Diplomacy: Too Important to Be Left to Men?

By Akmaral Arystanbekova

It seems to me that there was a fundamental turning-point in the early 1990s when a growing number of women were appointed Permanent Representatives to the United Nations; both objective circumstances and the personal abilities of women ambassadors played a part in this. On 1 February 1993, Madeleine Albright took up her duties as Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations. On that occasion, the Russian Ambassador, Yuli Vorontsov, gave a lunch for the Permanent Representatives of the Member States of the UN Security Council. He said he invited me as the representative not only of my country but also of the women ambassadors to the United Nations. When I met Ms. Albright for the first time, I said: “There are six women ambassadors here, you will be the seventh—we do hope that we will work well together.” She thanked me and replied: “Please tell our colleagues that I will soon be inviting you all to my first official lunch at the United Nations.” And she kept her word, hosting two weeks later a friendly lunch in honour of women ambassadors. She had invited the media, and The International Herald Tribune carried a large photograph of us. I received a letter from someone in France who had rather liked the look of me! One of our male colleagues remarked he had intended to send this clipping to his own country, but on reflection had decided against it, worried that he might be replaced by a woman!

Claudia Fritsche continued the initiative of regular lunches, and I hosted a lunch in the building of the Permanent Mission of Russia, where the Mission of Kazakhstan was housed at that time. Yuli Vorontsov genuinely wanted to attend, but we had a rule that we did not invite men. Thus, the famous group of women ambassadors to the United Nations, which we called the G-7, from “Girls-7”, was created. We agreed that we would support each other and work together to further the advancement of women in the United Nations and the provision of genuine equality through the activities of the Organization. Gradually, with the arrival of new women ambassadors from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Australia, Finland and Guinea, and the departure of our friends and colleagues from Canada, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States, who were replaced by men, our group grew to ten members. Our male colleagues at the United Nations were offended because we did not invite them to our “women’s lunches”. It was discrimination, they said. Not at all, we told them. The fact was that there were only seven women out of 185 ambassadors to the United Nations where the real discrimination lay!

Our group, officially and unofficially, worked to achieve more or less consensual decisions before the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. That we had the same name as the G-7 group of leaders of the world’s seven major industrialized countries was no accident, as the presence of the Permanent Representative of the United States gave it particular weight and authority.
From our very first meeting, Madeleine Albright and I established friendly relations. She was straightforward and very energetic. She was not a diplomat by profession and said she did not know diplomatic protocol. But she was indisputably committed to the idea of actively involving women in decision-making at the national and international levels. She often invited us to her residence, where we had the opportunity to meet prominent women, including members of the United States Congress and Senate, famous artists and social activists. She was always accessible and always received us at her Mission to discuss bilateral issues.

Once, on her return from a trip to some countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, she invited me to lunch and said to me: “Sit down, I’ll tell you a funny story. On my trip, the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova complained that their ambassadors could not get to see me. So I advised them to follow the example of Kazakhstan. They were surprised and asked exactly what they should do. Appoint a woman ambassador, I said, and then you won’t have any problems.” We both laughed, but in fact I never had a problem discussing any issue with her. Sometimes, she was the one who called or came by with a request about a United Nations resolution or elections to a body.

When, after a few years, I gave a reception in the Delegates’ Dining Room on the occasion of our Republic Day, Madeleine attended. It was unprecedented in the history of the United Nations, as the Permanent Representative of the United States never attended receptions for national holidays of Member States. Her arrival was the subject of unusual astonishment and agitation. When I told her about it, she replied: “I came to your reception because we girls must stick together and support each other.” Ms. Albright personally introduced me to President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and also to Hillary Clinton, who I met on several occasions at the United Nations.

In the run-up to the 1996 American presidential elections, rumours started to circulate around the United Nations that Ms. Albright would be the next Secretary of State. We women ambassadors fervently hoped for this as a sign of support and solidarity with our colleague. When she was appointed to the post in December 1996, I was in Almaty for the celebrations of the fifth anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence. On my return to New York in January, I called Madeleine, congratulated her and suggested holding a lunch or dinner with the women ambassadors in her honour. She agreed readily to come for a tea, which I held on 16 January, inviting all our women colleagues and women in high-level posts in the UN Secretariat and specialized agencies. President Clinton, in introducing Ms. Albright as Secretary of State, had said she embodied “the best of America”. In my remarks at the tea party on behalf of all my colleagues, I said that I would add to his words—she was also the embodiment of women politicians and mothers. Madeleine was visibly moved. She told us that our relationship would not change and asked us to continue calling her by her first name. She kept her word. On visits to New York for the General Assembly, she always held receptions for women ministers of foreign affairs and ambassadors to the United Nations. We had a souvenir photograph taken, on which she wrote: “To my dear friend Akmaral. You have done a wonderful work representing your country and women in the United Nations. I treasure our friendship—with admiration and affection, Madeleine”. When I was leaving the United Nations in September 1999 for my assignment to Paris, she received me in her New York residence and accepted my present—a traditional embroidered jacket—with great delight and made a firm promise to visit my country. I was in Paris when she sent me a brief letter telling me that she was at last going to Kazakhstan and described her high expectations of the visit.

I was often asked about my perception of Ms. Albright when she became the first woman ever to be appointed to such a senior post in the United States. It seemed to me that she was a powerful diplomat, very tough in defending her country’s interests. She often said to me that we were both Taurus (being born in May), meaning that we were “workaholics”, and that I too could be tough when it came to the interests of Kazakhstan. At the same time, in her personal relations with women ambassadors, she was very considerate and straightforward, sincerely convinced that women should play a greater role in world politics.
The biography of this remarkable woman is well known. The daughter of a Czech diplomat who had emigrated to the United States, Madeleine Albright always said that her life could serve as an example of putting into practice the principles of American democracy and freedom of the individual. She had a good education and an enviable capacity for hard work. She had to bring up three daughters alone, and is so proud of them. She is a happy mother and the proud grandmother of several grandchildren and a little granddaughter, another Madeleine. The fact that, alone in her family life, she managed to reach such heights in her career cannot fail to inspire great respect. I have met many women for whom she personified the achievement of women's right and their capacity to become involved in resolving global problems at the very highest level, forcing people to reckon with their abilities and professionalism.

Of the women I worked with at the United Nations, there were many amazing and brilliant individuals. I have already referred to Claudia Fritsche who has been Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein for over ten years. She is a shining example of the role and irreplaceable personal qualities of a diplomat in making a success of his or her work. Representing one of the smallest States in the world, she was at the same time one of the best-known and respected Ambassadors. When I first came to New York, she was always inviting me to her hospitable and welcoming home—in this way, I got to know a wide range of ambassadors and senior staff members of the UN Secretariat. The task of preparing her country's admission to the United Nations fell to her, as it had to me, and I voted with other delegates to admit Liechtenstein to the Organization in 1990. She had started her political career at an early age, becoming an adviser to the Prime Minister at nineteen years old, and did much to ensure that women in her country were given the right to vote. At the end of the 1990s, Claudia and I were given the honour of being accepted into the unofficial "doyen's club", which consisted of the 16 longest-serving ambassadors to the United Nations—the most venerable was the Ambassador of Yemen, who had been in the post for 26 years.

In 1997, when the General Assembly established a new post of Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan proposed Louise Fréchette for the position. Ms. Fréchette had been Permanent Representative of Canada in the early 1990s, and had then been appointed Associate Deputy Minister in her country's Department of Finance. Following the post of Deputy Minister of National Defence, she returned to the United Nations, occupying the most senior Secretariat post ever to have been held by a woman. As our famous "G-7" acquired ever greater authority and respect at the United Nations, we tried to ensure that more women were elected to important bodies within the Organization. In large part owing to our group's efforts, two women judges—from the United States and Costa Rica—were chosen to serve on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The first woman to have been appointed Under-Secretary-General at the United Nations. in the 1970s, was Lucille Mathurin-Mair of Jamaica, who was later her country's Permanent Representative in the early 1990s. It is interesting that in the past decade Jamaica has appointed women ambassadors to the United Nations. Lucille was succeeded by Patricia Durrant, a diplomat with extensive professional experience, who has just been appointed to the new post of Ombudsman created by the General Assembly. Gillian Sorensen is the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations. An American, she was for many years the head of the New York City Commission for the United Nations, dealing with the diplomatic corps. Her husband, Theodore Sorensen, a famous economist, was an adviser to President John F. Kennedy. Gillian headed the department of the UN Secretariat that prepared the celebrations for the United Nations fiftieth anniversary in 1995. I established a particularly friendly and warm relationship with this delicate, sweet-looking woman. She is working hard today to win over more friends for the United Nations in American society.

Rosario Green from Mexico belonged to the close circle of then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, working as his Special Political Adviser. I remember that we gave her moral support when, in occupying that senior post and the only woman in the Organization's leadership, she had to endure the frequent attacks of jealous male colleagues and constantly prove her highly professional abilities.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner from Austria was appointed Chief of Protocol at the United Nations in 1995. I invited her straight away to lunch for the women ambassadors so that she could get to know my colleagues. Within a year, she had returned to her country as Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And in 1999, after her party's victory in the elections, she was appointed to the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs. I recall that all the French newspapers remarked on her extraordinary courtesy and unfailing elegance. Judging by the press and comments of Austrian diplomats, I look forward to her possibly becoming the first woman President of Austria in 2004.
Narcisa Escaler was Permanent Representative of the Philippines. A beautiful woman and an energetic diplomat, she was popular in the United Nations. After working for three years, she became Deputy Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), holding off some difficult competition. Coming to New York in her new capacity, Narcisa told me how well the cooperation was going between IOM and Kazakhstan.

I would also like to refer to another American, Ambassador Melissa Wells. For about a year, in 1992–1993, she was Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management. At one time, Oleg Troyanovskii, a famous Soviet diplomat and former Permanent Representative, whom I had the honour of welcoming to my home with his wife, Tatiana Aleksandrovna, advised me: “If you tell Melissa that she is very much like her mother, she will be delighted. After all, she is the daughter of Miliza Korjus.” I did as he suggested and Melissa was pleasantly surprised. She does in fact resemble her mother, the famous singer actress who played a leading role in the matchless film, “The Great Waltz”, about the work of the great Strauss, a favourite of many generations. In the early 1990s, Russian television made a film about this legendary actress who, incidentally, started to sing when still a child in Ukraine, where she was born. Ambassador Yuli Vorontsov of the Russian Federation held a lovely party for Melissa with a showing of “The Great Waltz”, to which she invited many friends, including me. “Gorgeous Korjus” was what papers the world over called that wonderful singer.

During my years at the United Nations, five major specialized agencies and funds of the United Nations system were headed by women: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata (Japan); the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland); the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Gro Harlem Brundtland (former Prime Minister of Norway); the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Nafis Sadik (Pakistan); and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy (United States).

I worked closely with Nafis Sadik, and in particular with Carol Bellamy as I was twice elected Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board, its governing body. They both worked with my country with great determination. It was my job to organize their visits to Kazakhstan, and on each occasion they supported our requests and proposals with renewed enthusiasm. They were always welcome guests at our events and active professional contacts with these women were strengthened by personal friendly relations.

Once, at a luncheon I held in 1996 for the women ambassadors, we raised the question of women’s participation in UN peacekeeping activities. Traditionally, given the danger of such work, the Secretary-General appointed men as his special envoys to talk and negotiate to resolve conflicts. We considered, however, that in certain circumstances such missions could be assigned to women, particularly in the peace-building phase, taking into account the specific conditions in the country in question. Thus, it was that the idea was born, and later put into practice, of presenting the Secretary-General with a list of women diplomats and politicians who would be willing to take on mediation and peacekeeping functions. It included many of the world’s eminent women and also my colleagues who had worked at different times as Permanent Representatives to the United Nations—I too was on the list. Secretary-General Kofi Annan used this list, appointing the former Defence Minister of Finland, Elisabeth Rehn, as his Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And only recently Heidi Tagliavini of Switzerland was appointed the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Georgia. We worked to encourage the advancement of women to senior posts in the UN Secretariat. The General Assembly resolution on the question always received our support and attention, and many countries, including Kazakhstan, sponsored it.


The fortnightly Bulletin was a predecessor to the magazine now known as the UN Chronicle. Diligent readers might have noted the mores of the times; in the centre of the spread, the woman representative famous the world over as Eleanor Roosevelt is referred to as “Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt.”
We made a tradition of an annual meeting of women ambassadors and women staff members of the UN Secretariat on 8 March, International Women’s Day. We were treated not only as representatives of our countries but also as members of that original “women’s club”. In that capacity, at the request of a number of women staff members, I personally worked to resolve problems concerning payment of alimony to women who had at one time been married to Secretariat staff. When the issue was examined by the General Assembly’s Fifth Committee, which deals with administrative and budgetary matters, I organized some meetings with its then Chairman, Ambassador Movses Abelian of Armenia, and a leading expert, Nicholas Thorne of the United Kingdom, passing on the request of the women who were concerned that their problem be resolved in an objective and fair way, as was eventually done through our combined efforts.

All these practical matters earned great respect for the G-7. Of 185 Member States, seven were represented by women—the highest number of representatives of the fair sex in the history of the United Nations. The Secretary-General always mentioned it with pride at events celebrating Women’s Day. On 10 April 1995, The New York Times published a lengthy article on women in which we were referred to by name.

In the last year of my work in New York, friendly relations were established among women Permanent Representatives, including Penelope Wensley of Australia, Marjatta Rasi of Finland, Mahawa Bangoura Camara of Guinea, Aksoltan Ataeva of Turkmenistan and Deputy Permanent Representative Betty King of the United States. Others had left during my own tenure; Annette des Iles, Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago, was an excellent diplomat and a delightful person who, although she did not stay for very long in the post, enjoyed immense respect.

In October 1999, I was transferred to Paris. Before leaving for my new job, Betty King organized a splendid farewell party in my honour, and with my friends and colleagues we agreed that wherever we were, we would continue the traditions we had started in New York and which I carried with me to Paris where, with the support of the Secretary-General of the International Diplomatic Academy, Kyra Bodart, I took the initiative of founding a similar group, composed of women ambassadors to France (there were 15 when I first arrived) and to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The group meets once every two months, and on 8 March 2001, I invited them to a meeting at the Embassy and we agreed to make a tradition of the event. I willingly talk about my friends in the famous “group of seven” and continue to maintain friendly relations with them.

I am convinced that women diplomats, certainly most of those I have met, have alongside their professional qualities a surprising combination of toughness in defending the interests of their countries and resourcefulness in achieving compromises that suit everybody. It is not for nothing that many of my male colleagues stress that in conducting talks, it is indeed women diplomats who stand out for their particular persistence and consistency in defending their countries’ interests.

I often discussed women’s involvement in diplomacy with my women colleagues in New York, and we continue to do so in Paris. We all share the opinion that very few women reach senior posts in the diplomatic service. And once a woman has become an ambassador, she must work ten times harder than a man to prove that she, like any man, is capable of dealing with important affairs, including diplomacy.

To quote the well-known phrase of Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France during the First World War, “La diplomatie est une chose trop sérieuse pour être laissée aux seuls diplomates” (“Diplomacy is too important a matter to be left to diplomats”). Clemenceau was thinking of the involvement of the military in diplomacy. I think, and I mean no offence to my male colleagues, that today the phrase could be reworded as follows: “Diplomacy is too important a matter to be left to men.”

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The Personal and the Political: Gender and Sexuality in Diplomatic History

For more than a decade now Frank Costigliola has been publishing path-breaking articles that explore the nexus between emotion and statecraft. Using methods derived from cultural and gender history and theory, he has enlarged our understanding of the boundaries of diplomatic history. This accomplishment, though, is not simply a matter of bringing to bear recent theoretical innovations upon a formerly staid and conventional historical subdiscipline. Instead, an enlargement and enrichment of our understanding of the collapse of the Grand Alliance of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War emerges in large measure from his willingness to analytically engage the historical actors of the period as embodied, emotional, fully human characters. This is perhaps more radical than it might appear at first blush.

I do not want to create a straw man just to knock it down, but it seems fair to characterize much “traditional” diplomatic history as focused on the construction of narratives designed to reconcile the presumed imperatives of “national interests” (however construed), with a relatively disembodied policy-making process (i.e., minds at work, employing a rational strategic calculus). Statesmen, in this vision, are rarely depicted as driven by emotions of lust, anger, fear, disgust, loneliness, desire for intimacy, jealousy, or the burdens of physical frailty, at least as part of a systematic analysis of historical outcomes. Diplomacy as seduction, either literally or figuratively, is not a trope that gets much play in the standard model.

Costigliola’s work, though, shows us that “the personal is political” even in the context of the high politics of international relations. By putting private behaviors at the center of his inquiry about the workings of state power, he demonstrates how reason and emotion are inseparably bound together in the actual contingencies of lived experience where policy decisions are made. With this article on the remarkable role that Pamela Churchill played in the subterranean politics of the U.S.-British alliance through her sexual liaisons and her personal and financial relationships with very powerful men, he further develops an analysis of the ways that power is embodied.

Gender and sexuality structure informal, but very real, relationships of power in this story. Pamela Churchill, linked by affinal kinship ties to the prime minister of Great Britain, deployed charm, sexual allure, the promise and often
the practice of intimacy combined with carefully calculated discretion, to become a facilitator of the alliance between the United States and Britain. In doing so she not only served her powerful patrons, Churchill and Lord Beaverbrook, but also became a possessor of a kind of political agency in her own right. Because of the lack of direct sources, this dimension of Pamela Churchill’s role remains somewhat obscure. The precise ways that she helped shape the direction of the alliance is not entirely clear, but this story opens up interesting avenues for further exploration. The exchange of women has played a role in the formation and management of alliances between states for ages, of course. Nonetheless, several aspects of this narrative are striking. I especially would like to know more about the nexus between exchanges of money and exchanges of sexual intimacy.

If I understand the implications of the argument correctly, the prime minister of Great Britain was subsidizing his daughter-in-law while she cultivated sexual relationships with a variety of powerful American men whose cooperation and goodwill Winston Churchill sought. So too, Lord Beaverbrook, acting in some sense as an agent of the state, paid Pamela Churchill to cultivate relationships with powerful men and to then share “selected confidences” (p. 754) with him. The interpersonal dynamics at work with this “courtesan of the century” seem quite complex. Here perhaps some specific attention to social class might help clarify the workings of political power. Was this sort of sexual power game open only to Pamela Churchill because of her unique combination of aristocratic status, kinship with the head of state, and extraordinary sexual attractiveness, or were there other women who played analogous sexual/political roles among the political and military elite in London during the Second World War? Who else were Harriman, Murrow, Jock Whitney, Frederick Anderson, and Peter Portal sleeping with when Pamela Churchill was otherwise occupied? If I remember correctly, Senator Arthur Vandenberg’s wartime mistress in Washington was an agent of British intelligence. If so, to the extent that the cultivation of sexual intimacy and development of “trust” by providing attractive young women to powerful older American men was a policy of the state, there would appear to be other variants on this theme.

This sort of research, which attempts a rigorous assessment of the public consequences of private and at least semisecret behavior, entails considerable difficulties. Costigliola pulls it off with considerable panache. Persistence, and a willingness to piece together a wide variety of materials as historical evidence, allows him to effectively resist the conventional kinds of reductionism that tend to afflict our narratives of international relations. He introduces a new kind of complexity to our understanding of motivation and process in international relations by more fully humanizing his subjects. At its best, this work gives us a better understanding of the intersections between elements of identity formation, the individual actor in all his or her complexity, and the outcomes of political practice.
Naoko Shibusawa seeks to more fully connect the history of the lavender scare of the early Cold War to American imperial history. What, she asks, does the lavender scare have to do with empire? The provisional answer, it seems, is that the lavender scare was an outgrowth of the cultural hegemony that justified empire. This strikes me as a plausible assertion, but one located at a very high level of generalization and abstraction. Professor Shibusawa seems to argue that the ultimate cause of the lavender scare of 1947–54 was rooted in a hierarchical discourse of empire, sexuality, and civilization in an era of anxiety. She asks Americanist Cold War historians to understand that perceived differences between “us” and “them”—civilized and primitive, modern and backwards, white and nonwhite, masculine and effeminate, mature and juvenile, normal and perverse—have rationalized and justified unequal relationships of power. (p. 727)

Respectfully, I venture to suggest that even among Cold War historians, few will not have encountered one variant or another of this thesis in the historiography of the past thirty or forty years. My question is whether or not the elaboration of this argument in the particular context of the lavender scare and through exegesis of the documents helps us to identify patterns of agency and cause and effect that generate significant new insights not found in the existing literature.

It might be useful for further development of this project to delineate the ways that this cultural hegemony was rendered operational. How and why did a particular set of punitive political practices emerge that took shape in the purges of the lavender scare? How can we meaningfully connect those state practices to the imperial project of the early cold war? How were American Cold War discourses of sexuality imperial in ways that in turn shaped the course of the homosexual panic, situating it in the context of U.S. policies and interventions in the third world? In constructing an account of a homophobic imperial discourse, do we need to account for the opportunism, contingency, and ambivalences that are visible in the operations and actors of the inquisition?

From my preferred epistemological stance, these sorts of questions are most convincingly answered by locating agency in very concrete ways. This, of course, is often difficult if the central problematic under analysis is something as broadly construed as a hegemonic discourse that justifies empire. I was a bit surprised at the lack of direct engagement with my own argument concerning empire and the lavender scare. *Imperial Brotherhood*, is, after all, about empire, and the ways that bitter political rivalries acted out “domestically” redrew boundaries of the conceivable in imperial policy among the elites who experienced the purges.¹

Homosexuals became pawns in a struggle over political power. It was ultimately a question of empire—who, precisely, would control the empire? The sexual inquisition institutionalized by the state was a product of a boundary-marking contest between competing groups of political elites, fought on the terrain of gender and sexuality. The State Department, after all, was the obsessive target of the counterperversion crusaders. A primary aim of the inquisitorial tribunals of the lavender purges was to root out policy actors who deviated from a hetero-normative imperial masculinity, in order to politically reshape the imperial bureaucracy. This contest, of course, had roots in long-standing class and partisan divisions often given the labels “internationalism” and “isolationism,” but by the Cold War era both internationalists and isolationists were struggling not over the existence of a global American empire, but over who would run it, and how.

Veronica Wilson engages a related dimension of the Cold War with her article on the former Communist informer Hede Massing, whose testimony in the Alger Hiss perjury case helped convict Hiss and fuel the growing Red Scare. She seeks to revise the image of Massing and assess the significance of her role in the anti-Communist crusades. Writing to restore Massing’s voice, silenced at the time by an encrustation of stereotypes by the press and even by many of Massing’s anti-Communist supporters, Wilson explores the shaping effects of sexism in the context of domestic hysteria about espionage and subversion.

One can find some similarities with Frank Costigliola’s employment of emotion and gender as organizing principles of inquiry. The biographical focus on Massing and the intertwined emotional, sexual, and political dimension of her life does give us a more complete picture of one of the less prominent figures in the red scare. What is less clear perhaps, are the larger interpretive implications of this story. The structure of the narrative casts Massing as a victim first of her involvement with the Communist underground, placed in peril by her progressively less willing cooperation with Stalinist espionage, then made miserable by the social ruptures precipitated by her decision to cooperate as an anti-Communist informer during the red scare. Wilson demonstrates that operative cultural assumptions about subversion, espionage, and the sexual dangers posed by assertive women were projected onto Massing, simplifying and distorting the complexity of her personality and her actions. Nonetheless, Wilson also argues for Massing’s complicity in some of this with her memoir. By naming names, by employing the tropes of “women misled by their own neuroses; . . . communism arising from mental and emotional disorders instead of real social problems” (p. 714), Massing performed the ritual self-abasement that was the fundamental precondition for absolution by the countersubversive right and its inquisitorial tribunals.

Costigliola’s use of emotion, gender, and sexuality are analytically deployed in order to clarify otherwise hidden dimensions of international diplomacy during wartime; this framework also suggests the possibility of a new terrain for
scholars of diplomatic history. Wilson’s focus on the discursive “injustice” and “misrepresentation” that obscures the “moral courage” (all p. 721) of Massing’s role in the red scare leads away from an engagement with the role of gender, sexuality, or emotion in the conduct and operations of the red scare purges, the role of state power during a particularly repressive era of American history, or other structural features of the politics of the period beyond a pervasive sexism. Costigliola’s work demonstrates how the personal is political; Wilson’s, perhaps, illustrates how the political can be personal.
Women as Citizen-Diplomats

Reena Bernards

Twenty years ago two women—Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams—received the Nobel Peace Prize for leading mass demonstrations of Northern Irish people to protest the cycle of intercommunal violence. Since that time, the work of women striving to bring peace to their countries has become more strategic and sophisticated, building on women’s strengths and experiences. The recognition that these two Northern Irish women received was an exception to the rule; in fact, much of the work for peace that women do takes place behind the scenes, and their accomplishments go unacknowledged. The public knows a great deal about violent conflicts in the world, but doesn’t always know about the actions taken by grass-roots people, particularly women, to try to solve these conflicts.

Women from war-torn regions such as the Balkans, Transcaucasia, and the Horn of Africa are involved in conflict resolution as a means of stemming the tide of intercommunal violence in their countries. Women from opposing sides of these conflicts have reached out to one another during times of crisis, when men have been unable or unwilling to make such connections.

I became aware of women’s potential for success in conflict resolution at the 1985 United Nations Non-Governmental Women’s Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. I organized a workshop where, for the first time at a UN event, Israeli and Palestinian women publicly acknowledged each other’s national rights (Pezzulo 1986, 22). I have since been involved in facilitating numerous events where women from opposing sides of conflicts, including Jews and Palestinians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and Tamil and Singhalese Sri Lankans, have had an opportunity to grapple with the political issues that divide them and to develop strategies for broadening the base of people in their communities who will commit to peaceful resolutions. I have also brought together scholars, activists, journalists, and conflict-resolution practitioners in order to evaluate, analyze, and promote women’s work for peace in regions of conflict.

To better understand the women’s persistence under the most difficult of circumstances in peace efforts, I want to address the convergence of several seemingly distinct phenomena: conflict management, citizen’s diplomacy, and the global rise of women’s leadership. I will
begin with some recent examples of women’s successes from around the world, drawn from my own experiences and field research, and will conclude by offering some thoughts about what needs to happen in the future in order to increase the political effectiveness and influence of women’s peace movements.

**Signs of Success**

In the past few years there have been numerous examples of successful women’s peace organizing from regions in conflict. In the Republic of Ireland in 1996, women formed a women’s political party and did so well in the national elections that they had representatives at the official multiparty talks; in the spring of 1997 they won their first local government seat. The Women’s Party represents “all walks of life and all shades of political color,” including both Catholics and Protestants. Every dialogue—every meeting of women in universities, community centers, schools, and homes—contributed to the powerful coalition these women now maintain.

With support from the Center for Strategic Initiatives of Women (based in the United States), women in the Horn of Africa have received training in conflict-resolution skills, learning from South African trainers in particular. Peace centers in villages in Sudan and Somalia are staffed by trusted indigenous women leaders who help to resolve intertribal conflicts before they become violent confrontations. A woman in a Somalian village conducts a class in which young men learn that “using guns means dying an early death,” and some students have subsequently sold their guns (CSIW 1998). After effectively negotiating an end to fighting between two clans, members of Save Somali Women and Children crossed the division between north and south Mogadishu and held a peace fast. The women have continued to meet at night between the two sides of the green line to discuss peace initiatives.

In former Yugoslavia, multiethnic advocacy groups have been working to rebuild the lives of women ravaged by war. Scorces of these groups rely on support from “Strategies, Training, and Advocacy for Reconciliation: Women for Social Change in the Yugoslav Successor States,” or the STAR Project of Delphi International, supported by U.S. Aid for International Development and operating throughout the Yugoslav successor states. By coming together on practical issues of concern like housing, health care, violence against women, and microenterprise economic development, the women have begun to build the foundation for civil society. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Sarajevo Center for Women Returnees of Zene Zenama concentrates on the goal of
integrating women from different ethnic groups into their Sarajevo neighborhoods. A Sarajevo women’s health clinic, Medica Zenica Infoteka, has a seventy to eighty person multiethnic staff that treats victims of war trauma through counseling, education, job training, and advocacy. The STAR project brings together women from all the states of the former Yugoslavia for conferences and training workshops, which gives the women opportunities to begin to heal the wounds of war.

In the Middle East, a group called Jerusalem Link, comprising Israeli and Palestinian women who have been working together since 1989, sponsored a week of activities in 1997 under the slogan “Share Jerusalem.” As members of the only group to tackle this controversial issue directly, they inspired hot internal political debates about the future of Jerusalem within the two largest Israeli opposition parties. Jerusalem Link involves top women political leaders from both communities, including Knesset members and members of the Palestinian National Council. But this is not an elite women’s group; it also has a base of grass-roots activists. Jerusalem Link’s joint board oversees two women’s centers, one in East Jerusalem and one in West Jerusalem. Each pursues issues in the Palestinian and Israeli communities separately, and then they come together for joint activities. The organization has a dual commitment to promoting both peace and women’s equality in both communities. Now a similar group, Cyprus Link, is attempting to organize women’s centers in the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities.

Finally I want to give an example of a tactic that started locally and became global. In 1988, Israeli Jewish women began a vigil to protest the treatment of Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza. Every Friday, they dressed in black and gathered in silent vigil for an hour, holding signs in the shape of hands that read “End the Occupation.” This form of protest spread like wildfire across the world. At first Women in Black groups formed in the United States and Europe to hold vigils in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. But soon women began using the tactic to protest many forms of militarized violence. In Belgrade and Zagreb, Serbian and Croatian Women in Black groups aimed to stop the war in the former Yugoslavia and to end the mass rape of women. In Bangalore, India, Women in Black holds a weekly vigil to protest Hindu-Muslim strife, and to call for an end to the ill-treatment of women by religious fundamentalists. Women in Black vigils also take place in Colombo, Sri Lanka; Bangkok, Thailand; and Manila, the Philippines. Women in Black groups meet together at international conferences, most recently in 1997, when two hundred women from sixteen countries, including all the Yugoslav successor states, gathered in
Brussels to discuss women’s participation in the political process. Their opening statement reads, “For us peace is not only the absence of war, rather it is based on the needs of the civilian population and women’s human rights, not on the interests of military oligarchies.”

The Field of Conflict Resolution

The increasing interest among women around the world in developing constructive working relationships with their counterparts across ethnic or national boundaries is very much affected by the latest developments in the field of conflict resolution. In fact, a feminist critique of international relations is similar in many ways to the critique by some experts in the conflict-resolution field (Keohane 1991, 41–51; Tickner 1991, 32–37).

Since the end of the Cold War, interethnic and intercommunal conflicts have become a major impediment to world peace as well as to international, economic, and social development. Wars and massacres in such diverse societies as Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda have necessitated the development of a new technology of conflict management and conflict resolution to lessen the danger to human life from violent conflict. A group of theorists in the conflict-resolution field sees international and interethnic conflict as a struggle over basic human needs, such as food, shelter, security, and identity (Azar 1990, 7-10; Burton 1984, 1-16; Kelman 1979, 99-122; Montville 1991, “Psychodynamics,” 177-83; Saunders and Slim 1994). Behind the public reasons for engaging in war are deep psychological and communal needs that interact with political realities. Conflicts are viewed from an intersocietal perspective, in which the fears and wishes of each community play themselves out in the political sphere. Citizens play a major role in transforming the perceptions, understandings, and solutions acceptable to nations in conflict. When they are given an opportunity to engage in joint problem solving, they are able to expand the options for meeting the needs of both communities. For example, in South Africa, the citizen “peace committees” played a crucial role in preparing the population for the tremendous changes that took place in ending apartheid.

Citizens’ engagement in diplomacy can be especially effective when the governmental track is stymied. A former U.S. diplomat, Joseph V. Montville, coined the phrase “track two diplomacy” to describe “an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict” (Montville 1991, “Arrow,” 162). When these nonofficials
of each community come together, the insights that they gain from their experiences with the other side “trickle up” to the official diplomatic level and therefore affect policy. The agreement signed in 1993 between the Palestinians and the government of Israel was initiated at a “track two” meeting in Oslo, Norway. This effort was so successful that it became a back-channel official governmental negotiation.

Global Rise of Women’s Leadership
At the same time that citizens are playing a role in conflict resolution, women all over the world are exerting often newfound powers as political leaders. Whether at the village, neighborhood, municipal, or national level, women are organizing to take control over the issues that affect their lives (Rao 1991, 1–9; Morgan 1984, 3–6). This global rise of women’s leadership coincides with the success of citizen diplomacy to open an important role for women in what I call “women’s diplomacy.” The reasons for the emergence of women’s diplomacy as a force for peace are twofold.

First, many women around the world recognize violent conflict as a direct threat to their ability to make social and political gains. A militarized society, or one consumed by a national struggle, will not put women’s equality and human rights high on its agenda. Conflict creates an undemocratic atmosphere in which all deviations from the norm are viewed with suspicion. The community reverts to traditional patterns of behavior as a means of coping, and women’s emancipation is treated as particularly threatening (Ridd and Callaway 1987, 3–4). Women also bear the brunt of the burden of war and none of its glory. Since women and children make up the bulk of the world’s refugees, women pick up the pieces after a war in rebuilding families and civil society. Building a sustainable peace is a prerequisite for advancing on all issues of concern for women.

Second, women’s diplomacy has emerged because women bring important negotiating skills to the table. Biology need not be considered the cause of difference, but the socialization and life experiences of women often lead them to have unique perspectives on societal conflicts (Gilligan 1982, 173–74; Grant and Newland 1991, 1–7; Miller 1976, 125–40; Ruddick 1989, 225). I let me expand on this assertion.

Features of Women’s Diplomacy
Women are well positioned to create opportunities for dialogue and problem solving that do not exist in conventional corridors of power. First, precisely because most women are outside of traditional power...
structures and are not yet high in the hierarchy of existing societal institutions—military, religious, industrial, or governmental—women who choose to engage in peace-making processes are often able to think of solutions that are "outside of the box," outside of mainstream ways of thinking. For example, I recall that during an off-the-record dialogue at the 1985 UN Forum in Nairobi, Palestinians challenged the Israelis on their need for family reunification on the West Bank and in Gaza. The Israeli women agreed, but they asked if the Palestinians could also see the need for Soviet families to be reunited in Israel. The Palestinian women acknowledged that need. They were able to put aside the purely "nationalist" lens that views the conflict as a win/lose situation and were instead able to see the human needs common to both conflicting parties.

Second, women are a rising constituency that political parties need to take seriously, particularly in emerging democracies. The Northern Irish women, by forming a bicommunal political party and winning a place at the negotiating table, made it clear that politicians cannot take them for granted. Women from war-torn states in the Balkans, Transcaucasia, and other parts of the former Soviet Union are learning political campaign skills so that they too can have a say in the nature of their developing states.

Third, the commonalities between women enable them at times to be the first ones to walk the bridge to the other side. When there is a conflict so intractable that people are taught not to see the other side as even human, women are often the only ones who can make connections to their counterparts on the opposing side. In the early 1980s, amidst a raging war between the Singhalese government forces and the Tamil rebels from the north, Sri Lankan women from the north passed through dangerous militarized zones to meet with women in the south. They discovered that they shared similar struggles, including grief over the losses of war. They called this project "barefoot diplomacy."

This ability to see someone from the other side as a fellow human enables women to persist with relationships during times of great tension. During the Gulf War of 1991, a well-known male Israeli leftist responded with anger to the apparently pro-Iraq position of many Palestinians. He published an article entitled "They Should Come Find Me," meaning that his former Palestinian contacts would now have to seek him out, as he would no longer seek them. This became a slogan for many activists in the Israeli peace movement, a message of withdrawal despite their excellent work at building relationships with the Palestinians over twenty-five years. Yet women peace activists went to
each other’s communities, discussed political events, and struggled through a very difficult, painful time. These relationships have formed the basis for extensive joint political work in the years that followed.

Fourth, women often deeply value relationship building. People who are able to form personal relationships with individuals from the other side are the ones most successful at interactive conflict resolution. At a workshop in Moscow with women from Armenia and Azerbaijan, the late-night singing, both in Russian, which they had in common, and in their own native languages, communicated a great deal about the kind of mutual cooperation and affection they wished to bring to the work of problem solving.

Fifth, negotiation is a way of life for many women. The reality of many women’s lives is that they must negotiate in order to survive. At a conference on women and conflict, a woman from the Horn of Africa pointed out that women have to cross clan lines every day in order to get water. During times of violent conflict, negotiating is a necessary skill for women in order to sustain their families.

Finally, women are often more adept at giving and reading interpersonal signals designed to show their common humanity and vulnerability; this capacity can be extremely important in the de-escalation of conflict (Miller 1976, 29–49). For example, during a particularly tense moment at a Jewish-Palestinian workshop that I facilitated, one of the Jewish women felt vulnerable. Taking a more strident position than the other Jewish women, she felt isolated and attacked. The Palestinians were offended by some of her comments. There was silence in the room, and she was on the verge of tears. Then a Palestinian woman sitting next to her looked down at her feet and said, “Where’d you get those red shoes?” Her comment broke the tension, and this enabled the Jewish woman to stay with the process. Ultimately she traveled to the Middle East with a Jewish-Palestinian delegation, visited Palestinian institutions in the West Bank and in Gaza, and emerged as a spokesperson for the peace process within her more conservative Jewish community. But she would not have stayed with the dialogue process if she had not felt personally recognized as a human being.

Future Directions

What is the next step for women’s diplomacy? First, there is a need for more visibility; impressive actions and interactions such as those I have described are largely unacknowledged. Women’s diplomatic initiatives do not receive the funding, media attention, or political support they require and deserve. People in the West who support such efforts can help garner the resources necessary to nurture them.
Second, there is a need for documentation and academic research to determine what strategies are most successful. Women's studies programs can teach courses, sponsor conferences, evaluate projects, and provide the theoretical framework for understanding women activists' successes and failures. By joining with other departments such as government, political science, international relations, and conflict resolution, women's studies can play an important role in raising the awareness of others about the work of women's diplomacy.

Third, the work of building relationships needs to be mainstreamed. Foundations need to understand that the work women do in women's diplomacy is not just the "soft stuff." It's hard work, and it brings results in changed attitudes and a changed political atmosphere between peoples in conflict.

Fourth, women need to become involved in the political process. Conflict-resolution efforts need to include women already in positions of power. In addition, they need to reach out to teach political skills at the grass-roots level, so that more women who shun military solutions can win election to decision-making positions.

Fifth, there must be more opportunities for women from different regions to meet and learn from one another. One woman involved in women's diplomacy said she envisions a "swat team" with an Armenian and an Eritrean, or a South African and a Bosnian, who would get to a region in the early stages of a conflict and work with women on preventive action, before events get out of control.

Finally, I want to summarize my hope for this work with two words: lead men. The skills that women have to offer are human skills, and they can be learned. Ultimately, women's diplomacy needs to influence and involve men in the process of conflict resolution, so that those wielding the weapons will learn to wage conflict peacefully.

WORKS CITED


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