights that would traditional women's issues, such as the right to family (P.3).

Participant 4 believed that she needed to be an example of feminine leadership, especially in her role as an internship supervisor. Analogously, Participant 6 suggested the implementation of a mentorship program (P.6).

4.3. The Ambiguous Impact of MUD@R

MUD@R's establishment seemed to most a positive a sign of change (P.1, 2, 4, 7, 8). Some suggested that its biggest impact had been to institutionalize debate and organizing women who are so geographically disperse (P.1, 4 and 7). Most believed MUD@R's strength lay in its visibility – "it has initiative, it shows up" (P.2) –, in bringing the topic of gender equality into the mainstream conversation inside the Ministry (P.2, and 3), and in showcasing women's stories inside the Ministry (P.7). For instance, Participants 1 and 6 stated that the

implementation of gender quotas for promotion in the career should be debated within the institution, and MUD@R should spearhead the conversation.

On the more practical sense, MUD@R has contributed to the development of statistics on women in diplomacy, which Participant 7 sees as a form of pressure to power for better policies. Furthermore, they have synthesized information on parental leave, which before had been scattered on several documents, or not available for consultation (P.1 and P7). On the more critical side, Participant 5 believes the association does not go far enough in their advocacy role. Describing the public resolution of a sexual harassment case that, in the interviewees view, had let the perpetrating side get away with impunity, Participant 5 states "MUD@R didn't do any type of activity, or protest, it didn't do any sort of diligence" (P.5).

Perhaps the most visible initiative from MUD@R has been the inauguration, in March 2024, of the breastfeeding and parenthood room in the MFA's headquarters. Most diplomats saw it as an important step, even in its symbolic meaning – it shows commitment from the institution to progress in this matter (P. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8). Furthermore, by naming it both a breastfeeding and parenthood room, it nods to a shared role in childrearing responsibilities (P.1). However, some were critical of the development, questioning the importance of the room, especially when there are not enough meeting rooms in the Ministry (P.3 and 5). On this, Participant 5 states: "not all of us are mothers, but all of us are workers".

Conclusion

Diplomacy continues to be a gendered institution, with consequences for those who do diplomatic work. However, it is in this understanding, unearthed through the lived experiences of the women who do this work, that change may lie.

The first analytic chapter of this thesis aimed to show that a gendered division of labor persists, though not along policy areas (Aggestam and Towns 2019, 21), but through a division of expectations on care responsibilities, and pointed to the ways in which these expectations have consequences for one's career development. The choice of less visible posts or choosing to remain in Lisbon due to a concern for a child's schooling or a partner's career path may lead to restrictions in career progression, thus combining the 'glass border' and 'glass ceiling' phenomena in a unique way, which I chose to describe as a 'glass dome'. This concept does not originate from a clear addition of both. It instead specifies, updates and relates them to the diplomatic career. It specifies the glass ceiling concept, in line with A. Towns and Niklasson's (2016) notion of a ceiling with the added difficulty of appointments to less prestigious posts, and it updates the glass border, as, in this case, it makes little sense to speak of administrator's assumptions about women (Linehan and Walsh 1999, 264) and more to speak on constrained personal choices.

The second chapter contended with the gendering effect of the institution of diplomacy on hierarchies and social relations. Specifically, it attempted to explain the largely shared issue of moral harassment by women colleagues or superiors, through the concept of remedial work (Gherardi and Poggio 2001, 256). In it I argue that some women may engage in behaviors that have traditionally been considered masculine, to blend seamlessly into the invisible gendered hierarchy in place. On the other hand, the idea of a homosocial environment in this space, seems

to have been overstated, though some "boys clubs" remain. Marriott's (2017, 127) reports of support by male counterparts or the use of underestimation to extract opportunities are also confirmed by some of the responses.

On the third chapter I attempted to make visible the invisibility of gendered behaviors and policies. While most respondents agree that there has been a significant positive change, it is of note that most have heard of or experienced situations of harassment. As Krook (2022) states, this may preclude women from effectively carrying out their duties (if they take leave to recover from a situation, for instance), and sends a message to other women on what the prevailing norms are, especially when the policies in place to protect them are, too, invisible.

Lastly, the final chapter aimed to uncover women's perceived avenues for change. These responses have shown that constraints in choices, behaviors and especially policies can change. Though a high reliance on political structures remains, women utilize their agency while operating within these institutional constraints to achieve innovative solutions, especially within MUD@R. It is telling that even the fiercest critics of the association, only wish for it to do more.

This work accomplished the objective of raising more questions than answers, providing a valuable foundation to engage in larger scale studies that may confirm or dispel these concepts, paving the way for the enactment of policies based on women's lived experiences.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Could you tell me a little bit about your career path so far? What attracted you to a career in diplomacy?

Group 1: Perceptions on gender equality and discrimination

- Accessing an institution that has been largely dominated by men, do you have any recollection of feeling unequal for being a woman? For instance, speaking to a diplomat from Estonia, she told me that more than once in meetings she was always the one being called on to take the minutes on meetings. Could you tell me a story of a time where you might have felt differentiated based on your gender?

- Do you have any concerns when it comes to reconciling family and work life? Do you perceive your male colleagues to share the same concerns?

- What are the biggest challenges of the international component of the job – be it regarding your personal life or regarding life abroad?

- Since promotions are usually based on service time, did you feel it is straightforward to be promoted, or are there some informal barriers to accessing higher positions?

- Could you tell me more about the social aspect of the job? Did you feel accepted by your peers? Did you have trouble adapting?

- Did you ever experience situations of harassment or receive comments that have made you feel uncomfortable by a colleague or superior?

- In your career, did you notice any shifts in gender equality in the institution? (Any shifts in perceptions, colleagues, work culture?)

Group 2: Perceptions on current policies

- Are you aware of any policy or strategy in place to foster gender equality?

- If there were to be an issue regarding harassment or some sort of gender-based discrimination, would you feel comfortable issuing a complaint?

- Did you ever make a complaint about discrimination of gender inequality? Do you know anyone who has?

Group 3: Potential for change

- Do you feel that there is a need for change in the institution?

- What do you believe to be the path forward in changing the organization in the way of gender equality? What do you believe is your own and other women's role in this change?

- Do you believe there has been a shift with the establishment of MUD@R? What are some of the topics that have been discussed?