



Master of Studies in Diplomatic Studies

**Swiss Diplomacy and Change:
A Gender Perspective**

Dissertation Submitted for the Master of Studies in
Diplomatic Studies
University of Oxford

By

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Abstract

This study considers diplomacy as an institution of formalised human interaction subject to change triggered by a variety of causes. In addition to two widely discussed drivers of change, namely economic–political processes and technological progress, this study proposes and elaborates on a different driver, that of social change. The idea of social change references the fluid ways in which societies perceive and organise themselves, and as such it is inclusive of many different dynamics. In this paper, we address discourse on gender norms as an example of social change that has impacted on diplomacy in substantial ways. The case study of the Swiss foreign service will serve to contextualise our research interest.

This study sets out to describe the processes in which gender reforms have become relevant for diplomacy in the Swiss context. By using Foucauldian discourse analysis as our research strategy of choice, we present five turning points that define the evolution of Swiss diplomacy from a gender point of view. These are (1) Switzerland’s first exposure to female diplomats, (2) the professionalisation of the diplomatic contest, (3) the introduction of equal regulatory policies for women and men, (4) the pursuit of female representation, and (5) current conversations about flexible working arrangements. Through examination of each of these turning points, we present a coherent chronological tapestry that explains the way in which progressive gender norms have played a role in the development of the Swiss foreign service from the mid-twentieth century until today. In doing so, we deliver a case in point for how social change has affected diplomacy in the modern era.

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2. Conclusion

By analysing the evolution of gender norms in the Swiss foreign service, this study has contributed to the conversation around diplomacy and change. In particular, it has demonstrated that alongside more commonly identified triggers for change, such as economic, political and technological progress, change in diplomacy can also derive from a more hidden and unqualifiable source, namely social change. In order to prove our point, two preliminary assumptions had first to be addressed. Firstly, we have explained why 'gender' is a category subject to social interpretation. Secondly, by reference to Foucault's theory of 'power as knowledge', we have described how discourses about 'objects of knowledge' (Miles, 2010, p. 369) (such as ideas on gender) emerge in and transform society. Based on this proposition, and intrigued by the uniqueness of the Swiss case, we have conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis of the evolution of gender norms in the Swiss foreign service.

In carrying out this analysis we have identified five turning points in the development of Swiss diplomacy from a gender perspective. We have seen that in the mid-twentieth century, Swiss women were for the first time given access to the diplomatic profession, for reasons of international comparison and pressure from domestic interest groups (4.1.). Shortly after this, with the introduction of the diplomatic contest, both women and men could apply to the Swiss foreign office, yet women still suffered from significant disadvantages. Apart from regulatory disadvantages among other things, women were faced with the perception that they were limited in the posting options due to what was perceived as their 'natural propensities' (4.2). With the passing of the latter perception, and motivated by national and international initiatives (e.g. introduction of women's suffrage in 1971 and the UNESCO report), gender-discriminatory regulations, such as dismissal upon marriage for women diplomats, were eventually removed by the Swiss foreign ministry in the mid-1970s (4.3.). Since then, discussions about gender and diplomacy have revolved mainly around promoting female representation. In 2006, Micheline

Calmy-Rey shook up the ministry by imposing of a 50/50 gender-ratio policy for diplomatic recruitment (4.4.). Since then, debates about gender equality have taken the form of supporting and campaigning for flexible working arrangements, in particular, job-sharing solutions (4.5).

Apart from reconstructing the progressing discourse on gender in the Swiss foreign service from the mid-twentieth century until today (a result worthwhile in itself), our research has offered valuable insights from three other standpoints. For one thing, our case study has provided a case in point for our initial proposition, namely that social change is an additional – yet so far almost entirely overseen – trigger for change in the evolution of diplomacy. Then, by linking social change with discourse theory and by applying Foucauldian discourse analysis to our case study, we have provided a concrete example of how social change operates. Lastly, by viewing diplomacy through a gender lens we have delivered insight into an important aspect of contemporary diplomacy and have addressed the scarcity of this topic in today's literature.

Our analysis is not complete, but it offers new insights into the overlapping themes of gender, diplomacy and change. In order to explore this topic further, future research has a wide spectrum of options. For example, by researching other countries in a similar way, general and nation-specific elements of the evolution of diplomacy from a gender point of view could be identified and discussed. Remaining within Swiss diplomacy, by widening the number and diversity of discourse regulators (for example, by putting greater emphasis on gender representation in the media), new turning points could be found and evaluated.