# 1 (En-)gendering Water Diplomacy

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Cooperation and conflict around transboundary water resources have been studied from many angles: hydrological conditions, technical solutions, legal norms, institutional capacities, costs and benefits, power interests, as well as geographic, economic, and political disparities. In the past decades, awareness has been growing that the use, management, and protection of transboundary water resources is intrinsically political and embedded in complex political and socio-cultural settings. This awareness has translated into more attention to governance arrangements and diplomatic processes. Photos depicting water diplomacy or transboundary water governance-in-action – for instance of negotiations on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the signing of the water allocation protocols of the International Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia, or the staff overview on the website of the Lake Chad Basin Commission – show a variety of experts involved in this comprehensive task: diplomats, water officials, engineers, environmental experts, and lawyers. But first and foremost, they display the gatherings of men. As a matter of fact, the majority of professionals engaged in transboundary water governance are men. A recent survey of 117 transboundary river basin organisations worldwide found that – at least based on the publicly available data – fewer than one-third of their staff and fewer than one-fifth of staff in the highest leadership positions are women (Best 2019). Despite these clear gender disparities, few studies exist that look at transboundary waters from the angle of gender.

This might be because many consider the male dominance or masculinity of transboundary water governance as normal, and therefore as not needing explanation. In water diplomacy, after all, two highly masculinised professional fields come together: diplomacy and water resources management. By calling these professions masculinised, we do not only mean that positions in this field are mainly held by men – as reflected in the numbers mentioned above. The genderedness of professions also becomes manifest in the ideas, values, and principles used to define and measure professionality – what makes a real or true water diplomat? Who qualifies as a water diplomat? Terms used to describe and assess professional performance are often gendered in their association with behaviours and personality traits seen as belonging more to (or appreciated more in) one gender. For instance, the ability to negotiate can be expressed in

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terms of someone's ability to win an argument. This may be associated with forms of competitiveness that are seen as coming more "naturally" to men, or that are more positively appreciated when encountered in men than in women. The ability to negotiate can also be expressed in terms of skills that may be easier to recognise in women, for instance as one's ability to reach a compromise, thereby differently gendering the art of negotiation and making it easier for women to be seen and valued as professional negotiators. To date, there has not been much critical feminist research to unravel and reflect on the genderedness of transboundary water governance. Most research on gender and water governance has focused on households, local irrigation agriculture, or water system levels (drinking water or sanitation) (De Silva et al. 2018).[1]

The few articles and reports that do reflect on the genderedness of transboundary water governance are frequently referred to throughout the chapters of this book; we therefore briefly discuss their main arguments. Earle and Bazili (2013) noted relatively early on that, in contrast to the national and local levels, questions of gender are not incorporated in international transboundary water management. Based on an assessment of two River Basin Organisations (RBOs), as well as international legal instruments, they concluded that the laws, policies, and strategies at the transboundary level hardly address gender, if at all. They point towards the intersection of the masculine discourses and practices of both the water management community, dominated until recently by the "hydraulic mission" approach (Molle et al. 2009) and with military antecedents, and among scholars of international relations (IR), international water law, and political science.

Von Lossow (2015) notes that if questions of gender are addressed in interstate water politics, it is often at the request of donors. He assesses the Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategy of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and shows how the responsibility for questions of gender is attributed to the national level, ignoring the role of gender at the interstate level. Carmi et al. (2019) studied the challenges that women face in attaining high-level positions in water diplomacy in Jordan, Lebanon, and the State of Palestine through a survey of 33 female water professionals. Their answers highlight the challenges of a male-dominant society and negative perceptions of female decision makers by other women, among others. Reflections on gender in transboundary water governance can also be found in a number of policy reports (e.g., Fauconnier et al. 2018) which list the (potential) benefits of more women's involvement in transboundary water governance in support of a call for action to change structures that diminish the recognition, opportunities, and voice of women.

These findings show that questions of gender in transboundary water governance are about both *what* is discussed and negotiated in transboundary deliberations and *who* participates in these deliberations. There can be a relation between the two, though it is unlikely to be causal and needs further elaboration. There are clearly many questions still left open when it comes to gender and transboundary water governance. This book builds on, and aims to expand, the scholarship on this topic. It originates from the online workshop

"(En)Gendering Transboundary Water Governance: Feminist Perspectives on Water Conflict and Cooperation" organised by IHE Delft on 29–30 September 2020. The event brought together more than 100 researchers and practitioners from around the globe. Some of the presentations held at the workshop were summarised in a series of blog posts on FLOWs, the Water Governance Blog at IHE Delft Institute for Water Education.[2] Others were transformed into chapters for this edited volume. Both the workshop and the subsequent work on this edited volume were financially supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the DUPC2 Programme with IHE Delft. This support has also enabled the open access publication of this book.

In the remainder of this introduction, we first share our understanding of transboundary water governance, water diplomacy, and gender. We then elaborate on our argument that transboundary water governance is a masculinised field by exploring the dominating masculinities in both the water sector and diplomacy. We continue by explaining what we mean by a "feminist perspective" on transboundary water governance. The chapter ends with an overview of the sections and the individual chapters of this book.

## Gender, Masculinities, and Transboundary Water Governance and Diplomacy

### *Water Diplomacy and Transboundary Water Governance*

In current debates, interactions over water between representatives of states are often referred to as water diplomacy (Klimes et al. 2019; Keskinen et al. 2021). Water diplomacy stresses the role of negotiations and other foreign policy tools in decision making on transboundary waters, together with a broadening of the traditional diplomatic spheres to multiple tracks (Barua 2018; Mirumachi 2020). With water often seen as a strategic resource and related to (violent) conflicts, either as cause, trigger, or instrument (DeStefano 2017; Ide 2015; Gleick 2019), the water diplomacy discourse draws not only from IR literature but also, to a greater extent, from peace and conflict studies. The discourse around water diplomacy acknowledges the complexity of water-related problem settings and their interlinkage with other policy fields, issue-areas, and professional and academic communities. It also considers the interrelatedness of transboundary water governance with regional security and stability beyond the water sector. We use the term water diplomacy when referring to the political processes and practices of preventing, mitigating, and resolving disputes over transboundary water resources and developing joint water governance arrangements by applying foreign policy means. This definition involves looking beyond state-centric conceptualisations and focusing on how diplomats and others actually *do* transboundary water cooperation at different levels.

We use the broader term of transboundary water governance to refer to the institutions (including organisational structures as well as formal and informal rules and norms), processes, and practices that regulate water use, protection,

and management at a transboundary level. These practices and processes mostly occur within established decision-making mechanisms of transboundary river basin organisations or other institutionalised arrangements. The main actors are officials from the respective line Ministries dealing with water, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, other relevant national agencies, but also third parties engaged in these processes, academic experts, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It therefore includes water diplomacy processes, but also interactions beyond these.

Zwarteveen et al. (2017) stress that water governance is about distributions of water, but also of voice and authority, and expertise. Decisions about water are therefore inherently political choices, which are based on certain norms and rules, and are also influenced by which and whose authority and forms of knowledge are seen as legitimate. Focusing on distributions helps to recognise governance as a political process, dealing with contentious questions of fairness, justice, and representation. Water governance takes place through complex processes only some of which are regulated and institutionalised, which is also why not all involved actors are formally designated as water decision makers. In transboundary contexts, this means that understanding conflict and cooperation between states requires looking beyond the state to grasp the complexities of the politics of the distribution of water, voice, and knowledge among different actors and at different scales. Critical scholars of transboundary water interactions stress that there is not a linear development from conflict to cooperation. Rather, conflict and cooperation are both inherent in transboundary water governance and often occur simultaneously. Neither is conflict per se negative and cooperation positive, but both can have constructive as well as destructive dimensions (Mirumachi 2015; Zeitoun & Mirumachi 2008; Zeitoun et al. 2020). We therefore understand transboundary water governance as a dynamic field where different state and non-state actors with different interests and backgrounds interact in processes of decision making on shared water resources, with different degrees of institutionalised cooperation. As a specific field of governance, it is not only shaped by the geographic, climatic, or hydrological conditions of water availability, but embedded in the general political relations among basin countries, in the respective political systems and bureaucratic cultures. For example, the European integration smoothed transboundary water cooperation among European Union member states, not only due to common water quality standards, but also because of shared policy priorities, close overall cooperation, reduction of language and travel barriers, etc. In other contexts, like the Indus, the Jordan, or the Kura river basins, political tensions between riparian countries make even technical collaboration efforts an issue of security politics. Also, how independent from their respective national directives staff members of a transboundary basin organisation are depends not only on the formal mandate but also on the political setting and on bureaucratic and decision-making cultures. As these relations and cultures are always gendered, looking at transboundary water governance with a gendered lens does not stop at documenting and explaining

the formal roles and positions of men, women, and those with a different gender identification.

### *Gender and Transboundary Water Governance*

Gender is about identities and identifications, about who and what is understood as "man", "manly", "woman", or "womanly" – or something else altogether. Although "embodied", these identities and identifications are never just or purely ordained by biology but constructed by society. They are deeply cultural performances that always emerge in specific histories and places, with gendered difference intersecting with other differences – such as those based on class, race, age, religion, etc. – to form power-laden social hierarchies (Butler 1990; Shields 2008; Goodrich et al. 2019). One's gender co-shapes opportunities for expression and self-realisation, and co-determines how one is perceived and valued by others. Beyond individual identities, gender manifests itself in societal structures (of kinship, property, divisions of income and labour, etc.) as well as in symbols and discourses (dress, ways of moving and behaving) (Harding 1986; Zwarteveen 2017). In addition to the dominance of one gender in important positions, then, gendered hierarchies and differences also become institutionalised and normalised in how notions of and associations with "male" or "female" shape the definition and qualification of what and who matters in transboundary water governance.

Hence, analysing how transboundary water governance is gendered means identifying and questioning men and their dominance, as much as it entails unravelling how prevailing professional norms and institutions themselves are shaped and coloured by what it means to be a "real" or "good" man. A critical re-evaluation and reassessment of everything and everyone that is marginal to or not fitting the male norm is a necessary accompaniment. To date, the analysis of gender and water has focused mostly on women – on their role and positions, their marginalisation, or on strategies for their inclusion or empowerment. These studies have yielded a wealth of data and provide an important empirical basis for feminist understanding and action. Yet, without also looking at men, and questioning how the male–female distinction has emerged and operates in transboundary water governance, the analysis remains incomplete. This can be done by taking inspiration from masculinity studies, and from a focus on "masculinisation" as a historical process.

### *Masculinities*

Based on Whitehead (2002) and Zwarteveen (2017), we define masculinities as "those practices and ways of being that serve to validate the masculine subject's sense of itself as male/boy/man" (Zwarteveen 2017, p. 82). Being (seen as) male or masculine is loosely related to visible biological features, making it somewhat more difficult for some bodies to be seen, accepted, or treated as "real" men than for others. We use the term masculinities in plural

to indicate that there are several masculinities, a diversity that emerges partly from how gender intersects with other axes of difference (e.g., class, race, age, sexual preference, professional field or religion), but also from differences in how people can or prefer to perform their gender. Even within a relatively small socio-cultural setting, be it a country or a ministry, there may be multiple masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity expresses that masculinities are not only plural, but are also hierarchically ordered – with some ways of performing masculinity being considered as superior to others (Connell 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity, then, is the socially or culturally preferred way of being a man – it expresses what a "real" man is supposed to be like.

The current masculine character of transboundary water governance is the result of historical processes: there is nothing natural or normal about it, nor is it static or inherent to the field. Spike Peterson's (2004) definition of masculinism neatly captures such processes as:

> the discursive, cultural, material, and structural privileging of that which is associated with "maleness" or masculinity (which is not limited to men) over that which is associated with "femaleness" or femininity (which is not limited to women).
>
> (p. 45)

Masculinism therefore justifies, normalises, naturalises, and depoliticises existing gender hierarchies in transboundary water governance, as we discuss in the next section.

## Water Resources Management and Diplomacy as Masculinised Fields

While both water resources management and diplomacy are masculinised professional fields, they are so in different ways. In what follows, we review and summarise research about the genderedness of the two professions. This, we hope, provides a useful starting point for reflecting on and examining what happens when the two come together in transboundary water governance.

### *Tracing the Historical Emergence of Diplomacy and Water Resources Management as Professions*

A first way to identify and trace how the two professional fields that come together in transboundary water governance are gendered is by studying how they historically emerged as professions. Diplomacy, at least in its formal and professional form, has long been a field reserved for men belonging to the upper-class elite or nobility. Diplomacy has therefore come to be culturally defined at the intersection of aristocracy and gender (Neumann 2012, Aggestam & Towns 2019). Even in Sweden, a country considered particularly liberal and

progressive in terms of social and gender equity, a female diplomat who entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1986 noticed that its leadership "was strongly dominated by elderly distinguished men from the upper classes dressed in dark suits" (Sparre in Niklasson, B., & Robertson, F. (2018), p. 68).

It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that women started entering the Foreign Service; in most countries, they could first have administrative and consular positions before being allowed to occupy diplomatic posts (Neumann 2012; Enloe 2014; Herren 2014). In the 1920s, the first female diplomats started working in the United States and some European countries, followed by Turkey in 1932, Brazil in 1938, and Japan in 1950. Until the 1970s, or even more recently, however, in many countries married women continued to be banned from postings abroad or from working in the same embassies as their husbands (de Souza Farias & Do Carmo 2018; Fowler 2018; Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2018). Still today, globally 85 per cent of all ambassadors are men, and the more prestigious ambassadorial positions are less frequently occupied by women (Towns & Niklasson 2018). With diplomacy changing, also masculinities in diplomacy are changing. Neumann (2012), based on a study of the post-Second World War Norwegian Foreign Ministry, identified three types of masculinity: (1) the dominant civil servant masculinity, which stemmed from bourgeois, upper-middle class families; (2) the subordinate petit bourgeois masculinity, reflecting the upward social mobility under social democratic governments and after the Second World War; and (3) the troublemaking masculinity of the "68er",[3] challenging existing practices and norms (and supporting female colleagues). In addition, as Towns (2020) shows, a certain idea of femininity is also often associated with diplomacy as a soft (or weak) alternative to military power and violence.

The underrepresentation of women in formal diplomacy does not mean that women have not played a role in diplomacy. Scholars in diplomatic history have shown the important (but usually unofficial) functions of women behind the scenes (Bastian et al. 2014; Aggestam & Towns 2018). However, with the professionalisation in the nineteenth century "diplomacy came to be defined as an exclusively male and masculine profession" (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2018, p. 90). Yet, in modern diplomacy women have also played crucial roles, most visibly as the spouses of ambassadors. They are responsible for hosting dinners, organising social events, or, more generally, for maintaining informal relations. Many diplomats would agree that such social events – that happen outside offices – are key to creating and maintaining relations of trust with their counterparts from other countries. This is important as trust is key for diplomacy to work (Aggestam & Towns 2018). Nevertheless, although diplomacy relies and has always relied on work done by women (often wives of male diplomats), this work is hardly recognised as an integral part in the "formal, anti-emotional, masculine-dominated world of traditional diplomacy" (Ross 2007, p. 156).

Not only is international politics male-dominated, but also its study. Mainstream IR has been "both an andro- and Eurocentric enterprise that […]

has used selective global and historical examples to universalize the experience of European men" (Ashworth & Swatuk 2018, p. 76; see also Peterson 2004, Tickner 1997). Ashworth and Swatuk (2018) link the two main theoretical schools in IR, realism and liberalism, with two different masculinities: the hypermasculinity of the warrior for the former, and the rational masculinity of the objective decision maker for the latter. IR has long been seen as the field of war and peace, of diplomacy, high-level politics, economic power – thus a field for men, that has nothing to do with the private domain, women, or the lives of working-class people. This was challenged by feminist IR scholars like Enloe (2014) who showed that where there are male diplomats, there are wives; where there are soldiers, there are prostitutes; where there are international businessmen, there are maids; where there is international trade, there are labourers.

Similarly, in water management, authority and expertise have historically come to be attributed more easily to men than to women. Water management is believed to require attributes and skills – like physical strength, technical competence, being in command, determination, self-confidence – that are usually associated with men rather than with women (Alda-Vidal et al. 2017; Rap & Oré 2017; Leder et al. 2019; Zwarteveen 2008). While no legal barriers exist, these perceptions act as barriers for women to seek careers in the water sector. A global survey found that less than 20 per cent of water service providers' staff are women (World Bank 2019). Despite regular laments about the need for more women in the water sector, there is surprisingly little actual data on the gender balance in the water sector. Even the 2016 World Water Development Report, devoted to the topic "Water and Jobs", has only a small sub-chapter on the gender gap, providing data about female participation in the labour market in general, not specifically for the water sector (WWAP 2016). Professional cultures in water are strongly shaped by engineers, as engineers dominate those who work in (public) water organisations. Gendered accounts of the rise of engineering as a profession (such as Oldenziel 1999 for the United States), in-depth studies of the professionalisation of irrigation and the history of engineering colleges in specific countries (see Zwarteveen 2017; Rap & Oré 2017; Mital 1986; Vera Delgado & Zwarteveen 2017; Liebrand 2022) do provide some insights in how water engineering became masculinised. First, these suggest that the gradual establishment of (irrigation) engineering as a scientific discipline and a profession was itself part of a more or less conscious move of (what until then were seen as) craftspeople to improve their social status and legitimacy. This move created a new possibility for upward mobility and political influence to those not born into the higher classes or belonging to the aristocracy. Second, the studies also show how the importance of irrigation engineering in creating a modern society throughout the twentieth century – most visible through the construction of large hydraulic infrastructures (see Molle et al. 2009) – was important in bolstering the power and prestige of irrigation engineers. In some countries, including Peru (see Vera Delgado & Zwarteveen 2017;

Rap & Oré 2017) and the Netherlands (Bergsma 2019), water engineers became new protagonists of the societal and political elite, with some of them even becoming presidents. Third, these studies provide evidence to support the hypothesis that the symbolic construction of engineering as an honourable and prestigious profession happened through the intersection of gendered and racial metaphorical binaries. These qualify the skills, abilities, and expertise of white, upper-class men as better than, and often even in explicit opposition to, those of others. In Peru, for instance, this happened partly through the association of engineering with rural *hacienda* and *mestizo* men[4] (Vera Delgado & Zwarteveen 2017). In many other places, like India or the United States, it was also deeply shaped by the intimate connections between engineering and the military with the first public engineering departments often being part of the army (Zwarteveen 2017).[5] Hence, in India many of the first colonial irrigation engineers were army men who were trained in military colleges (see Gilmartin 1994, 2003). The overall conclusion from these studies is that irrigation engineering (and the water profession more broadly) *was made* masculine and white, and therefore intrinsically incompatible with femininity and non-white. The first engineering institute of the British Empire in India in 1847, for instance, was Roorkee College. It offered different courses for different classes of students: Engineers, Upper Subordinate, and Lower Subordinate. Who could follow which class was clearly specified: the Engineers class was just for Europeans, the Upper Subordinate class was for both Europeans and Indians, and the Lower Subordinate class was just for Indians. Hence, initially only Europeans could become engineers (Mital 1986; see also Zwarteveen 2017).

While in water management and diplomacy the respective processes of masculinisation and the masculine ideals are clearly different, we can see that it has shaped hierarchies that are closely interlinked with class (in diplomacy) and race (in engineering).

### *The Making Of "True" Diplomats and Water Managers*

The modelling of engineers or diplomats from a distinctly masculine mould – making sure that their appearance and behaviour fit what is expected – does not happen by itself. It requires active work, much of which happens through more or less explicit processes of socialisation and acculturation, many of which occur during their education and training. Hence, diplomats are often trained in specific diplomatic academies after a tough selection process. In Brazil, for example, aspiring diplomats follow an 18-month programme at the Rio Branco Institute, their MFA's diplomatic academy. The Dutch MFA's traineeship starts with a joint 8-week course. In Germany, aspiring diplomats spend several months of their training programme together in the MFA's own training centre located in a castle near Berlin. The "crew", as each cohort is called, forms the basis for strong bonding and informal networks throughout the career, one that stays stable throughout regular changing postings.

Likewise, many water professionals are trained in specific engineering colleges. Similar to what happens in diplomacy academies, training as an engineer also works to forge strong homosocial bonds with those being trained in the same year, often forming friendships that last for the rest of their life. Rap and Oré (2017) showed through an in-depth study of such a college, namely *La Molina* in Peru, how the making of engineers-as-men (or men-as-engineers) happens often through ritualised performances – including theatrical dances and the singing of songs – that forge strong linkages between engineering and a specific version of masculinity.

The making of "true" diplomats and engineers happens through actively cultivating ways of speaking about and knowing the world. Hence, engineers prefer numbers, maps, and equations and may dismiss other forms of talking about or knowing water (see Zwarteveen & Liebrand 2016). Equally, Ross (2007) has shown how the use of a specific terminology representing a particular way of thinking contributes to keeping diplomacy barely intelligible for outsiders and to its image as a closed world.

### *Women and Other "Not-Normal Men" in Masculine Fields*

In both diplomacy and water resources management, more or less formal requirements for and rules of access and belonging to the profession are linked to deeply gendered idea(l)s about what it means to be a "good" or "true" diplomat or a "good" or "true" water engineer. These ideas and ideals make it much harder for some people (e.g., all those who do not identify as typical men or who do not conform to ruling stereotypes about masculinity) to enter these professions. They make it equally more difficult for them to be seen and recognised as well-performing professionals or to successfully make a career in this field.

Women who nevertheless want to enter and perform well in the field have to do "gender work" to prove that it is possible to be both feminine and a true or good diplomat or water resources manager. They can do this by creatively stretching the meanings of both femininity and professionality, or by trying to change how both are defined (Spike Peterson 2004; Towns 2020).

In diplomacy, the arrival of the first female diplomats and ambassadors challenged the established protocol rules. While diplomatic protocol serves as a common code to overcome national and cultural differences, its masculine character became obvious when for example rules regarding correctly addressing others or seating arrangements could not be applied to female diplomats (and their husbands) (see e.g., Schattenberg 2014; Zala & Bentele 2014). A nice example of how female diplomats adapt to more informal rules and ways of bonding comes from the Turkish diplomat Sumru Noyan. When holding a high position at the UNODC in Vienna, she started to watch football matches and even hung a Turkish football team's flag in her office in order to share cultural preferences with her male colleagues (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2018).

Studies of the genderedness of water bureaucracies in South Asia (Liebrand 2014, 2022; Kulkarni et al. 2009; Liebrand & Udas 2017; Udas & Zwarteveen 2010) likewise show that those few women who do work in water management find it difficult to be recognised and seen to perform as "real" water professionals and face all kinds of practical and ideological problems. One is either a man and an engineer or a woman and, therefore by definition, not an engineer. Combining the two identities is difficult, risky, or simply implies that one of them suffers. Hence, if a female engineer is successful as an engineer, she risks being accused of "unwomanly" behaviour. As one assistant engineer of the Bangladesh Water Board states: "if a woman is successful, she is told that she is egoistic and stretching herself too far" (Kulkarni in Zwarteveen 2017, p. 90). Hence, women need to actively invest in constructing themselves as credible engineers, while remaining convincing as decent women (see Zwarteveen 2017).

### *The Gendered Organisation of Work*

Another way to start examining and questioning the genderedness of professions is by observing how work is organised, something that is directly related to how different types of work are valued. Feminists have long pointed out that 8-hour working days are only possible when the tasks of reproduction (cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the elderly) can be delegated to others. These tasks are seldom recognised as "real" work, and if they are, it is when they are paid (such as employed help in the home) and valued much less than the salaried work of, for instance, diplomats and water managers. Although many other examples are possible, in both diplomacy and water resources management the gendering of work becomes strikingly apparent in the importance attached to "being in" or "going to" the field. In diplomacy, "being in the field" refers to postings abroad, whereas in the water sector it refers to travelling to project sites – sites where engineering work is located, the construction or operation of which needs to be done or supervised.

Postings abroad form a key element of professional identity and career advancement in diplomacy, and in many countries women used to be excluded from it. When the first women entered the United States Foreign Service in the 1920s, overseas postings and career development were denied to them, due to the belief that, among other things:

> Women could not keep secrets, faced physical risk in foreign postings, were unable to network effectively given restrictions on access to elite clubs in many locations and relied too heavily on emotions to function in a cerebral and rational field of endeavour.
>
> (Bashevkin 2018, p. 47)

When organising diplomatic postings abroad, it has long been taken for granted that the spouse (and children) would accompany the male partner. Spouses

were not expected to engage in paid work themselves, but to concentrate on their role as housewives, which included organising and hosting social events for their husbands, as previously mentioned. This has changed in the past decades, with career interests of spouses now being considered much more. Yet, specific challenges for women remain, especially related to societal expectations. An example from Sweden illustrates this:

> The Swedish diplomat Maria Velasco is one of those who had to leave her family behind in Sweden when serving at a foreign mission. She recounts how appalled a male Nordic ambassador was when she told him of her family situation, even though he himself had made the same choice to go alone. When she wondered how their decisions differed, he answered: "But you are a *mother*!".
>
> (Niklasson & Robertson 2018, p. 76)

Being a water engineer also requires travel, not in the form of long postings abroad, but duty travels for maintenance, construction, or monitoring of water infrastructure, often located in remote areas. Research on public irrigation engineers in Nepal and India shows how trips to the field are seen as particularly challenging and sometimes even inappropriate for women engineers. This is partly because women are expected to also assume all kinds of domestic tasks, thus spending a couple of days in the field signals that they are not "good" women. It is also because of how the field is seen as a distinctly masculine space, one that is not suitable for women due to poor sanitary facilities or because it involves physical hardship, among other things (Liebrand & Udas 2017).

Studies that shed light on how professions are defined and organised through spatial distinctions between more male and more female spaces suggest that part of the reason why it is difficult to challenge them – even when it would require relatively straightforward and practical adjustments – has to do with how these distinctions themselves have become part of symbolically demarcating and defining professional identities and cultures. Hence, making it possible for women to enter into "masculine" spaces such as the field challenges what it means to be a diplomat or water manager at symbolic levels.

### *From a Feminist Perspective?*

The aim of this edited collection is to shed light on the often hidden gender dynamics of water conflict and cooperation at transboundary level and the implicit assumptions that guide research as well as policies, and to contribute to the policy and academic debate with empirical case studies, practitioners' accounts, and theoretical reflections.

A feminist perspective helps to achieve this aim in different ways. It challenges the state-focused approach of traditional IR research that limits the theoretical space to include gender in the analysis, and often overlooks domestic

complexities or concrete practices of interstate relations in transboundary water governance. Building on feminist theories also allows shifting the research gaze to the more personal and relational aspects of IR, thinking beyond states as the most important units of analysis, and highlighting the role and agency of various individuals that make up these states and their institutions (Ackerly et al. 2006; Mackay et al. 2010). Beyond that, a feminist perspective includes a reflection on how knowledge is constructed and how gender biases shape the academic discourses and scientific knowledge generation in the disciplines that study and inform diplomacy and water governance.

Not every analysis of gender relations or women's participation has an explicit feminist approach. On the contrary, some experts and practitioners prefer to stress that they and their research and/or projects are not feminist (see Kunz et al. 2019). Their rationale for a gendered approach is more instrumental and relates to expected overall benefits like increased effectiveness, for example. This book also brings together authors with different approaches and understandings, one of its core values being this diversity. Nevertheless, we as editors have an explicit feminist understanding of our approach. For us, a feminist perspective means to critically question and challenge masculinities and gender hierarchies in transboundary water governance – not by adding women, but by challenging power relations and using gender as an analytical category. In this, we follow Zwarteveen's (2017) understanding that a "feminist analysis sets out not just to describe and name different manifestations of gender, but also to critically unravel their effects in terms of power and the creation of social hierarchies" (p. 82). This means focusing "less on sex as an empirical variable and more on gender as an analytical category […] and hence, the significance of gender in how we *think* as well as how we act. […] [It] entails a shift from 'adding' empirically to 'rethinking' analytically" (Spike Peterson 2004, p. 40, emphasis in original). A feminist exploration of transboundary water governance thus means scrutinising the (gendered) ideas and norms behind supposedly neutral or normal procedures and standards and investigating how these have different effects on men and women. It entails uncovering how expected behaviours of professionals (and others) engaged in transboundary water governance are shaped by historical processes of gendered socialisation, and how institutionalised norms of "good" professionalism or behaviour more broadly have co-evolved with what is deemed culturally appropriate for men or for women (Mackay et al. 2010).

While we have stated repeatedly that looking at numbers is not sufficient, showing numbers and making women visible is an important first step for a feminist analysis. It exposes the masculine dominance of the existing arrangements and processes of transboundary water governance. If women (categorised as resembling femininity) are added to the state/diplomacy/the water sector (categorised as masculine), it has consequences: either women are forced to adapt, meaning to change in order not to be what is perceived as feminine anymore (thus, become more masculine), or the category must be transformed to include the feminine aspects. If the latter occurs, the meaning

and understanding of the original category (e.g., diplomacy) changes and with that also the associated meaning of masculinity. Therefore, aiming for the inclusion of more women in transboundary water governance – while bearing the risk of being only about achieving a quota of female actors – can also, and ultimately probably will, pave the way for the reframing and restructuring of the very concept and understanding of transboundary water governance and diplomacy.

We are convinced that such a perspective contributes to questioning the taken-for-grantedness of the status quo and to better understand the rules of engagement in a field in which the exchange between people is highly orchestrated through diplomatic protocol and informal etiquette, while acknowledging that these interactions occur simultaneously between people as individuals and as representatives of their states.

In this sense, a feminist approach is also not only about visibility and empowerment of women, but about addressing all inequalities that are linked to a devaluation of "female" or "feminine". This includes raising awareness of and challenging the dominance of the Global North in the scholarship in our field, while the objects of study are often transboundary basins in the Global South. We have tried to address this imbalance by reaching out to authors from diverse backgrounds, and including case studies from both the Global South and the Global North. This was also important to situate both gender and transboundary water governance in specific contexts, explore their dynamics in their own particular setting, and nurture attentiveness and sensitivity to the concept- or language-dependence of knowledge about gender in transboundary water governance. However, this endeavour did not reach the success we had hoped for. Therefore, we acknowledge the early stages of the discussion on gender in transboundary water governance, and the path still to go to make all the different voices and perspectives heard.

Another ambition not met is that in the chapters, gender and transboundary water governance is discussed through binary categorisation (explicit or implicit), primarily focusing on cisgender individuals. We did not succeed in making visible those who do not identify according to these binary cisgender norms. By at least being explicit about their absence, we want to signal our awareness that there is much more to unravel in terms of gender and transboundary waters than we manage to do with this volume. In this sense, the book is only a first step in identifying gender-based hierarchies and power differences as a basis for questioning and possibly changing them.

## Outline of the Book

This volume contains empirical case studies, discourse analyses, practitioners' accounts, and theoretical reflections to assess the nexus of gender and transboundary water governance. The authors are a mix of well-established academics, promising young researchers, and experts with a practitioner background. The different positions of the authors as researchers, gender

experts, or practitioners make for diverse texts, ranging from theory-guided research chapters to chapters that are written from a practitioner's view. There are two chapters in the format of written interviews, allowing us to bring the rich experience of female water negotiators to light. For several contributors, writing for an academic book like this was a new and sometimes challenging endeavour. We are grateful for the extra effort they undertook to share their insights.

The first section of the volume is entitled "Rethinking frameworks and knowledge" and collects contributions that question the established ways of thinking about transboundary water governance and the categories and terms used in its discussion. This section aims to invite the reader to rethink supposedly neutral theories and approaches and discover the way they are gendered. In Chapter 2, Diego Jara and Mariana Yumbay Yallico present the perspective of the first indigenous female judge of the National Court of Justice of Ecuador, who has been involved in the negotiations for the establishment of a binational water commission between Ecuador and Peru. Her account shows the importance of considering not only different genders, but also different forms of knowledge and different understandings of what "transboundary" is, and of who sets and defines borders. Ritu Priya and Tania Debnath review the academic literature on transboundary waters in South Asia in Chapter 3 to show how knowledge production is dominated by men, and ask if and how this is linked to different disciplinary backgrounds and theoretical approaches. In Chapter 4, Alyssa Offutt reviews the literature on the water-conflict nexus at multiple scales. She analyses how far gender is considered and shows where the blind spots are that hinder a full understanding of the genderedness of water conflicts. Medha Bisht asks in Chapter 5 what feminising water diplomacy could mean. She brings together network studies and diplomacy in order to develop a more relational understanding of (water) diplomacy and applies this to the collaboration between India and Bhutan on the Saralbhanga/Saralpara river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra river.

The next section focuses on more practical questions: (how) can gender mainstreaming policies help support more gender equality in transboundary water governance? Ellen Hagerman, Hellen Natu, and Christine Ochieng (Chapter 6) reflect on one specific international programme to foster women's participation and leadership in transboundary water governance in the Nile basin. Based on in-depth interviews with stakeholders, they assess the challenges to achieving a truly transformative approach for gender equality. These challenges are partly rooted in the fact that gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in daily practices, private and professional socialisations, and cultural norms that we are often not aware of. However, awareness is the first step toward changing them. In Chapter 7, Tobias von Lossow looks at five transboundary basins – Nile, Jordan, Zambesi, Indus, and Danube – and assesses whether and which gender-related policies are in place. His assessment is that presence and effect of gender policies are very modest, but he was nevertheless able to identify several factors that can help in promoting gender policies.

The third section aims to unravel some of the hidden gender dynamics in procedures, rules, and norms within transboundary water organisations and in negotiation processes. Jenniver Sehring analyses the gendered norms and practices within the transboundary Chu–Talas Commission in Central Asia in Chapter 8 and shows how they affect men and women differently in terms of access to and performing work on transboundary waters. In Chapter 9, Rachana Mattur and Rozemarijn ter Horst study an exceptional commission: in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, a majority of leadership positions are held by women. They show how political and societal developments over the past decades have changed the water sector and transboundary decision making in the basin. Alexandra Said takes another look at the Nile basin in Chapter 10, focusing specifically on the Nile–Technical Advisory Committee to understand why there are so few women represented and how gender affects the decision-making processes in this committee. The last chapter (Chapter 11) in this section is again an interview chapter, it is a dialogue of Rozemarijn ter Horst with five female water diplomats and experts: Maria Amakali from Namibia, Anamika Barua from India, Nadia Gefoun from Sudan, Heide Jekel from Germany, and Pilar Carolina Villar from Brazil. They share their personal experiences of gender dynamics in water negotiations and more generally in manoeuvring in a male-dominated field.

In the concluding chapter, we reflect on the main insights gained from the chapters of this book, the different approaches taken by the authors, and the value a feminist perspective adds to understanding the dynamics of water conflict and cooperation.

## Notes

1 De Silva et al. (2018), by analysing over 10,000 papers published between 1977 and 2016 that contain the keywords "women" and "water", found that the vast majority of them focused primarily on women's health in relation to water access and water quality and on the role of women as water users, rather than as managers and governors.

2 The blog series can be found on FLOWs at https://flows.hypotheses.org/category/research/engendering-water-diplomacy-research

3 The 68ers refers to a progressive student movement in European states and the generation born at the end of the Second World War and politicised in the late 1960s.

4 These are the sons or sometimes the paid assistants of large landholding farmers, many of whom descended from Spanish colonial families. A large proportion of those who were enrolled in the first engineering colleges in Peru belonged to this group, colouring it with a distinct countryside form of male behaviour.

5 This is in stark contrast to diplomacy, which happens to be presented as a soft (or feminine) alternative to the military, see Towns (2020).

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