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**Women's Access, Representation and Leadership in the United Nations**

By

Kirsten Haack

Northumbria University

## **Dedication**

To my parents

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
  - Women leaders and IR feminism
  - The impact of women's participation in international relations
  - Overview over the book
2. Gender equality and the development of UN policy
  - From the League of Nations to the United Nations
  - Foundations, 1945-1969
  - The emergence of a new agenda, 1970-1975
  - Feminist advances, 1975-1985
  - Sexist work cultures and women's human rights, 1986-1999
  - Gender equality in the new millennium
  - Making women visible
3. Breaking the glass ceiling? Women's representation in the UN system
  - Permanent representatives
  - Professional and senior staff
  - Special representatives, envoys and judges
  - Executive heads
  - Glass ceiling: cracked or shattered?
4. Explaining access to executive leadership in UN agencies
  - Candidates
  - Processes: selecting and appointing
  - Institutions: portfolios
  - Institutions: authority
  - Circumstances
  - From glass houses to labyrinths: women's winding paths to leadership
5. Explaining failure: the UN Secretary-Generalship
  - The campaign
  - Polling results
  - Merit, power and role-definitions
  - Discourses of merit
  - Merit: a double-edged sword
6. Leadership
  - Defining women's leadership
  - Leading as chief administrator
  - Catherine Bertini, WFP (1992-2002)
  - Carol Bellamy, UNICEF (1995-2005)
  - Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO (1998-2003)
  - Irina Bokova, UNESCO (2009-2017)
  - Helen Clark, UNDP (2009-2017)
  - Leading as women, for women
7. Conclusion

The role of the Secretary-General  
The UN's role as global leader  
Where next?

### **List of Abbreviations**

ASG	Assistant-Secretary-General
CEB	Chief Executives Board for Coordination
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment (US constitution)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GA	United Nations General Assembly
IACW	Inter-American Commission of Women
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICAS	International Conference of American States
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
INSTRAW	UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
LON	League of Nations
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSAGI	Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
SC	Security Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SG	Secretary-General
She4SG	Campaign to Elect a Woman UN Secretary-General
SRSG	Special Representatives of the Secretary-General
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN	United Nations
UNA-UK	United Nations Association – United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nation Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNON	United Nations Office in Nairobi
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNOV	United Nations Office in Vienna
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UPU	Universal Postal Union
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WILPF	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMF-IGP	World Federalist Movement – Institute for Global Policy
WMG	Women’s Major Group
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

## **List of Figures and Tables**

Table 3.1 – Resolutions specifying gender quotas

Table 3.1 – Percentage of women in UN departments and other entities, 1980-2016

Table 3.2 – Percentage of women in UN agencies, 1972-2018

Table 3.3 – Women in international legal organisations, 2015

Table 3.4 – Women executive heads of UN agencies

Table 4.1 – Gender and executive leadership in UN agencies, 2018

Table 4.2 – Executive heads' level of education, according to gender, 1987-2018

Table 4.3 – Gender distribution in international tribunals

Table 4.4 – Representation of women in UN agencies according to portfolio (P1 to UG), 2017

Table 5.1 – Candidates for the post of Secretary-General in 2016

Table 5.2 – Polling results of the elections for the UN Secretary-Generalship

Table 6.1 – Proportion of women in professional and managerial categories, UNICEF 2004-2005

Table 6.2 – Summary of gender equality indices for five women leaders, first and last year in office

Table 7.1 – The Secretary-General's score card on gender equality

Figure 3.1 – Number of women ambassadors, 1972-2020

Figure 3.2 – Percentage of women in posts subject to geographic distribution, 1971-2018

Figure 3.3 – Percentage of women in professional categories, 1971-2018

Figure 3.4 – Percentage of women in senior roles, 1971-2018

Figure 6.1 – Trends in gender inequality in WFP, 1991-2019

Figure 6.2 – Trends in gender inequality in UNICEF, 1991-2019

Figure 6.3 – Trends in gender inequality in WHO, 1991-2019

Figure 6.4 – Trends in gender inequality in UNESCO, 1991-2019

Figure 6.5 – Trends in gender inequality in UNDP, 1992-2019



# Chapter One

## Introduction

The face of international politics has been changing significantly since the year 2000. Whether that is the group photo of multilateral meetings and global conferences, or the UN and one of its many agencies in the field: women are accessing leadership positions in governments and international organisations. This follows an earlier rise in the number of women in national politics, including in government, which has seen women entering politics in more significant numbers since the 1980s. It is also a reflection of women shaping careers in the private or public sector. Today we see women in two types of roles in international politics: Women are state representatives, be that heads of governments and heads of states, or ministers with a portfolio that has an international dimension, such as foreign ministers, defence ministers or trade ministers. Women have also increasingly entered the diplomatic services, and thus become the face of their state in embassies around the world, including international organisations. Secondly, women are also international actors, representing multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, and thus participating in the delivery of global aid, and in the conceptualisation and negotiation of global policy. This study investigates the latter group: women executive heads in the United Nations system.

Research in comparative politics has followed this empirical phenomenon and investigated how and why women are able to access office, in which areas of activity they can be found, and how their presence shapes the institutions they work in and the policies they adopt; in other words, how women are agents of change. The idea that women's increasing presence in institutions creates change is widely seen as a given, yet continues to be contested: Does the mere presence of women create change? What changes when their numbers increase? How does change occur? These and similar questions have been discussed at length in comparative politics. Here, questions of access, representation and leadership to various offices at different levels of politics have been explored broadly, including the role of political ambition (Lawless and Fox 2010), quotas and affirmative action (Krook 2010), the media (Lawrence 2009; Trimble 2018), party political ideology, institutions, and historic circumstances (Genovese 1993). Research includes women's access to political office at all levels, from local politics to parliamentary office (Lovenduski 2005), cabinets (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2016; Howard Davis 1997), and the office of prime minister and president (Genovese 1993; Jalalzai 2013, 2016; Skard 2015). By contrast, the growing number of women leaders in international relations has received comparatively little theoretical-conceptual attention. This follows the privileging of structural explanations over agent-focussed analysis in the discipline of International Relations. As a result, only a few individuals are acknowledged as having shaped politics at critical junctures in time. These individuals are predominantly men and rarely women; they represent a 'big man' history, not a systematic understanding of the role of people in international relations. Consequently, the practice of international relations and the discipline of International Relations remain – as feminist scholars of IR note – a men's world.

### Women leaders and IR feminism

If mainstream IR theory disregarded the individual and their gender, feminist IR was slow to engage with elite women, given their historic absence from the global public domain. In her seminal publication *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Enloe (1989) significantly challenged mainstream IR theory by assuming that power infuses all international relationships, allowing her to show that “relations between governments depend not on only on capital and weaponry, but also on the control of women as symbols, consumers, workers, and emotional comforters” (Enloe 1989: xvii). By focussing on the impact of international politics and decision-making on ordinary women's lives, Enloe showed that women's service as low paid workers, prostitutes or wives served to maintain a globalising

economy, the politics of the Cold War as well as the process of international politics itself. Thus, previously invisible from IR, women were shown to be an essential part of it, albeit in unexpected ways. Heavily focussed on global production and consumption, Enloe's study considered issues of security and diplomacy in only two of seven case studies while referencing only three women leaders at the time: Margaret Thatcher (UK prime minister 1979-1990), Indira Gandhi (Indian prime minister 1980-1984) and Jeanne Kirkpatrick (US ambassador to the UN, 1981-1985). Feminist IR scholarship thus made visible structures of oppression and subordination that curtailed women's agency to control their own lives and bodies, including the unpaid work of diplomatic wives. However, in the empirical absence of women leaders, feminism's emphasis on the division between the public and the private led to a focus on 'ordinary' women in IR and a rich body of work analysing the significant contributions by feminist activists and the global women's movement, i.e. political 'outsiders' (Antrobus 2004; Caglar et al. 2013; Hawkesworth 2012; Marx Ferree and Tripp 2006; Stienstra 1994). Here, the personal might have been political but the political was certainly not personal i.e. informed by the study of specific individuals that are recognisable as state representatives. This was reinforced by the introduction of gender as an analytical focus, which defined 'woman' as a smaller part of a more encompassing analysis of power relations that "produce and perpetuate gender identities" (Squires and Weldes 2007: 186). Thus, when Zalewski (1998) asked 'where is woman in International Relations?', her concern was the increasing focus on gender over the category of woman, not an interest in women as identifiable individual global actors.

The 1990s saw some interest in the question of women's presence (or absence) in formal roles in international politics, including North American foreign policy (Crapol 1992; McGlen and Reid Sarkees 1993; Weiers 1995) and the attitudinal, institutional and regulatory hurdles women faced in accessing employment in the diplomatic services, and women's equality at the UN from an international legal perspective (Charlesworth 1994, 1995). Feminist IR textbooks would regularly include chapters on women in foreign policy and global policy-making (D'Amico 1999), yet the study of women leaders and political 'insiders' received relatively little attention. However, the increasing visibility of women in governmental roles in the 21st century, especially Hilary Clinton's time as Secretary of State and her subsequent bid for the presidency, the election of numerous women as heads of state or government, and an increasing presence of women at trade and security summits, as well as the passing of UN Resolution 1325 and its commitment to increase women's representation in all areas of politics influenced renewed interest in the question. Historians have updated and expanded – both geographically and temporally – their analyses of women's exclusion and subsequent inclusion into diplomatic services (Hughes 2010; McCarthy 2009, 2014; McCarthy and Southern 2017; Rahman 2011), while renewed engagement with the internationalist movement of the late 19th and early 20th century (re-)discovered the contributions made by a number of women as part of the international women's movement or as representatives to the League of Nations (DuBois and Derby 2009, Midtgaard 2011, Miller 1994, Trigg 1995). Others broadened the scope of analysis to include new actors, such as foreign ministers (Bashevkin 2014) and defence ministers (Barnes and O'Brien 2018), while also investigating the integration of women into military structures (Carreiras 2006).

Hillary Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State and the adoption of the so-called 'Hillary doctrine' (Garner 2013; Hudson and Leidl 2015) led not only to, what the press termed, the 'Hillary effect', i.e. an increase in women ambassadors globally (Jordan 2010), but also raised again the question of women leaders' potential to shape foreign policy in such a way as to affect the lives of women globally. While Bashevkin (2018) analysed four US Secretaries of State (Kirkpatrick, Albright, Rice and Clinton) and the question whether their foreign policies had feminist directions, the introduction of feminist foreign policies by Sweden, Canada and others has led to further engagement with the nature and effectiveness of these policies, and their relation to state identity (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016; Chapnick 2019; Hudson 2017; Richey 2001). The introduction of the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda with Resolution 1325 led to increased attention to women's roles in peacekeeping (Karim and Beardsley 2017; Olonisakin et al. 2011) and the negotiation of peace treaties (Aggestam and Towns 2018). Studies of women in international organisations had been limited to brief case studies and overviews of their exclusion (Charlesworth and Chinkin 2000; D'Amico 1999; Meyer and Prügl 1999), yet recent research has begun to

study the gendered nature of institutional processes and practices that influence women's access to leadership roles in international organisations, such as the UN (Bode 2020; Haack 2014b, 2014a, 2017), NATO (Wright et al. 2019), the International Criminal Court (Chappell 2015), the EU (Kantola 2010), and the way in which women navigate these hurdles.

Despite extensive research into women's access to office domestically, their relative absence in governmental and decision-making positions relevant to foreign policy meant that some women, whose political career, actions and decisions were well understood domestically, disappeared from view when adopting an international perspective. Their contribution to foreign policy, or indeed global policy-making remained ill understood. At the same time, the fairly recent increase in the number of women leaders in international organisations, let alone the recognition that executive heads in international organisations may act independently, meant that scholars have been unable to systematically account for women's contributions to policy-making in international organisations – specifically how gender norms and gender equality agendas are advanced alongside advocacy by the women's movement or, notably, in areas where the global women's movement is less likely to reach. Yet, research has shown gender differences in both foreign policy interests (Togebly 1994; True 2016), and leadership and communication styles (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001); while the recent emergence of feminist foreign policies suggests that women leaders may shape international relations differently by refocussing policy to represent women's interests or address women's issues globally. This creates expectations that the representation of women in international relations could be a potential move away from 'traditional' representations of the state through masculine strength and force while acting *within* the existing state system. Indeed, while Jain's (2005) rich account of sixty years of UN development policy and gender equality shows the role that insiders (diplomats and UN staff) have played alongside the global women's movement, Dersnah's (2016) and Sanderson's and Rao's (2012) analyses of UN Women and its role in developing the Women, Peace and Security agenda highlights the activities of femocrats and feminist practitioners as insiders, working to advance feminist agendas through daily struggle.

### **The impact of women's participation in international relations**

Why care about women's presence in international organisations? And what impact might it have on organisations, the political process and outcomes? The relationship between presence, i.e. descriptive representation, and impact, e.g. substantive representation, has been a central concern of feminist comparative political research. Researchers focussed on sheer numbers, i.e. 'critical mass', and the idea that organisations change as the number of women met the target of 30% representation (Beckwith 2007; Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007; Bratton 2005; Celis 2008; Childs and Krook 2008; Dahlerup 1988; Tremblay 2006). Yet, as Lovenduski (2005) noted, feminists have had unrealistic expectations of the opportunities for representation. The assumption that descriptive representation and substantive representation are causally related could not be proven. Lovenduski noted both public and scholarly disappointment in women's apparent inability to make a difference. Research on the relationship between numbers and impact proved inconclusive as researchers recognised the diversity of women's ideological positions (Celis and Childs 2012; Childs 2006), a lack of cross-party coalitions among women (Ayata and Tütüncü 2008), and the emergence of backlash (Grey 2006). Dahlerup (2006) concluded that scholars had become too focussed on one dimension of change, here: output, or voting behaviour, while ignoring cultural and organisational change. Thus, some called for a (partial) abandonment of the concept in favour of a focus on 'critical actors' (Childs and Krook 2006), which may also include feminist men. But scholars could not ignore critics' argument that women entering politics become political men and thus supported patriarchal attitudes, behaviours and policies. Why then, Lovenduski asked, should we support or be concerned with women entering politics and accessing office if women's agency is thus curtailed? To this we might add, why should we be concerned with women in global governance, specifically women in roles that are commonly understood as bureaucratic, i.e. as servants to UN member states and multilateral diplomacy? Diplomacy and diplomatic scripts of behaviour may act as much as a cage that constrains

individual leadership, as does the need to confer with governments and ministries of foreign affairs at home. For example, Art. 100 UN Charter clearly limits agency for UN staff, setting out the requirements for bureaucratic neutrality by stating that

“1. In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instruction from any government or from any other authority external to the Organizations. *They shall refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization.*

2. Each Member of the United Nations undertakes to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities.” (emphasis added)

To answer her own question, Lovenduski proceeded to rehearse the main reasons given as to why women’s representation should indeed be supported, including arguments of justice, pragmatism and difference, which will serve here as proxies for the broader debate within social sciences. Each reveal how and why gender equality and gender parity at the UN, in particular women’s access to executive office, matter, despite the apparent limitations of the role’s scope of authority.

According to Lovenduski, justice arguments highlight the question of fairness between the sexes to participate in public affairs and policy-making. Proponents of the justice argument simply state that it is unfair for men alone to populate the sphere of politics, noting instead women’s entitlement to participate on the basis of citizenship. Justice proponents thus emphasise equality as the fundamental principle upon which women’s access to office is justified. Consequently, to many states women’s representation signals modernity and therefore forms a central element of the construction of their own identity, be that at home or abroad (Lovenduski 2005). Indeed, Art. 8 of the UN Charter, which specifies that “the United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs”, has functioned as a reference point for advocates of gender equality. Despite its mere declaratory character, the progressive nature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, negotiated shortly after the UN charter, reinforces the UN’s commitment to gender equality as a norm guiding the United Nations, if not member states. Indeed, supporters of gender equality at the UN have followed the same discourse of modernity as highlighted by Lovenduski. This has prevented effective opposition to women’s representation in UN agencies to emerge.

With a focus on equal representation, proponents of the justice argument are said to be concerned primarily with quantifying women’s presence, rather than the question whether women can or do make a difference once in office. Thus, justice arguments do not assume any substantive representation of women’s interests, in contrast to arguments that emphasise women’s difference, summarised by Lovenduski (2005) as pragmatic and difference arguments. According to Lovenduski, pragmatic arguments highlight the perspective of the vote-maximising rational politicians, who see advantages in the use of women candidates. Assuming that women are more likely to vote for candidates who are like themselves (descriptive representation), they hope to increase the number of women voters by fielding women candidates. Proponents of this view emphasise that women will bring something different to the political arena, such as different styles of communication and decision-making. This, they assume leads to a different kind of politics over time (Lovenduski 2005). This argument is not too dissimilar from Lovenduski’s ‘difference’ argument, which omits the role of the calculating politician and focuses solely on what women can bring to politics. Both arguments are functional in focus, emphasising the presumed benefit of women’s presence to the institution. Similar arguments are made in business, where the presence of women in company boards has been shown to increase company profits (Hoobler et al. 2018), while International Relations research has shown that peace agreements are more stable and enduring if women are involved in the creation and maintenance of peace agreements (Krause et al. 2018; True and Riveros-Morales 2019).

Thus, discourses of gender and peace steer a delicate boundary between essentialist views of women as intrinsically peaceful, caring and nurturing (while suggesting a considerable degree of passivity) and findings that women’s political behaviour, communication styles and decision-making are different to men but by no means passive; and between calls for equal treatment between men and women, and the

recognition that women are affected differently in the economy or in situations of conflict, for examples as victims of sexual violence, and therefore do require different support. While essentialism sits uneasily with feminist scholars, as it supports the assumption that there are distinct sex roles and therefore gender hierarchies, Steans (2013) argues that ‘strategic essentialism’ could be important in noticing differential effects in order to ensure that assistance is directed towards women (and children) as victims in conflict. Proponents of gender equality at the UN have drawn on both justice and functional arguments at various times. In the 1970s member states emphasised equality as a value in itself. Member states emphasised that only if equality was achieved could all benefit from development (Danish representative, 33<sup>rd</sup> session, 1978, A/C.5/33/SR.14) and that the UN could become ‘truly representative’ only if more women were hired (representative of Oman, 34<sup>th</sup> session, 1979), while others argued that gender equality would ensure ‘harmony’ between men and women (Belgian representative, 33<sup>rd</sup> session, 1978, A/C.5/33/SR.14). In the 1990s member states increasingly highlighted the relationship between gender equality at the UN and its leadership and modelling effect on member states. Member states recognised that women bring different perspectives and life experiences that are of value to the UN, in particular in the field (e.g. peacekeeping, development aid) where UN staff engage directly with those it serves.

Finally, a third dimension of the functional argument relates to the symbolism attached to descriptive representation. According to Pitkin (1967), the representative evokes a response from their audience, attaching meaning to their presence. In the public administration literature this finds expression in the ‘representative bureaucracy’ debate, which emphasises that passive (i.e. descriptive) representation can be an “instrument of collective identity” (Gravier 2013) for both bureaucracy and indeed minorities; for example, ‘working for the government’ can be seen as a sign of successful integration of minorities into the state and normal social roles (Peters et al. 2015). In the absence of street-level bureaucrats, the representativeness of international organisation bureaucrats may also function to enhance legitimacy vis-a-vis member states, especially where nationality rules are concerned (Gravier 2013; Haack 2018). Thus, the inclusion of women in UN agencies may signal the inclusion of women in international and national affairs, legitimating women as agents as well as aid recipients.

Irrespective of how women’s presence in international relations is justified, it is commonly assumed that presence will create change in some form or another. While political scientists have highlighted women parliamentarians’ substantive representation of women’s needs and interests through the adoption of relevant policies (Celis et al. 2008; Childs 2006), public administration scholars note that bureaucrats are not passive executors of politicians’ will but work toward furthering a common good.<sup>1</sup> For example, EU bureaucrats are committed to the construction of Europe (Stevens 2009), while UN staff identify as cosmopolitans, with a high degree of humanitarianism (Anderfuhren-Biget et al. 2013). Thus, recognising the role of bureaucratic actors and leadership in the context of the United Nations (Bauer 2006; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Dijkstra 2016; Johnson 2014; Kille 2006; Weinlich 2014) means that disregarding gender, esp. women as participants in global policy-making, can only lead to a partial understanding of political change, especially change that advances women globally. This study seeks to investigate how women access executive head roles in the United Nations, how they represent – descriptively or substantively – women and exercise leadership. It illustrates how an organisation that is often perceived to be ‘ahead of the curve’ on progressive social values, as expressed by the inclusion of gender equality in the UN charter, is shaped by gendered attitudes and power structures that constrain women’s contribution to the work of international organisations. The study shows the transformation of women’s access and representation over time following internal and external activism, as well as changes in attitudes and policies, while also introducing a brief analysis of women’s leadership as an example for future transformation of gendered institutional dynamics.

While the importance of women in senior roles was recognised by some as early as the 1940s, gender parity among UN staff did not become an organisational concern and explicit goal until three

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<sup>1</sup> Bureaucrats’ ability to influence the formulation and implementation of policy depends on the specific administrative model. While the Westminster model leaves no room for opinion or influence by bureaucrats, in the continental system bureaucracy sustains and advances a common good (Stevens 2009).

decades later. Yet, despite growing acceptance of the importance of gender parity, women's advancement into these senior level roles was slow. Writing for the feminist magazine *Ms.* in 1992, Kirshenbaum (1992) called the UN the "world's largest men's club", noting women's absence in senior roles. It is only since the turn of the millennium that the number of women working for the UN has increased at all levels. Between 1987 and 2018 thirty women have occupied executive leadership roles in the UN system, overseeing and contributing to global policy-making. These roles include executive directorship of UN funds and programmes, specialized agencies, UN offices and the role of the Deputy-Secretary-General. Understanding their contribution to global policy-making will expand feminist IR literature to include the role of insiders, i.e. political actors in formal roles, and the development of the UN's gender equality agenda, while adding to the literature of international organisation, norm development and the role of individuals, esp. bureaucratic actors. Access, representation and leadership are analysed together here, as without understanding why, how and under what conditions women are able to access senior roles in international organisations, their potential for effective leadership cannot be fully understood. Institutional differences and other environmental factors created differential opportunities for women to access organisations, leading to specific patterns of representation. From this follows that women are more likely to contribute to some areas of global policy than others.

## **Overview over the book**

Drawing on historiographic approaches and archival study (Ventresca and Baum 2005) of meeting records, resolutions and reports, the study first investigates organisational practices, ideas and discourses over time. In treating UN documents as both a source and artefact of information, the study reveals the continuities and discontinuities created by bureaucratic documents in understanding, conceptualising and indeed implementing norms such as gender equality. In other words, the study shows how the report is a political act: the bureaucratic practice of data collection and analysis, a central UN Secretariat practice (Svenson 2017), makes visible and leaves invisible women's presence. As such the changing shape of data tells its own story, as much as the evolving landscape of resolutions and conventions does. Secondly, the study seeks to transpose theory from the domain democratic politics and, to a lesser extent, business research to the domain of international organisations. While the human factor, i.e. attitudes and behaviours, are broadly speaking, constants, the institutional environment does shape outcomes in specific ways. Thus, in applying theories of access, representation and leadership from related domains to the UN, the study draws out the unique institutional frameworks, practices and behaviours of the organisation. These institutional aspects have been little studied elsewhere, given that a public administration perspective of international organisations is recent and evolving field (Moloney and Rosenbloom 2020). In this regard, the study of women and their recruitment may also serve as a case study to organisational development.

Chapter 2 begins with the history of gender equality agenda at the United Nations – its emergence, development and implementation. As a human resource policy to increase the number of women in professional and senior roles, to eventually achieve gender parity, the idea of gender equality saw a relatively easy journey to adoption. As feminist activism had ensured that key documents, such as the UN charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, laid the foundations for gender equality, member states found it difficult to argue against the application of it in their staff and recruitment policies. Despite this, initial hurdles to define appropriate responsibilities for the implementation of gender equality remained, and it was only once key advances had been made in understanding the impact of structural hurdles versus direct discrimination, as outlined by second wave feminism, that gender equality for UN staff finally became a standing agenda item and human resource policy. The idea of gender equality did not face opposition among member states but it competed with geographic distribution for attention by member states. Initially, the policy's institutionalisation moved alongside the development of gender equality norms and policies applicable to women across the world, and became part and parcel of a single gender equality agenda expressed at the World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals, and Resolution 1325, which required all

member states and organisation to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all UN peace and security efforts. However, its implementation faced challenges due to sexist work cultures and increasing backlash from conservative groups and member states.

These efforts saw a steady increase in the number of women in professional and senior roles, yet despite all efforts all targets set by the General Assembly were missed. Moreover, access and representation was uneven across agencies and levels, following well-known patterns elsewhere. These questions of access and representation are addressed in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 investigates how the efforts to increase the recruitment, promotion and retention of women has translated into quantitative changes across a variety of roles, including professional staff, UN executive heads, permanent representatives (ambassadors), envoys and special representatives, international judges and peacekeepers. The feminist goal to make women visible is data driven: Without efforts to collect data, representation and analysis, the role of women in the UN remained obscured by the absence of overt discrimination against women's employment in the UN in line with Art. 8 UN charter. Chapter 3 thus makes visible the speed and direction of the UN's feminisation since 1971 when gender was introduced as a reporting category in the Secretary-General's annual reports on the composition of the Secretariat, reports on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, and similar. The focus here is on the professional, decision-making and senior leadership categories, which has been most consistently reported and has been the main focus for those calling for gender parity. However, the data also shows that gender parity goals were repeatedly missed, and that the achievement of gender parity goals is dependent on individuals (e.g. the Secretary-General) in driving forward the agenda. What is clear is that without a disaggregation of data, both the lack of women in senior roles, as well as the slow but upward trend, could not be visible given the high number of women in the lower, general service categories. These figures distorted the overall picture and suggested that gender parity had existed since the UN's foundation. What is more, women's representation is by no means equal across levels, agencies or departments. The resulting pattern of representation highlights the limitations of the concept of the 'glass ceiling' that is either to be broken or remains intact. Some organisations remain entirely male, while others have been led than more than one woman. All funds and programmes, bar UNCTAD, have been led by a woman, while only four of the fifteen specialised agencies have had a woman executive head.

Chapter 4 moves on from a quantitative analysis of women's access to explain how and why women have or have not accessed executive roles, drawing on research in democratic politics and translating it to the institutional context of the UN. Drawing on Eagly and Carli's (2007) concept of a 'labyrinth' to express the complexity and number of hurdles, chapter 4 focuses on women in executive roles in UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies, to show how the various dimensions women's access to UN executive leadership create a labyrinth. Gender stereotypes, and attitudinal and institutional hurdles shape and in turn create narratives of difference between genders in four areas: candidates, processes, institutions and circumstances. Analysing the educational and professional profiles of male and female executive heads shows that the professional pipeline for women is narrower and longer than it is for men. Professional experience also places potential executive heads into relevant networks and therefore into sight of selectors, such as the Secretary-General or member states. Selection and appointment processes pose very different obstacles for women candidates, explaining why there have been so few women leading the specialised agencies while all UN funds and programmes, bar UNCTAD, have been led by one or more women. The pattern of representation can be further explained by the gendering of portfolios and institutions, i.e. distinct 'female' portfolios of work, or institutional frameworks that limit women's authority in order to manage stereotyped weaknesses of women. Finally, specifically applying to the specialised agencies, women's access to office can be subject to circumstances; such as conditions that are haphazard and less controllable, posing a risk to reputation or institutional stability. However, for nationals of certain member states, such as Chinese nationals, these conditions can be surpassed and access becomes subject to geopolitics.

Having investigated successful access to executive office, chapter 5 moves on to analyse women's lack of success in accessing the role of UN Secretary-General as the elected António Guterres met neither gender nor regional criteria. The chapter shows that the criterion of merit emerged in the 2016 selection process to work against the advancement of women. The selection process was significantly reformed,

introducing more transparency in terms of both process and candidate criteria, with a view to preventing the selection of less well-qualified political compromise candidates. In their pursuit of change, campaign groups advocated for changes to the role, and, in line with this, ‘the best’ candidate. Merit discourses thus began to work against women candidates, as the members of the Security Council (who select the Secretary-General) sought to navigate these challenging demands by meeting the less contentious issue of merit. Thus, while a woman may not have been selected at this point in time, the question of gender and women in leadership roles received significant prominence, and the Secretary-General’s attempt to further drive the gender equality agenda in light of this, has led to significant results.

Finally, chapter 6 moves the analysis toward the third dimension of women’s representation in international relations and the UN discussed here: leadership. Often hard to identify, and indeed to define, leadership is one means to understand the impact and effectiveness of UN executive heads. The women (and men) who lead UN agencies face the challenge of manoeuvring the boundaries of the often ill-defined roles they inhabit, subject to the political pressures of their political masters (i.e. member states) while also recognising their accountability to people worldwide, as expressed in the UN charter. While often associated with different leadership styles and the expectation that women are better leaders, gendered leadership here focuses on substance over process, asking how women executive heads act and speak to improve the status of women: from internal hiring practices to framing programmes, projects and budget decisions, to interaction with women’s organisations, to challenging powerful actors promoting patriarchal, anti-feminist values, and, finally, to acting as norm entrepreneurs by shaping discourses in pro-feminist directions. Chapter six will focus on recruitment and norm entrepreneurship to investigate how women executive heads exercise leadership.

In sum, the analysis of access and representation shows that the single factor to positively influence outcomes, i.e. an increase in the numerical (descriptive) representation of women, and to move beyond stereotypes and misogynistic attitudes is *proactive* support by the UN Secretary-General. When the Secretary-General speaks for gender equality, recruits explicitly with gender equality in mind and acts to ensure that organisational processes support an environment that creates gender equality quantitatively and qualitatively, women’s representation increases significantly. While it cannot be argued that gender parity or gender equality as an attitude have been achieved, given backlash to recent advances, the Secretary-Generalship of António Guterres has shown how explicit commitment to the idea and policy, as well as responding positively to criticism, can achieve significant results.

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