



## Table of Contents

- 3 Introduction**  
by Kelsey Coolidge
  
- 17 Unsettling Feminist Foreign Policy and Aotearoa New Zealand**  
by Angela Wilton
  
- 21 The Feminist Revolution: An Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Militarist Case for Re-thinking Foreign Policy**  
by Irina Militaru
  
- 25 The Girl Next Door: How Local Individuals Can Affect Global Policy**  
by Isobel Dodd
  
- 29 Shiny Feminism**  
by Margherita Sofia Zambelli
  
- 33 The War Within**  
by Morgan Shier
  
- 36 Framing an Afro-Feminist Foreign Policy**  
by Oluwatoyin Olajide
  
- 41 How to Better Define a Feminist Foreign Policy**  
by Padmini Das
  
- 46 Right to Choice and the Hijab: Call for International Legal Reform**  
by Raghavi Purimetla and Amukta Sistla
  
- 50 The Case for a Feminist Domestic Policy for Mexico**  
by Rocío Magali Maciel
  
- 55 From the Cuban Missile Crisis to Russia's War in Ukraine: Strategic Empathy as Feminist Foreign Policy**  
by Samara Shaz
  
- 59 From Victims to Leaders": Let the Silenced Speak -- Climate Change through the Lens of Feminist Foreign Policy**  
by Shrinwanti Mistri

## Introduction by Kelsey Coolidge

The foreign policy and national security community is dominated by elitist voices and “expert” jargon. The result is an exclusionary system where the status quo is maintained by effectively restricting emerging thought and thought leaders who do not adopt the same language, attain the same credentials, or advocate for the same policies. The lack of diversity in the field further isolates the very people these policies are supposed to protect and entrenches elitist views. The lived experiences of those most profoundly impacted by the policies crafted in distant corridors of power are rarely represented in the decision-making process. As a reaction to this system, calls for a feminist foreign policy have emerged to challenge the status quo, reject elitism in the decision-making process, and prioritize the experiences of historically excluded voices and those most impacted by policy outcomes.

In October 2022, the War Prevention Initiative (WPI) of the Jubitz Family Foundation launched a feminist foreign policy essay “un-contest.” The purpose of the un-contest was to advance ideas from voices under-represented in (typically elitist) foreign policy discussions. Indeed, the term “un-contest” was intentionally chosen as a refusal to ranking new ideas or implying that there is an objective hierarchy to emerging thought in peace and security. To embrace the inherent value of new ideas without ranking is a feminist value by rejecting the zero-sum logics of competition and thereby dismantling hierarchy. Our goal was to challenge and advance our collective thinking on a feminist foreign policy guided by the values of care, empathy, and nonviolence.

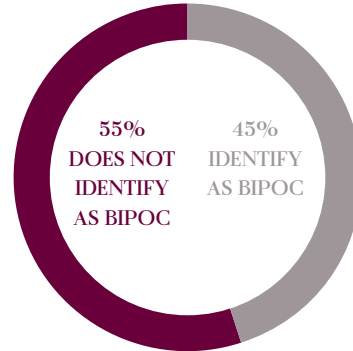
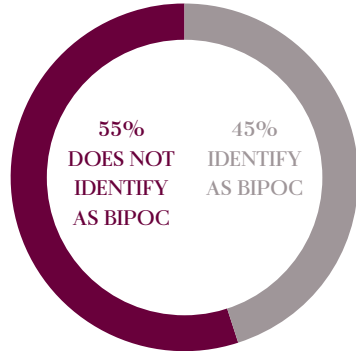
We took several measures to ensure a feminist ethic was present in every stage of the un-contest project. For example, we were thoughtful about our language when writing the description and prompt for the un-contest and sought external feedback on how we could better align our language with our intended impact. While we set a due date for submissions, we encouraged authors to contact us and provided flexible submission timelines for those who were interested but could not submit by the listed date. We intentionally chose partners who represented diverse coalitions and had a global reach to help ensure the call for submissions extended beyond U.S. borders. These actions, among others, were key to attracting the diversity of authors who submitted to the un-contest.

## Review and Evidence on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Goals

Through these efforts we received deeply moving, thoughtful, and engaging essays exploring a feminist foreign policy—40 entries in total, with authors from 18 different countries, including India, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Argentina, Aotearoa New Zealand, UK, Italy, Romania, Jordan, and Canada. In our online submission form, we asked authors to self-select whether they identified as Black, Indigenous, or other Person of Color (BIPOC). We ultimately published 11 essays and aimed to keep the selection of published essays proportional to the racial and geographic make-up of the essays submitted. For example, roughly half of the authors who submitted essays and of those whose essays were selected for publication identified as BIPOC.

**AUTHORS WHO SUBMITTED ESSAYS**

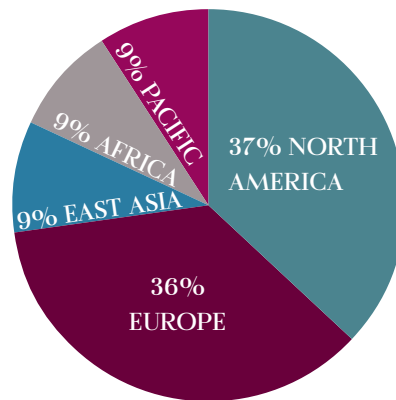
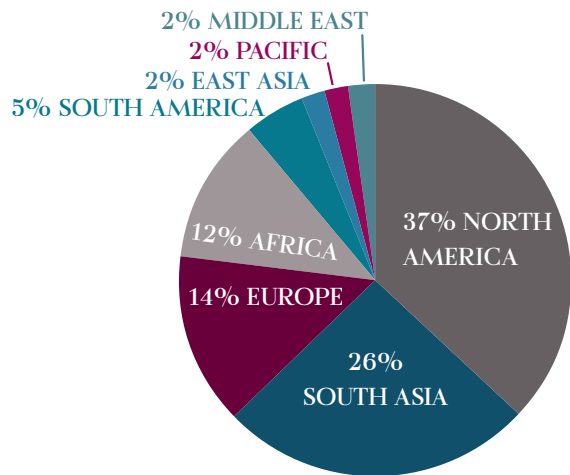
**AUTHORS WHOSE ESSAYS WERE PUBLISHED**



We were immensely proud of the global reception to our un-contest. While the authors who submitted essays represented most regions of the world, the highest number came from North America (with 12 submissions from the U.S. accounting for most of the region) and South Asia (with 10 submissions from India accounting for most of the region). However, the final selection of essays skewed disproportionately to authors located Europe—while Europe-based authors accounted for only 14% of the essays submitted, they accounted for 36% of the essays selected. The reverse is true for authors located in South Asia—26% of essays submitted and 9% of essays selected.

**REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF AUTHORS WHO SUBMITTED ESSAYS**

**REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF AUTHORS WHOSE ESSAYS WERE PUBLISHED**



This is important information for us to track, evaluate, and share as it helps to identify possible areas of bias and to inform future programming. It also ensures accountability and transparency around WPI's stated goals. Additionally, the process by which essays were selected for publication is helpful to share for greater learning. The team at WPI wanted to create a selection process that minimized bias while identifying essays with compelling responses to the prompt. A WPI team member (Kelsey Coolidge) facilitated the selection process with little input into the final essays selected. We created a selec-

tion committee that included two WPI team members (Patrick Hiller and Molly Wallace) and representatives from several organizational sponsors of the un-contest: Diana Duarte from MADRE, Danaka Katovich from CodePink, Christine Ahn from Women Cross DMZ, and Maher Akremi from Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (WCAPS). Selection committee members were paired into three groups and given a random, anonymized selection of entries to review. The selection process was split into two rounds. In the first, each pair reviewed the essays in their random selection and were asked to nominate no more than half of the essays to the second selection round. After receiving and reviewing the list of nominated essays from the first round, the second round brought all members of the selection committee to a virtual session held over Zoom to select the final essays to be published.

We developed a series of questions to guide the selection committee in the decision-making process:

- *Does the essay demonstrate creativity or originality? Are the ideas that the author presents unique or presented in a unique manner? Is the author interpreting established ideas in a new way?*
- *How does the essay respond to the stated prompts? Is there a clear relevance to feminist foreign policy?*
- *Does the author present their ideas effectively? Effective essays may demonstrate clarity in thought, focus, and organization. Cited evidence is also welcome, but not required.*
- *Does the author speak from lived experience? How are the ideas presented in relation to intersectionality or diversity?*

The essays were edited and published by WPI in the first half of 2023. All authors were compensated for their work.

## Essays

### **“Unsettling Feminist Foreign Policy and Aotearoa New Zealand”**

by Angela Wilton

Angela Wilton argues that a “feminist” foreign policy would be an anti-feminist act in Aotearoa New Zealand without co-creation and co-governance with Indigenous peoples.

### **“The Feminist Revolution: An Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Work, and Anti-Militarist Case to Rethink Foreign Policy”**

by Irina Militaru

Irina Militaru argues that a feminist foreign policy must be anti-capitalist.

### **“The Girl Next Door: How Local Individuals Can Affect Global Policy”**

by Isobel Dodd

Isobel Dodd argues that addressing domestic misogyny must be a part of a feminist foreign policy to strengthen state security.

**“Shiny Feminism”** by Margherita Sofia Zambelli

Margherita Sofia Zambelli calls out “shiny feminism” and offers a set of questions, as tools, to analyze whether feminist foreign policies contribute to transformative change.

**“The War Within”** by Morgan Shier

Morgan Shier intimately links the experience of daily life with a call for policies that recognize human multidimensionality, intersectionality, and interconnectedness.

**“Framing an Afro-Feminist Foreign Policy”** by Oluwatoyin Christiana Olajide.

Oluwatoyin Christiana Olajide explores a two-pronged approach for pursuing a feminist foreign policy in an African context: local feminist activism with global reach and men’s ally-ship within government ministries.

**“How to Better Define a Feminist Foreign Policy”** by Padmini Das

Padmini Das offers three strategies for how to better define and implement a feminist foreign policy.

**“Right to Choice and the Hijab: Call for International Legal Reform”** by Raghavi Purimetla and Amukta Sistla

Raghavi Purimetla and Amukta Sistla envision how a feminist foreign policy can integrate with international legal frameworks to protect women’s rights around the world.

**“The Case for a Feminist Domestic Policy for Mexico”**

by Rocío Magali Maciel

Rocío Magali Maciel calls for a feminist domestic policy for Mexico—in addition to the country’s feminist foreign policy—to address violence against women.

**“From the Cuban Missile Crisis to Russia’s War in Ukraine: Strategic Empathy as Feminist Foreign Policy”**

by Samara Shaz

Samara Shaz outlines how a feminist foreign policy should replace brinkmanship with strategic empathy in order to end wars and prevent further loss of human life.

**“From Victims to Leaders”: Let the Silenced Speak -- Climate Change through the Lens of Feminist Foreign Policy”**

by Shrinwanti Mistri

Shrinwanti Mistri argues for climate justice as a core feature of feminist foreign policy, and for centering those most impacted and marginalized by the global climate crisis in decision-making processes about how to address it.

## Common Themes

All authors centered a definition of feminist foreign policy that emphasized intersectionality and uplifting marginalized voices in foreign policy. This general assessment aligns with WPI's working understanding of a feminist foreign policy. To summarize from our peace briefing,<sup>1</sup> a feminist foreign policy is a political framework and approach to international relations “that challenges gender-blind policymaking, critiques the lack of gender consciousness in political and social structures, and unpacks the gender disparities, hierarchies, and power differentials that result from current patriarchal systems.”<sup>2</sup> A feminist foreign policy emphasizes the values of compassion, care, and equality along with a more comprehensive appreciation for what actually makes people—especially the more marginalized in society—feel safe and secure. It “disrupt(s) colonial, racist, patriarchal, and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision.”<sup>3</sup> By taking an intersectional feminist approach, a feminist foreign policy considers policies from the vantage point of collective care and peoples' basic needs, such as healthcare, housing, or food.

Whether these goals of a feminist foreign policy can be achieved was the central concern for these authors. Many criticized the ability of governments to truly embrace an intersectional feminist approach, pointing to examples of hypocrisy where countries fall short in advancing feminist goals. Likewise, many raised concerns that oppressive institutions—like patriarchy, colonialism, or capitalism—are so deeply ingrained in social, economic, and political structures that a government-backed approach would serve to further engrain exploitative systems. To this point, some authors offered new frameworks or approaches to feminist foreign policy that could contribute to transformative change.

Three prominent themes emerged in the selected essays that explore oppressive systems of power while proposing visions of alternative futures. First, authors recognized that feminist foreign policies are embedded within colonial legacies, which exert incredible influence on both global and domestic power dynamics. Second, authors were concerned about discrepancies between domestic and international policy frameworks, including in contexts with stated feminist foreign policies but without feminist domestic policies. Third, authors explored what security and safety mean from a feminist perspective and how the embrace of a feminist lens changes how we understand the world around us.

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1. Erica Belfi, “Peace Briefing: Feminist Foreign Policy,” *War Prevention Initiative*, 2002, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://warpreventioninitiative.org/2022/peace-briefing-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

2. Karin Aggestam, Annika Bergman Rosamond, and Annica Kronsell. “Theorising Feminist Foreign Policy.” *International Relations* 33, no. 1 (2019): 23-39.

3. Lyric Thompson, Gayatri Patel, Gawain Kripke, and Megan O'Donnell, *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States* (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2020), accessed March, 2024, [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFP-USA\\_v11-spreads.pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFP-USA_v11-spreads.pdf).

## Colonial Legacies

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**“TO ADVOCATE FOR A [FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY] WITHIN A COLONIALY IMPOSED STATE STRUCTURE... WOULD BE AN ACT OF REINSCRIBING THOSE SAME COLONIAL LOGICS THAT [FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES] AIM TO DISMANTLE.” ANGELA WILTON**

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Colonial legacies, namely the European and North American (referred to as the Global North) colonial and imperial order of the last several centuries, are deeply ingrained in domestic and foreign affairs. It is no coincidence that many of the world’s most powerful states are former or current colonial powers. The international order is still structured around the interests and agendas of the most powerful countries. Margherita Zambelli notes that more powerful countries (determined by economic and military strength) have also been the first to advance a feminist foreign policy. She cautions that this could result in the more powerful countries forcing their “feminist” agendas on less powerful countries. She writes, “It is important that feminist foreign policy not be seen as a new standard of wealthy nations and owned and claimed only by representatives of the global political and economic elite.”

One of the problems with powerful countries “owning” a feminist foreign policy is that many of these countries are the most responsible and have the least accountability for global crises. For example, Shrinwanti Mistri explores the impact of climate change on the Global South, which historically has been caused primarily by activities in the Global North. She decries the lack of accountability among Global North countries for creating the climate crisis and failing to take responsibility for environmental damage. Without a decolonized, intersectional, feminist approach to climate change, namely one that centers decision-making and representation among those communities most adversely affected by climate change, Mistri warns that “environmentalism might become the imperialism of the 21st century, and the designed solutions will never be equitable or just.”

Colonial legacies also impact foreign and domestic policies with considerable consequences for a feminist foreign policy. Oluwatoyin Christiana Olajide describes how colonial histories actively shape the foreign policies of African states as “the conduct of states is...reflective of their continued emergence as agentic entities committed to solidifying their presence in global relations.” Irina Militaru reflects on how Global North countries favor military deployment as the solution to international crises in the Global South, a response favored “most vocally [by] white supremacists.” She cites the historical example of the Opium Wars, but many contemporary examples fit with her description (for instance, the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, or U.S. drone warfare). Powerful countries deploy their militaries to “solve” crises in the Global South—guided by militarized logics on the assumed lack of agency of Global South countries to address their own security challenges and the steadfast belief that security can only be assured through the use of force. A feminist foreign policy considers safety and security from the perspective of the historically oppressed and marginalized. This approach is antithetical to decisions to wage war, as such violence most adversely impacts historically oppressed and marginalized communities.



Colonial legacies are also present in domestic policies. There is a serious concern with how settler-colonial states—like Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada, or the U.S.—can advance a feminist foreign policy without addressing the legacies of colonization and the history of oppression of Indigenous peoples. Angela Wilton looks to her home country of Aotearoa New Zealand, the subjugation of the Maori people therein, and re-examines “settler-colonial frameworks” in light of the growing momentum around feminist foreign policy. While Aotearoa New Zealand may seem like the perfect candidate for a feminist foreign policy, she cautions that advancing a feminist foreign policy—with its emphasis on centering marginalized peoples and dismantling systems of oppression—within “settler-colonial frameworks” may only reinforce colonial logics without co-creation and co-governance with Indigenous peoples.

The impact of colonization as a global ordering system is a considerable challenge to fulfilling the stated goals of a feminist foreign policy. However, the authors provide tangible solutions. Mistri reminds us that “we need to keep pushing, often beyond our limits, to try and be more ethical and to keep raising our voices about why it is essential to change the status quo.” She draws inspiration from youth activist groups, particularly the #PeopleOverProfit protests, in their efforts to bring about just climate action. Also in support of civil society organizations, Zambelli offers a specific suggestion to ministries of foreign affairs: to provide a platform to distribute foreign aid to local women’s groups. This move could allow local women to advance their own agendas within their own contexts, rather than advancing the policies of “donor” countries.

### Discrepancies between Feminist Foreign and Domestic Policies

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**“FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD BEGIN AT HOME, MEANING THAT STATES NEED TO RETHINK THEIR STRATEGIES AND FOREIGN POLICIES IN A WAY THAT DOESN’T INHERENTLY CREATE GENDERED INEQUALITIES, PARTICULARLY WITHIN THEIR OWN DOMESTIC FRAMEWORK AND THEN SUBSEQUENTLY ABROAD.”**  
**PADMINI DAS**

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Many of the essays were primarily concerned about the relationship between a feminist foreign policy and domestic politics. Foreign and domestic policy frameworks are deeply integrated with each other. Critically examining feminist foreign policy within a system of domestic sexism, misogyny, and discrimination of historically marginalized communities is necessary to evaluate how feminist values are practiced.

Isobel Dodd argues that addressing domestic misogyny and sexism must be part of the conversation in advancing a feminist foreign policy. She points to examples in the U.K.—victim blaming in the criminal justice system—and the U.S.—the reversal of abortion rights—arguing that, “when misogyny is not confronted within society, it can become an institutional characteristic of the fabric of the state.” The status of women’s rights is also directly related to state security on an international level. Feminist policies must begin at home before “we” (as a feminist community) turn our collective focus abroad.

The U.K. and the U.S. do not have a feminist foreign policy framework. What about the status of women's rights in countries that do? Rocío Magali Maciel considers her home country, Mexico, the first Latin American country to establish a feminist foreign policy. She sees a contradiction between the country's foreign policy and domestic policies, especially regarding violence mitigation and gender inequality. Highlighting the lived experience of women in Mexico, Maciel calls for a feminist domestic policy to complement the country's feminist foreign policy that focuses on addressing daily experiences of violence and injustice.

Reflecting on Sweden's reversal of its feminist foreign policy in 2022, the authors express concern about domestic backlash to feminist progress. In their essay contrasting women's rights in Iran and India, Purimetla and Sistla observe that "the rights of women are always subject to the prevailing politico-religious environment of any country." In any country, the politico-religious context is contested and subject to change. Several authors, including Zambelli and Wilton, raise concern about right-wing, conservative backlash. Zambelli warns that the rise in "extreme far-right politics and anti-rights movements" threatens gender equality as a global trend. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Wilton observes that "a groundswell of racist and conservative backlash continues to stall meaningful progress." Part of the challenge, according to Das, is the lack of a clear definition of what feminism means in the context of foreign policy, noting that there is a "fundamental disconnect between what a feminist foreign policy promises and how those promises are delivered." A lack of clarity creates opportunities for oppositional actors to reframe or reverse meaningful progress for feminist policies.

The essays also identify ways to resolve discrepancies between domestic and foreign policies, including bottom-up and top-down approaches to support feminist policies and place women in positions of political power. Bottom-up approaches focus on changes that can be made at the local or national level and envision how feminist policies are driven from the local to the international. Militararu calls for changes in how care work (childcare, elder care, or other types of work to cultivate community well-being, often unpaid or under-paid) is valued: "a feminist approach [would mean] a recognition of the value that care work brings to society and a pro-active initiative to prioritize the health of communities by giving resources and support to those who take care of us." Recognizing the value of care work could signal a more systemic shift in how labor is understood and compensated, especially considering that women often dominate care work. The prospect of such a shift raises the question: What kind of foreign policies would we create if guided primarily by the ethic of care?

Supporting and strengthening local women's rights and feminist organizations is one clear way to support bottom-up feminist policies. Zambelli notes: "[feminist foreign policies] should involve and reflect the perspectives of feminist and gender equality movements within the country." Civil society groups can actively shape foreign policy through advocacy, activism, and transnational relationships. For example, Olajide argues that African women's civil society organizations practice feminist foreign policy through digital technology and transboundary solidarity. She points to the example of the Feminist Coalition (FEMCO) in Nigeria and its success in eliciting transboundary solidarity through social media for its advocacy and activist campaigns.

Several authors discuss the importance of women in positions of political power: the shocking lack of women in politics (especially in foreign policy) and why women's inclusion is essential. Zambelli pulls data on percentages of women in positions of political power to demonstrate the scale of the problem: approximately 15% of heads of government of UN member states and approximately 20% of all ambassadorships are held by women. She concludes that diplomacy and foreign affairs are “patriarchal institutions with structural barriers to the inclusion of women.” After observing official photos from the UN climate conference in Egypt and seeing all older men, Mistri asks, “Who has the power to speak and decide on climate justice? Who has the power to be seen and heard? Whose agendas are being served by whom?” By excluding women, and thereby women's experiences with climate change, Mistri notes that policy circles “rarely adhere to feminist ethical and intersectional frameworks.” Das argues that “insisting that women are at the negotiation table ensures that security concerns are viewed more holistically.” Specifically in Africa, Olajide suggests that building strong domestic institutions prioritizing women's representation is key to strengthening African states in global affairs. Without women in foreign or domestic policy positions, it becomes more difficult to cultivate an Afro-feminist policy agenda.

At the same time, the international community can support burgeoning feminist movements and policies, especially in countries hostile to women's rights, demonstrating the top-down approach to supporting a feminist foreign policy. Purimelta and Sistla ask, “When states fail at their duty to protect women's rights, what is the alternative?” They point to examples in Iran and India where women's freedom of expression (framed as their right to choose whether or not to wear a hijab) is repressed, subject to cultural norms in each context. International law, they argue, can be a mechanism to support women's rights in multiple contexts, yet, “current international law and foreign policy efforts [pertaining] to women's rights are inadequate in scope and action.” Countries with a feminist foreign policy can help support international mechanisms that ensure women's rights by, “usher[ing] in new women's rights treaties—such as the campaign to adopt the Every Woman Treaty.”

## Redefining Safety and Security from a Feminist Perspective

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**“SAFETY IS ONLY EVER TEMPORARILY GENERATED  
BY MILITARIZATION, AN APPROACH THAT ALMOST  
CERTAINLY GUARANTEES SELF-ANNIHILATION.”  
MORGAN SHIER**

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Security policy often connotes traditional approaches that employ the use of force or violence. The term conjures images of the military, weaponry, and border walls. Yet, some authors interrogate how security is collectively understood and attained from a feminist perspective. They push back on traditional conceptions of security and offer a more holistic vision of security centered on meeting essential needs like food, housing, or healthcare and individuals' emotional and intellectual needs. By centering human needs and critiquing prominent security narratives that dominate our understanding of world history and current events, these authors use a feminist lens to radically change how we think about security.

Morgan Shier, a family medicine physician, writes, “From birth, we are wired to seek a sense of safety, and it is a lack of general safety that necessarily contributes to a lifetime of self-blame, self-punishment, and avoidance of the darker aspects of our experience that we will inevitably be called to confront.” A feminist foreign policy not only calls for human-centered policies but also recognizes the humanity of the people creating policies in the first place. Individuals act according to their emotional responses, perceptions, and interpretations of the world around them, as well as what they learn from their past experiences. Samara Shaz observes this when writing about the dominant narratives and retellings of the Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC),<sup>4</sup> noting that “retellings of this CMC narrative in American defense circles support rationalism and brinkmanship,” whereas a reinterpretation of this event using a feminist lens shows that “strategic empathy is what saved the world from a nuclear war; not brinkmanship.” Leaders operated out of fear, not rationality, in decision-making. Once leaders recognize that their so-called adversaries also operate out of fear, they can make decisions based on empathy and compassion for the other side.

Further, the stories we tell about security frame what actions or behaviors we believe are necessary to achieve security, with dominant security narratives today foregrounding military responses while obscuring nonviolent alternatives. For example, Shaz notes from the CMC that “heroism and nationalism paint a grand portrait of great men who do great things to narrowly avoid the unimaginable. However, the greatness of their avoidance must be undercut with the fact that they created these crisis scenarios in the first place.” Social and political issues are immensely complex and are driven by multiple factors. A single narrative cannot tell the whole story. Yet, all security systems are based on narrow interpretations of history that, according to Shaz, “lend credibility to aggression [making it] exceedingly difficult to de-escalate.” A feminist foreign policy re-frames security narratives, removing heroism and nationalism as major themes and replacing them with trust and communication, providing “a stable basis for international relations [and] multilateralism.”

As a result of viewing security through a feminist lens, policies become human-centered and concerned with the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Shier writes that “foundational to any policy, whether it be personal or global, should be a clear recognition of our human multidimensionality, intersectionality, and interconnectedness.” Speaking directly to the political realities of today, Militararu asks, “What if our first priority were to ensure not the profit of businesses but the wellbeing of local communities and the environment? What if all the effort we put into making corporations prosper went towards building functional healthcare and education systems, public-owned farms and green energy grids?” Shifting the political system’s priorities to embrace a feminist lens would result in radical change to both domestic and foreign policies, to what we collectively believe to be politically possible, and to how security stories are framed and re-told.

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4. “The Cuban Missile Crisis...was a 13-day confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, when American deployments of nuclear missiles in Italy and Turkey were matched by Soviet deployments of nuclear missiles in Cuba.” Cuban Missile Crisis,” Wikipedia, accessed December 20, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban\\_Missile\\_Crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis).

## New Concepts for Feminist Foreign Policy

In addition to the themes discussed earlier, several essays introduce new concepts or apply existing concepts that expand our understanding of a feminist foreign policy. These provide new ground for analysis, re-interpretation, exploration, and learning about a feminist foreign policy.

Oluwatoyin Christiana Olajide	Afro-Feminist Foreign Policy	“Recognizes the peculiarity of women’s lives in Africa and adopts strategies responsive to this situation, thereby amplifying women’s voices. An Afro-feminist foreign policy recognizes that feminist activism and voice within the formal state apparatus is limited, therefore creating the need to pursue an Afro-feminist foreign policy through a two-pronged strategy of non-state feminist activism on the global stage and male ally-ship within state foreign policy institutions.”
Rocio Magali Maciel	Feminist Domestic Policy	“An approach [that] applies] an intersectional and transversal vision of gender, because understanding the intersection between gender and other factors such as access to education, economic mobility, and family roles, is an essential part to the solution. A feminist domestic policy would understand the need to address the phenomenon of violence against women from different angles, such as prevention, attention, and sanction.”
Samara Shaz	Strategic Empathy	“Acknowledges the gap between intention and action, specifically in the perceptions of other actors in politics.” Originally a term coined by Zachary Shore and H.R. McMaster; <sup>5</sup> meaning, “the skill of understanding what drives and constrains one’s adversary,” to which Shaz adds, “strategic empathy asks leaders to think through risk perception from the perspective of their ‘adversaries’.”
Margherita Sofia Zambelli	Shiny Feminism	“The misappropriation of feminism in the public and private spheres, a surface-level application of the term without a deep understanding of its meaning and implications.”

5. H. R. McMaster, “Developing Strategic Empathy: History as the Foundation of Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy,” George C. Marshall Lecture Series in Military History, *Journal of Military History* 84 (July 2020): 689–97; and Zachary Shore, “A Sense of the Enemy,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 65 (April 2012): 32–37.

## Conclusion

This essay collection displays a more diverse set of authors than what is typically seen in many policy discussions, particularly in the United States and other Global North countries. Focusing on diverse and non-elitist voices on feminist foreign policy reveals a different set of policy concerns and priorities than what typically dominates the agenda. Countries with feminist foreign policy frameworks often focus on prioritizing funding for women's rights in international aid or gender mainstreaming in foreign policies. While the goal to increase funding for women's rights in foreign policy is certainly worthwhile, and in fact many of the authors suggest an increase of funding and support for women's civil society organizations, we must question whether funding alone is enough to fulfill the transformational goals inherent in the shift towards feminist foreign policies. The common themes and new concepts explored in these essays offer a framework to assess the transformational potential of feminist foreign policies.

Many of the essays focused on colonial legacies—how these legacies shape global power dynamics between the Global North and Global South, as well as domestic policies in countries with marginalized Indigenous communities. The disproportionate power relationship between Global North and Global South countries is prominent across all foreign policy areas. It shapes how wealthier and more powerful countries interact with their less wealthy, less powerful counterparts—like, on the extremes, in decisions to invade with their militaries as seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Niger, Gaza, and others—and how global decision-making processes are structured—observed prominently by the make-up of the United Nations Security Council. To ensure that feminist foreign policies get closer to fulfilling their radical potential, the question needs to evolve from, *“How can we increase funding to women's civil society groups and for women's rights?”* to, in addition, *“How does this funding shift power dynamics for women within their home countries, and for their home countries within a global system of power?”*

The prominence of colonization in these essays shines a light on settler-colonial states with significant—and often marginalized—Indigenous communities. The status, rights, and representation of Indigenous communities varies significantly among settler-colonial states. However, these contexts share political-social-economic systems that are based on European models. At a minimum, a feminist policy without Indigenous rights and representation is not a feminist policy. To dismantle hierarchy and question the status quo—as feminist foreign policy is charged to do—means to question the foundational values and principles of dominant political and economic systems and to explore future alternatives that respect Indigenous values and ways of being.

The type of change that a feminist foreign policy calls for—deep structural and transformative change that dismantles power hierarchies in pursuit of greater equality among all people—might feel too large, diffuse, or even impossible to achieve. Indeed, outside of the discussions in these essays (wherein the authors generally agree on intersectional feminism), there is considerable disagreement on what feminism means and conservative backlash against feminist progress world-wide. Even within the essays, there are contradictions and tensions on future pathways. For instance, how might we address global colonial legacies while also relying on the UN or other international organizations—often the very institutions reaffirming neocolonial systems—to support women's rights campaigns in more repressive or authoritarian contexts? There are no simple answers or

easy solutions. Rather, as the movement for a feminist foreign policy continues to grow in prominence, the feminist policy community must forgo perfection, instead embracing a spirit of curiosity, experimentation, and flexibility in advocating for policies that shift power, embrace an ethic of care, and pursue a future that affirms feminist values. This includes contending with reality—understanding the current status of feminist discourse in society writ large, how even labeling a policy as feminist may elicit a negative reaction, the sheer scale of the threat against feminist progress, and increasing global levels of warfare and authoritarianism.

For our next steps, WPI is committed to supporting the feminist community and engaging in the tough, messy work needed to actualize a feminist foreign policy. We continue supporting this cohort of authors by creating a regular meeting space, sharing knowledge and resources, and identifying opportunities for future work and collaboration. Fundamentally, centering a feminist ethic of care means nurturing interpersonal and communal relationships as part of wider societal change. We believe that even the smallest actions are a step towards the larger, transformational change that we wish to see in the world.

## Acknowledgements

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# UNSETTLING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY AND AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Written by

ANGELA  
WILTON

Advocating for the development of a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in Aotearoa New Zealand is in itself an anti-feminist act. This is perhaps an odd statement for a feminist scholar to make, particularly in a country that became the first in the world where women had the right to vote (noting however that Māori women “voted” long before colonists arrived), and that has had an openly feminist Prime Minister, a highly diverse Cabinet, and an Indigenous female Minister of Foreign Affairs who has committed to “doing things differently” in foreign policy. Surely the political landscape is ripe for a FFP in Aotearoa NZ.

However, the political (landscape) is also personal. For I am also a white settler in a land, sea, and sky where exogenous systems, structures, and policies have been imposed by settlers for the last 180 years. To advocate for a FFP within a colonially imposed state structure, which continues to breach the Treaty signed with Indigenous peoples, would be an act of reinscribing those same colonial logics that FFPs aim to dismantle. FFPs may challenge inequitable power structures both globally and locally, but in settler-states, such as Aotearoa NZ, if foreign policy is not (co)created by and with Indigenous peoples, a FFP runs the risk of being yet another tool from the master’s house.

This essay, then, briefly articulates three interrelated conundrums posed by entangling Aotearoa NZ with FFP discourse and concludes with what is needed for a more socially just foreign policy to unfold.

Firstly, the issue of who sets foreign policy is critical. In 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi was signed between Māori and the British Crown. Due to the existence of two versions of the Treaty—in English (the Treaty) and te reo Māori (Te Tiriti)—there have been different understandings of “sovereignty, governance and the terms for co-habitation.”<sup>1</sup> The Crown has privileged the English version and has put in place systems and structures that have repeatedly (dis)possessed Māori. As a result, the political landscape in Aotearoa NZ continues to be (un)settled (what I refer to below as the settler state), despite what was agreed to in Te Tiriti, and centuries of Māori resistance.

Māori scholar Bargh<sup>2</sup> states that foreign policy has often been constructed around notions of how “we” deal with “them,” and yet in Aotearoa NZ, the Crown has historically assumed the right to define the “we,” to define “by whom” and “on what terms” others are dealt with. Māori “interest groups” may be consulted or asked to advise in these pro-

1. Carisa R. Showden, Karen Nairn, and Kyle R Matthews, “So People Wake Up, What Are We Gonna Do?: From Paralysis to Action in Decolonizing Activism,” *Ethnicities* 22, no. 5 (2022): 663–684.

2. Maria Bargh, “Te Tiriti o Waitangi in International Relations and Trade,” *In Always Speaking: The Treaty of Waitangi and Public Policy*, ed. Veronica MH Tawhai and Katarina Gray Sharp (Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2011), 48.

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**[I]N SETTLER STATES, SUCH AS AOTEAROA NZ, IF FOREIGN POLICY IS NOT (CO)CREATED BY AND WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, A FFP RUNS THE RISK OF BEING YET ANOTHER TOOL FROM THE MASTER'S HOUSE.**

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cesses, but consultation is a far cry from self-determination, co-creation, or co-governance with equal partners.

With the appointment of Nanaia Mahuta—herself Indigenous—as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2020, there has been a significant shift towards more Indigenous-centred approaches to foreign policy in Aotearoa NZ. However, these approaches are still embedded within a Crown structure, which is founded on settler-colonial frameworks and operates within a UK Westminster system. Despite evolving conversations across Aotearoa NZ

about alternative governance models and constitutional transformation that would increase Crown/Maori co-governance and power-sharing, a groundswell of racist and conservative backlash continues to stall meaningful progress. Like Sweden, which repealed its FFP in 2022 with the arrival of a new right-wing government, it is possible that the space for meaningful change may contract with the increasing popularity of the right-wing opposition in Aotearoa NZ. As within many settler states, these forces stress the importance of national “unity” and “shared identity,” citing the “divisiveness” of identity-based politics. In this context, “unity” means perpetuation of the settler status quo, the side-lining of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the assimilation of “Others” within “settler space.”

Secondly, the question of whether “feminism” is the starting point for foreign policy in Aotearoa NZ is important. For example, Foreign Affairs Minister Mahuta has reinforced Indigenous values in recognising the mana of wahine (the unique spiritual essence of women), “not defined by western feminist thinking, but the values that have long underpinned our culture, histories and traditions.”<sup>3</sup>

Mahuta’s statement highlights the recurrent dissonance, locally and globally, between Indigenous world views and what can be seen as universalising notions of Western liberal feminism. Non-Indigenous feminists are also settlers, intricately inscribed within the “postcolony” as both relationally colonised and materially colonising. Indigenous feminists speak of having to challenge the prevailing structures of power on the dual fronts of race and gender, and having to navigate multiple points of oppression, including white patriarchy, Indigenous patriarchy, and white feminism.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, entangling a FFP within the settler-state, and within an Indigenous context wary of white feminism, runs the risk of perpetuating marginalisation at “home” due to the ongoing presence of that same settler state in which Indigenous peoples may or may not be “included.” It also runs the risk of reinforcing exogenous notions of feminism which themselves may be unsettling.

Finally, Aotearoa NZ is intricately entangled within the international system of global politics which continues to impoverish the “Global South” through extractive trade deals, crippling debt obligations, predatory corporate “deals,” and aid flows from the Global

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3. Nanaia Mahuta, “A Legacy of Mana Wahine—Women’s Leadership,” Opening Address to Maori Women’s Welfare League 66th National Conference, September 27, 2018, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/legacy-mana-wahine-%E2%80%93-womens-leadership>

4. Celeste Liddle, “Intersectionality and Indigenous Feminism: An Aboriginal Woman’s Perspective,” *The Postcolonialist*, June 25, 2014, <http://postcolonialist.com/civil-discourse/intersectionality-indigenous-feminism-aboriginal-womans-perspective/>

North to the Global South which are a drop in the ocean compared to “financial resources that flow in the opposite direction.”<sup>5</sup> And yet too often these global connections, and their links to the imperialist past, are erased. This “colonial amnesia” that disconnects current global inequities from the legacies of empire<sup>6</sup> is pervasive in Aotearoa, with Maori and settler histories also “remembered and forgotten and reinvented” in what has been termed the “dementia wing of national history.”<sup>7</sup> Additionally, colonial ideological enclosures within foreign policy have led to siloed and compartmentalised approaches, separating aid flows from trade deals from policy approaches and more. As a result, critical interconnections within and between foreign and domestic policy are invisibilised or overlooked, both temporally (in terms of the intergenerational disconnection between past, present, and future) and spatially (in terms of policy incoherence stretching across political spaces). It may not be possible, then, for a FFP alone to untangle the multi-layered complexities of a settler state built on Indigenous (dis)possession and woven into an inequitable global world order. Thus, there is much deeper and wider work to be done.

A FFP in Aotearoa NZ would thus be territorialised i) within a domestic landscape which itself is contested because of the ongoing colonial project; ii) through an exogenous notion of feminism/s which does not always speak to Indigenous feminism/s; and iii) across a neo-imperialist, neoliberal international system which privileges the Global North and perpetuates disconnections between global and historical inequities and global/local power.

If a FFP is about challenging hegemonic power, marginalisation, and oppression in all their forms, then it also needs to be open to the possibility of its own power (un/intentionally) centring itself while de-centring those who have been de-centred for 180 years. In a settler society, there must be a “break between the settler subject and the idea of a centre,” and a move away from the settler demand for “Others” to speak in the settler voice and on settler terms.<sup>8</sup> Equally, a FFP, if shaped through settler voices and on settler terms within a settler state, could simply be yet another (albeit less masculine) chapter in the centuries-old story of settler-centred sovereignty in Aotearoa NZ. Instead, foreign policy must be positioned within a Te Tiriti-centric model that honours the decision-making of both tangata whenua (Indigenous people of the land) and tangata Tiriti (non-Indigenous people of the Treaty). To advocate for anything different, including a FFP, would simply be un-feminist.

5. Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018).

6. Columba Achilleos-Sarll, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis),” *The Journal of International Women’s Studies* 19, no. 1 (2018): 43.

7. Rachel Buchanan, “The Dementia Wing of History,” *Cultural Studies Review* 12, no 1 (March 2007): 174.

8. Avril Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 196.

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# THE FEMINIST REVOLUTION:

## AN ANTI-CAPITALIST, ANTI-MILITARIST CASE FOR RETHINKING FOREIGN POLICY

Written by

IRINA  
MILITARU

Let's not beat around the bush. The world is on fire, and it got like this because we never questioned the legitimacy of business and profit maximization as the main driver of global politics. It is impossible to separate capitalism from its violent roots—slavery and racism,<sup>1</sup> witch-hunting and patriarchy<sup>2</sup>—from its continued disregard for human dignity,<sup>3</sup> or from its incessant crimes against the environment.<sup>4</sup> In these conditions, can we even be surprised white supremacy is still alive and well?

The organizing principle of capital has always been exploitation, and that lies at the basis of all human endeavor, including how foreign policy is done. Spritzing some gender and racial diversity in the mix will not change anything—not even in the long-run—unless this core principle is done away with. Feminist foreign policy is necessarily anti-capitalist.

When one thinks of foreign policy, two things tend to come to mind: war and international trade agreements, with a generalized misconception that the latter safeguard peace. I posit that trade agreements cannot effectively stand without the threat of armed conflict as a tacit negotiation tool, since local communities would not tolerate the disproportional power dynamics enabling exploitation if it were not for the constant state of tension fueled by these military threats. The extraction of natural resources, the dramatic alteration of the environment, and the destitution of people constitute the necessary state upon which global trade can build itself and create profit.<sup>5</sup> Under such conditions, taking any action to promote peace would be counter-productive, so instead, trade agreements make a

flimsy promise of mutual economic benefit. And then, like vultures over a corpse, corporations swoop in to make good on that promise. A global pandemic hits? Pharma is now flush with cash. Gas prices soaring worldwide? Oil companies make it rain (acid). People lose their homes in natural disasters? Look at all this land that just freed up to make luxury resorts!

One community's unspeakable tragedy is another white man's treasure. But what if it wasn't?

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**FEMINIST FOREIGN  
POLICY WOULD SERVE TO  
CREATE A REVOLUTIONARY  
CULTURAL SHIFT FROM  
INDIVIDUALISTIC RE-  
SOURCE-HOARDING  
TO A COMMUNITY-  
ORIENTED MINDSET,  
IN WHICH WEALTH IS  
SHARED BETWEEN PEOPLES,  
NOT CORPORATIONS**

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1. Catherine Hall, "Racial Capitalism: What Is in a Name?" Senior Seminar in Global Humanities Opening Lecture at University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy, November 19, 2019.

2. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).

3. Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (July/August 2016), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii100/articles/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care>.

4. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

5. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, 2nd edition (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012).

What if our first priority were to ensure not the profit of businesses but the wellbeing of local communities and the environment? What if all that effort we put into making corporations prosper went towards building functional healthcare and education systems, public-owned farms and green energy grids? Why sell our time, labor, and expertise to a job for a salary that is taxed, so that these taxes can be allocated by people who indirectly represent our interests, when we could directly contribute these funds in ways that benefit our local community?

Capital masquerading as feminism isn't saving anyone. The oppression of women started when society collectively decided that social reproductive labor is less valuable than productive labor,<sup>6</sup> and that breadwinning is a man's job, while "bread-managing" is female nature. A first step in the right direction is to start paying people who choose to work within the home to secure the wellbeing and quality of life for children, elders, and the community as a whole. A feminist approach to both domestic and international affairs would therefore mean a recognition of the value that care work brings to society and a pro-active initiative to prioritize the health of communities by giving resources and support to those who take care of us. It would certainly aid those who already do that kind of work to be independent and less vulnerable to abuse.

But still, how does this link to foreign policy?

Feminist foreign policy would serve to create a revolutionary cultural shift from individualistic resource-hoarding to a community-oriented mindset, in which wealth is shared between peoples, not corporations, and in which governments cooperate on distribution of existing resources directly to communities who need them rather than appeal to corporations to dispense them at their discretion. Until the idea of profit maximization becomes marginal to human activity, capital will continue to hinder social progress, fuel local tensions, promote international conflict, and destroy the environment.

That is not to say that businesses have an exclusively negative impact on the world. Businesses create value and facilitate community wellbeing. It is multinational corporate greed that puts a strain on local economies and holds governments hostage. It is no coincidence that this chokehold is most strongly felt in countries that are former colonies, while the headquarters of these corporations are almost all situated in the Global North. The cognitive link between corporate capitalism and imperialism is not a novelty.

To even begin to loosen the chokehold, governments must strictly regulate corporate activity and incentivize small local businesses at the expense of fast-paced growth. In the Global North, the objective should be degrowth and sharing resources with the Global South—or even better, giving back those looted over the years.

To ensure this does not hurt local communities, economies should reorient themselves towards the library economy model, in which individuals can access shared commodities and get involved in local decision-making processes, while weekly working hours are halved without the threat of salary reduction. Give people twenty hours back per week, and we all could be enjoying another Renaissance.

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6. Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

Lastly, let's talk about the military. "Boots on the ground" seems to be a favored response to international crises these days, especially in the Global South, and it is telling that this favor comes most vocally from white supremacists. Historically, how many wars were started to protect free trade outside Europe? I can think of at least two and they both contain the word "opium" in their name. Coercive action with the full force of state violence behind it does not keep trade free but rather forces open markets and reduces said markets' ability to sustain themselves. Even with all the protectionist tax reforms a government can come up with, it's still powerless in the face of global supply chains made dirt-cheap at gunpoint. Once armed conflict gets involved to protect commercial interests, it's hard to still imagine an independent merchant in a junk boat sailing the Indian Ocean for small change.

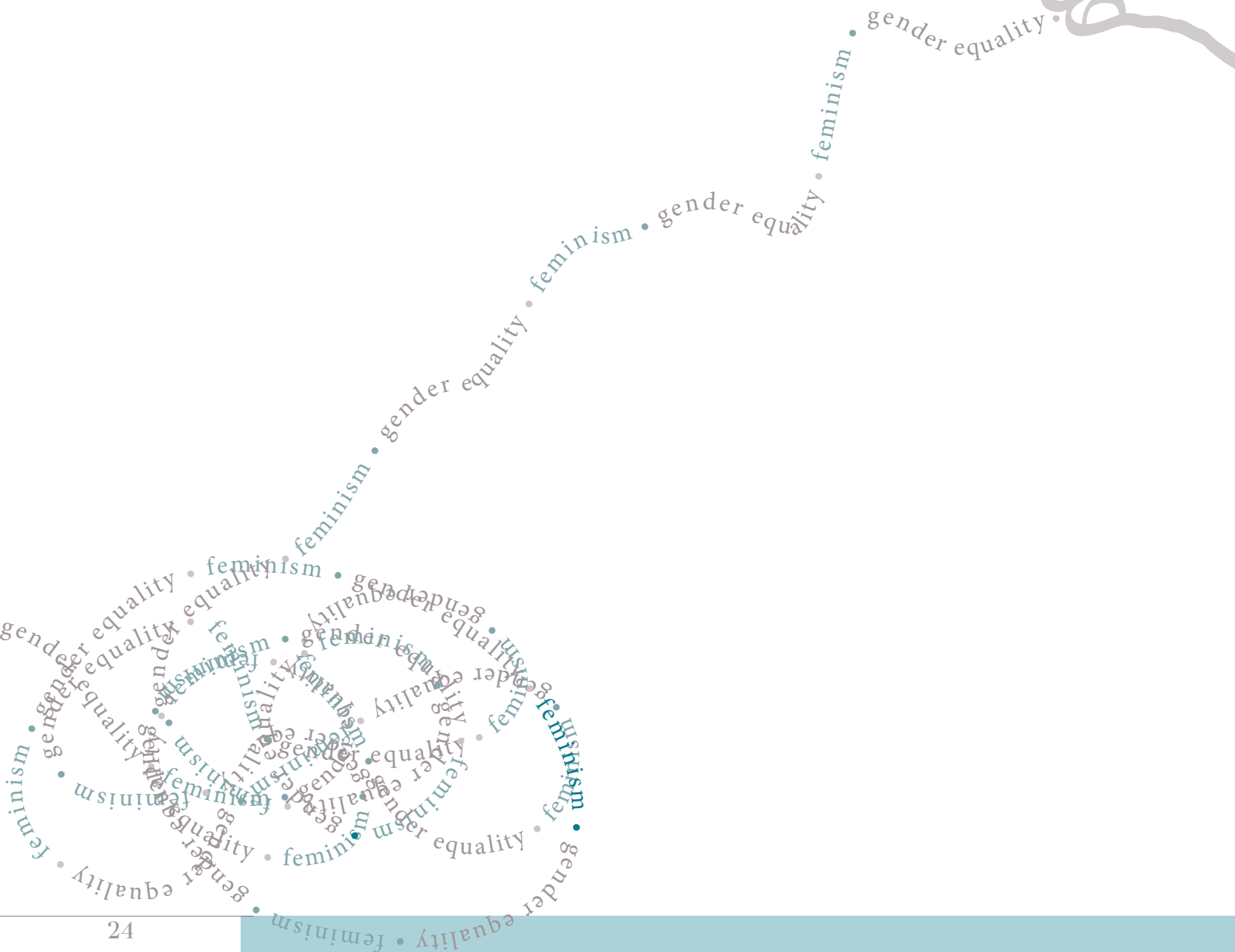
In the end, militarism is only an ideology, but it is one that feeds off the constant state of armed conflict and crisis. In this regard, it makes good bedfellows with capitalism, as suggested above. Ideally, that level of manpower, research capabilities, and technology that the army disposes of could be used to provide disaster relief and counter the negative impacts of climate change, but as long as militarism exists, and serves a for-profit purpose, the army as an institution will always protect the interests of capital above those of humanity.

Capital, propped up by militarism, breeds the sense of dominion of whiteness and masculinity over anyone else. It lends a semblance of power to white men who like to believe the system works in their favor, as long as they uphold the system's hegemony. What they fail to realize, though, is that they're aiding in their own disenfranchisement since capital, in its nature, is built to benefit fewer and fewer people, and those who win the game in the end are only a handful of the uber-rich.

To conclude, feminist foreign policy is a bottom-up approach grounded in strong local communities and sound domestic policies that prioritize the wellbeing of people over the profits of private companies. It prioritizes community-oriented economic models and guards against predatory ones through government regulations. It promotes shared property, economic degrowth, demilitarization, and anti-consumerism, while incentivizing small businesses and remunerating domestic labor.

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# THE GIRL NEXT DOOR: HOW LOCAL INDIVIDUALS CAN AFFECT GLOBAL POLICY

Written by ISOBEL  
DODD

Feminist foreign policy attempts to utilise the voices of marginalised individuals and communities, stepping outside the traditional foreign policy route of violence, war, militarisation, and destruction.<sup>1</sup> The word “feminist” in “feminist foreign policy” can lead readers down the wrong path to thinking a feminist foreign policy concerns only women. It does not. A true and honest feminist foreign policy is intersectional, considering those disadvantaged by gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, economic status within society, and more. That said, a true and honest feminist foreign policy should address the misogyny that is experienced daily by women all around the world as it perpetuates harm across all members of society. Time and time again, it is evident that ignoring the daily experiences of sexism and misogyny leads to serious injustice for women and to the insecurity of society as a whole. Domestic injustice in even the most subtle form can lead to nation-wide discrimination, weakening state security. Feminist foreign policy presents alternative approaches for disrupting cycles of injustice and discrimination and strengthening state security. But change must start at home.

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**FEMINIST FOREIGN  
POLICY ASKS CRUCIAL  
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE  
STRUCTURE OF  
GOVERNMENTS, POLITICS,  
AND POLICIES; BUT WHAT  
IS THE MEANING OF A  
FEMINIST FOREIGN  
POLICY IN A SYSTEM  
OF MISOGYNY?**

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Misogyny is a universally recognised issue, yet it lacks the attention it deserves. It includes sexism, prejudice, and other forms of injustice aimed at enforcing women’s subordination in society through political, social, and economic means<sup>2</sup> and is a tool of discrimination which intersects with other forms of prejudice, such as homophobia and classism.<sup>3</sup> The specific type of discrimination that women of colour face is known as “misogynoir,” which is compounded and shaped by other identities.<sup>4</sup> This form of misogyny represents the intersection between racism and sexism.<sup>5</sup> Misogynoir can be explicit: For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) in the lead-up to the 2017 general elec-

1. Cornelius Adebahr and Barbara Mittelhammer, “A Feminist Foreign Policy to Deal with Iran? Assessing the EU’s Options,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, 1-36, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/23/feminist-foreign-policy-to-deal-with-iran-assessing-eu-s-options-pub-83251>.

2. Laura Bates, *Misogynation: The True Scale of Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2018); Mary E. Hawkesworth, “Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth,” *Signs* 14, no. 3 (1989): 533-557, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174401>; Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, *Misogyny – A Human Rights Issue* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2022), [www.gov.scot/publications/misogyny-human-rights-issue/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/misogyny-human-rights-issue/).

3. Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism: The Project that Inspired a Worldwide Movement* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014); Bates, *Misogynation*.

4. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299; R. Marie Griffith, *Making the World Over: Confronting Racism, Misogyny, and Xenophobia in U.S. History* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2021).

5. Crenshaw, 1241-1299.

tion, women of colour Members of Parliament (MP) received 35 per cent more abusive online vitriol than their white peers.<sup>6</sup> There is also implicit discrimination, as well as passive systemic injustice, such as the invisibility of Black women in the UK justice system due to the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) failure to create disaggregated statistics of prosecutorial outcomes, despite the fact that women of colour are disproportionately more likely to be victims of sexual violence.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can observe how a feminist conceptualisation of justice "recognises that the world is organised in ways that exposes some women to disproportionate levels of violence."<sup>8</sup>

When misogyny is not confronted within society, it can become an institutional characteristic of the fabric of the state. Consider, for example, institutional misogyny in the criminal justice system in the UK. This can be observed through victim-blaming in sexual assault cases. Harriet Johnson states that to blame the victim for her assault "is perhaps a little more revealing of an attitude than a slip of the tongue."<sup>9</sup> Consider, then, across the Atlantic, the recent repeal of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States. The ruling has revoked a fundamental women's right to bodily autonomy. Rhiannon Lucy Cosset states we must observe this landmark ruling as "state-sanctioned forced birth on a monumental scale."<sup>10</sup> The domestic institutional misogyny embedded in domestic structures and relationships critically influences the fabric of communities and states as a whole, impacting national security. If feminist foreign policy considers how the domestic impacts the international, domestic misogyny must be part of that conversation.

Theories of international relations such as realism place the security of the state from external threat as a principal concern in an anarchic international system.<sup>11</sup> However, as the domestic impacts the international, women's domestic (in)security contributes to the internal (in)security of the state.<sup>12</sup> Consider the security of Iraq after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed sanctions after the First Gulf War. The imposition of sanctions crippled the state's infrastructure. Unable to afford structural necessities such as labour expenditures, the state neglected to provide services critical to women, like transportation and maternity leave, leading to considerable women's unemployment.<sup>13</sup> Not only that but, by 2000, the illiteracy rate among Iraqi women soared to 77 per cent as education rates dropped.<sup>14</sup> Further, the collapse of healthcare meant that women were disproportionately affected. As a result of the sanctions, pervasive malnourishment meant child-bearing became increasingly dangerous and infant mortality rates rapidly escalat-

6. Harriet Johnson, *Enough: The Violence Against Women and How to End It* (London: Harper Collins, 2022).

7. Bates referencing Andrea Simon in Laura Bates, *Fix the System, Not the Women* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2022).

8. Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

9. Johnson, 107.

10. Rhiannon Lucy Cosset, "Let's Call the Overturning of *Roe v Wade* What It Is: State-Sanctioned Forced Birth," *The Guardian*, June 27, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/27/roe-wade-forced-birth-america-abortion-ban-misogyny>.

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13. Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008).

14. *bid.*

ed.<sup>15</sup> Facing economic austerity, many Iraqi women engaged in prostitution as a means of survival, and, as patriarchal social conservatism intensified under the sanctions regime, women were punished as sexual violence in all forms increased.<sup>16</sup> The impact of sanctions on Iraq reduced the life expectancy of women by 11 years, from 68 to 57.<sup>17</sup> The total devastation of the state will affect Iraqi women's lives for decades to come. The security of Iraq depended on its most vulnerable citizens at the domestic level: women. Iraqi women's insecurity is observed through job insecurity, the inaccessibility of healthcare, and the increase in violence against women in all forms. The weakened security of the state made it more vulnerable to external threat or invasion, which is observed through the 2003 US-led coalition invasion of Iraq. The endangered, unprotected status of Iraqi women at the microlevel contributed to the insecurity of Iraq at the international level.

Feminist foreign policy asks crucial questions about the structure of governments, politics, and policies; but what is the meaning of a feminist foreign policy in a system of misogyny? In light of the domestic impact of the sanctions on Iraq, along with the injustice in the UK justice system, it is clear that the domestic practice of misogyny affects the international subordination of women, thus contributing to the insecurity of the state at the international level. As Mary Caprioli states, "gender equality is not merely a matter of social justice but of international security in predicting state aggressiveness internationally."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, before feminist foreign policy attempts to influence relations at the international level, it is vital to address what is happening at the domestic, through a bottom-up approach. I want to consider what questions we—as activists, politicians, organisations, and everyday people—are not asking: Specifically, are we looking closely enough at misogyny within our own communities before trying to impact the global?

Feminist foreign policy offers new routes for dealing with domestic as well as foreign affairs. It presents three central pillars for implementing feminist foreign policy into the world: "Broadening the understanding of security; Decoding (international) power relations; Recognising women's political agency."<sup>19</sup> By applying these pillars as principles for confronting domestic daily misogyny for all women, we will effectively disrupt the power hierarchies upholding traditional foreign policy practices and effect a transition to feminist foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> As Cornelius Adebahr and Barbara Mittelhammer note, "Feminist foreign policy begins at home."<sup>21</sup>

15. Ann Tickner and Laura Sjoberg, "Feminism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 5th ed., ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 182-196.

16. Samia Saliba, "Regendering Iraq: State Feminism, Imperial Feminism, and Women's Rights Under Sanctions," *Western Libraries Undergraduate Research Award* 17 (2019): 1-14, [https://cedar.wvu.edu/library\\_researchaward/17/](https://cedar.wvu.edu/library_researchaward/17/); Naje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 4/5 (2005): 739-758.

17. Louise Cainkar, "The Gulf War, Sanctions and the Lives of Iraqi Women," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1993): 15-51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858972>.

18. Caprioli, 195-214.

19. Adebahr and Mittelhammer, 1-36.

20. See Marieke Fröhlich, "Masculinities in Peacekeeping: Limits and Transformations of UNSCR 1325 in the South African National Defence Force," Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, February 24, 2020, 1-31, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-africa/masculinities-peacekeeping-limits-and-transformations-unscr-1325-south-african>.

21. Adebahr and Mittelhammer, 1.

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# SHINY FEMINISM

Written by

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## Introduction

The recent news that Sweden is abandoning its national feminist foreign policy (FFP)<sup>1</sup> has caught the attention of all those interested in feminism, gender equality, and foreign policy. The new Prime Minister, leader of the Moderate Party, a liberal-conservative political party, said that the label has become more important than its content. Beyond the feelings of disorientation and perplexity that it may evoke, this change provides an opportunity to reflect on the content of feminist foreign policy and its vulnerability when it is tied to the political party in power at any given point in time. Removed from the label, what remains—and must remain—in the container? In the past few years, the words “gender equality” and “feminism” have been over-exploited by actors who are neither feminists nor gender equality advocates. The business and entertainment sectors, among others, operating on and offline, have increasingly used these words with profit as their sole objective. Actors and social media influencers promote a “feminism” distant from its real meaning. A luxury brand sells a plain cotton t-shirt that says, “We Should All Be Feminists”—inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s essay and TEDx talk of the same name—for over \$900.<sup>2</sup>

This appears to me as an empty, *shiny feminism*—or, the misappropriation of feminism in the public and private spheres, a surface-level application of the term without a deep understanding of its meaning and implications. Although shiny feminism may be more immediately apparent in the private sector, it shows up in the public sector, too—from domestic to foreign policy—and at multilateral, bilateral, and national levels. In light of the frequent use and misuse of the words “feminism” and “feminist,” this essay intends to reflect on feminist foreign policies and their ideal configuration and essence.

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**IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, THE WORDS “GENDER EQUALITY” AND “FEMINISM” HAVE BEEN OVER-EXPLOITED BY ACTORS WHO ARE NEITHER FEMINISTS NOR GENDER EQUALITY ADVOCATES.**

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The essay provides a set of questions, as tools, to analyze feminist foreign policies and to verify whether they bring a transformative change to foreign policy—or whether they are only a new way to designate (gender) strategies and action plans that should have already been in place for a long time. Hence, the next paragraphs present some provocative questions on which the ministries of foreign affairs (MOFAs) that engage in feminist foreign policy should ponder. The answers

1. Merlyn Thomas, “Sweden Ditches ‘Feminist Foreign Policy,’” *BBC News*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63311743>.

2. T-Shirt selling price available at: [https://www.dior.com/en\\_us/fashion/products/213T03TA001\\_X0200-we-should-all-be-feminists-t-shirt-white-cotton-jersey-and-linen](https://www.dior.com/en_us/fashion/products/213T03TA001_X0200-we-should-all-be-feminists-t-shirt-white-cotton-jersey-and-linen).

will reveal whether the FFP pursued is only a shiny label without content or a real, new, transformative foreign policy.

## Guiding questions for feminist foreign policy-makers

### 1. Does the FFP vacillate (or risk vacillating) with political changes?

The rise in insecurity, extreme far-right politics, and anti-rights movements jeopardizes the promotion and safeguarding of gender equality. Political changes over time and even the natural fluctuation of political parties cannot be a threat to civil and political rights. Foreign affairs, like all ministries, are tied to the political colour of the country at a specific time. This observation is not new but remains crucial. Gender equality is often a fragile achievement, exposed to the ever-changing weather of politics, and the same applies to FFPs. The Swedish case provides an example. For this reason, states should aim at institutionalizing feminist foreign policies as a core principle and cornerstone of their operations. Similarly, when gender equality is anchored in national commitments as a fundamental and non-negotiable principle in all its components—intersectionality, transformation, and human rights—foreign policies are more likely to be automatically feminist.

### 2. Does the FFP reinforce existing geographies of power?

Feminist foreign policy is intrinsically and naturally linked to foreign policy. But whose foreign policy? Of the countries that have formally adopted or committed to a feminist foreign policy, five are among the 15 countries with the largest gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>3</sup>—France, Canada, Mexico, Spain, and Germany. Nations with higher economic, financial, and political power are particularly influential in their foreign policies, making it necessary to reflect on the risk that FFP could be used as another form of power, foisting the agendas of powerful countries onto less powerful ones. It is important that feminist foreign policy not be seen as a new standard of wealthy nations and owned and claimed only by representatives of the global political and economic elite. Aware that discussions are being held on the challenging relationship between feminist foreign policy, power, trade, and defense,<sup>4</sup> I deem necessary two essential steps to ensure that FFPs do not reinforce global power imbalances. These steps would ensure a genuine feminist foreign policy that would transform unequal power relations both within and among countries.

The first step entails an *internal* process regarding how a country adopts a FFP. Feminist foreign policies should not be formulated and implemented with a top-down approach at ministries of foreign affairs but should be as inclusive as possible in their drafting and implementation. They should involve and reflect the perspectives of feminists and gender equality movements within the country.

3. World Bank, “Gross Domestic Product 2021,” World Development Indicators Database, July 2022, [https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext\\_download/GDP.pdf](https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/GDP.pdf).

4. The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy offers compelling publications on this subject at: <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/publications/>.

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## THE WORK ON INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE CHANGE FOR GENDER EQUALITY MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A DEEP REFLECTION ON POWER AND PRIVILEGE.

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The second step entails an *external* process concerning how foreign aid is distributed by countries with a FFP. Wealthy countries often have a considerable amount of aid allocated to development cooperation and dedicated agencies within their MOFAs in charge of disbursing it. Aid is measured against gender targets—such as the OECD DAC (the Or-

ganisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee) Gender Equality Policy Marker<sup>5</sup>—that assess development activities with gender equality objectives. The same countries mentioned above with the highest GDP are also among the top so-called “donor countries” that allocate the most funds to gender equality in their foreign aid.<sup>6</sup> MOFAs with a formal FFP should use foreign aid to provide a platform and funding for local women’s and gender equality organizations in “recipient countries” so they can pursue their own agendas, rather than simply import the agendas of donor countries.

### 3. Does the FFP fail to disrupt unbalanced power relations at the societal and institutional levels?

Institutional culture change, gender-responsive leadership, and gender-mainstreaming capacity-building are all imperative to identify and disrupt gender power relations. Yet, after decades of work, progress is still slow. The work on institutional culture change for gender equality must be accompanied by a deep reflection on power and privilege. Strict hierarchical workplace relations affect workers’ experiences at all levels. Power and privilege are those peculiar, seductive forms of influence that distort relations in the workplace (as in other institutions), making it easy to discriminate against someone’s age, gender, sex, and ethnicity, among others. Harassment in the workplace and violence and sexism in politics are two examples. The underrepresentation of women in foreign affairs, as well as other domains, is another. Notably, in 2023, women served as the head of government in just 13 of the 193 member states of the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> According to the 2023 Women in Diplomacy Index, only 20.54% of all ambassadorships are held by women.<sup>8</sup> Based on these numbers, diplomacy and foreign affairs appear to be patriarchal institutions with structural barriers to the inclusion of women. This is why national strategies for gender equality and feminist foreign policy must be mutually reinforcing. As Anne-Marie Brady, a professor of politics at New Zealand’s University of Canterbury, stated on the occasion of the resignation of former Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern: “Women have been liberated but ‘patriarchal institutions’ have not

5. The Gender Equality Marker is a qualitative statistical tool to record development activities that target gender equality as a policy objective. The gender equality policy marker is used by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members as part of the annual reporting of their development activities, to indicate for each aid activity whether it targets gender equality as a policy objective. Some philanthropies, private sector organizations, non-DAC donors, and other actors have started monitoring their development activities using the policy marker. OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality (Gendernet), “Definition and Minimum Recommended Criteria for the DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker,” OECD, December 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Minimum-recommended-criteria-for-DAC-gender-marker.pdf>.

6. Ibid.

7. Laura Clancy and Sarah Austin, “Fewer than a Third of UN Member States Have Ever Had a Woman Leader,” Pew Research Centre, March 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/28/women-leaders-around-the-world/>.

8. Sara Chehab, “Women in Diplomacy Index 2023,” Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, March 2023, <https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/default-document-library/women-diplomacy.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.

evolved enough to support family life. Her situation is cause for reflection about what we can do more to support women in politics.”<sup>9</sup> To “walk the talk,” feminist foreign policies should challenge structural discrimination in ministries, embassies, consulates, and other institutions, which impedes individuals of all genders from performing their roles the way they wish to.

## Conclusions

These are three important questions that must be asked in the coming years, answers to which will shape the contents of FFP—whether the label of “feminism” is flaunted or discarded.

What remains when a country abandons feminist foreign policy in name? It could be asserted that Sweden’s intrinsic and rooted commitment to gender equality will continue to positively influence its foreign policy. Analyses of the lingering effects of the Swedish FFP (and monitoring of civil and political rights) will confirm or disprove this assertion. If confirmed, this could provide hope for the future of feminist foreign policies around the globe: that a genuine domestic commitment to gender equality can continue to influence foreign policy, even if by another name. Given the volatility of our current global context, FFP proponents would do well to reinforce the transformative foundations of FFP so it can maintain its critical potential in the face of political changes and continue to challenge unequal distributions of power between and within countries, as well as inside foreign policy institutions themselves.

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9. Kate Lamb, Lucy Craymer, and Kanupriya Kapoor, “Ardern’s Resignation Resonates for Women in Power,” *Reuters*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sign-times-nz-pm-arderns-resignation-resonates-women-power-2023-01-19/>.



# THE WAR WITHIN

Written by

MORGAN  
SHIER

Her cane rested comfortably against the exam table, the joyful print of her button-down intensifying her sunken chest and pallor. Her son had passed away just a few months before her hospitalization for acute renal failure, and as I've intuited over my own journey of grief, sorrow left unprocessed makes its home in the kidneys.

I fidgeted with my ID badge. I felt partially responsible for her current state of weakness and depression. She desperately wanted to avoid the ER, having recently watched her son die in one, and I desperately wanted to be her old-timey country doctor who could fix anything. Against my better judgment, I coordinated her CT scan for the next morning and sent her home. She no showed for her appointment. I called her but no answer. Was she ok?

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**FOUNDATIONAL TO ANY POLICY, WHETHER IT BE PERSONAL OR GLOBAL, SHOULD BE A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF OUR HUMAN MULTIDIMENSIONALITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS; THAT IS, TRUE SAFETY IS ONLY NURTURED WHEN HOLDING WITH EXQUISITE TENDERNESS BOTH OUR INNER AND OUTER WORLDS**

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Three days later, I received notification that she had been hospitalized. I agonized over every detail of her admission note, which mentioned me, her primary care physician, several times. Surely, the hospital staff must think I'm an idiot. Surely my patient will see me at fault, and word of my incompetence as a physician will spread. One thing is for sure—I am the best at beating myself up.

I am the mother of an eleven-month-old and a three-year-old. I am a wife. I am a daughter. And fourteen months ago, my eighty-one-year-old father disappeared without a trace and is still missing. Despite the support I receive from my family, friends, and community, I remain with the seemingly innate habit of seeing myself as inadequate and going to war with myself about what it means to be a "good" mother,

wife, daughter, sister, and doctor. In the context of the broader global definition of these roles, what do I want to pass along to my children and my patients? Surely, it is that they know their inherent perfection, worth, and right to safety.

I greet my patient with a hello, how are you, knowing full well she's been better.

I say to her, "I have read your hospital notes, and of course, I have questions, but in your own words, please tell me as much or as little as you would like about what happened." I brace myself for the blame I've imagined she's felt toward me this whole time.

Instead, she says, “I miss my son. There must have been something I could have done for him, and it’s all my fault.”

I hand her the box of tissues, which has become more critical than gauze in my practice, and we go down to the depths of her suffering together.

She tells me about her son’s depression. She tells me she should have recognized it and done something sooner. She tells me she should have loved him more. I reassured her that she did everything right and she did everything she could.

In my own life, I have grappled with this self-blame. I should have recognized my father’s depression about his stroke and aphasia. I should have taken him on more drives to the mountains. I should have searched for him harder. I should have been a better doctor and daughter.

I should have—the violent incantation of self-blame and punishment that is deeply ingrained in the human psyche due to its tendency to favor blame over anguish, motivating us to never make such a “mistake” again; otherwise, we may compromise our safety by becoming unlovable to others.

From birth, we are wired to seek a sense of safety, and it is a lack of general safety that necessarily contributes to a lifetime of self-blame, self-punishment, and avoidance of the darker aspects of our experience that we will inevitably be called to confront. What’s more terrifying is that in the rare moments we have allowed ourselves to go to the depths of a painful or ecstatic experience, we open ourselves up to the emotions of the collective human experience, and we can no longer deny our oneness. Resisting this call to cultivate a space of tenderness for ourselves and others in these moments drives us deeper into separation from one another. Uncompromising beliefs (on any end of a spectrum) solidify to obliterate any chance for seeds of inclusivity, growth, and change to take root.

My work often calls me to the depths of human experience, and in these moments (and any moment, really), it is my job to create a safe space for exploration. Some days this is challenging, especially if the exploration necessitates conversation about divisive topics that we may never agree upon as a society. Still, most days, there is a reward, as a deeply felt sense of safety creates a foundation for shared decision-making on that which we have in common: that deep love for our families, vocation, etc., which ultimately shapes our strong beliefs. Ironically, curiosity and the exploration of a variety of experiences, particularly the tender moments, tend to make any discomfort we experience trying to avoid them fade, which opens a channel for self-acceptance in its purest form.

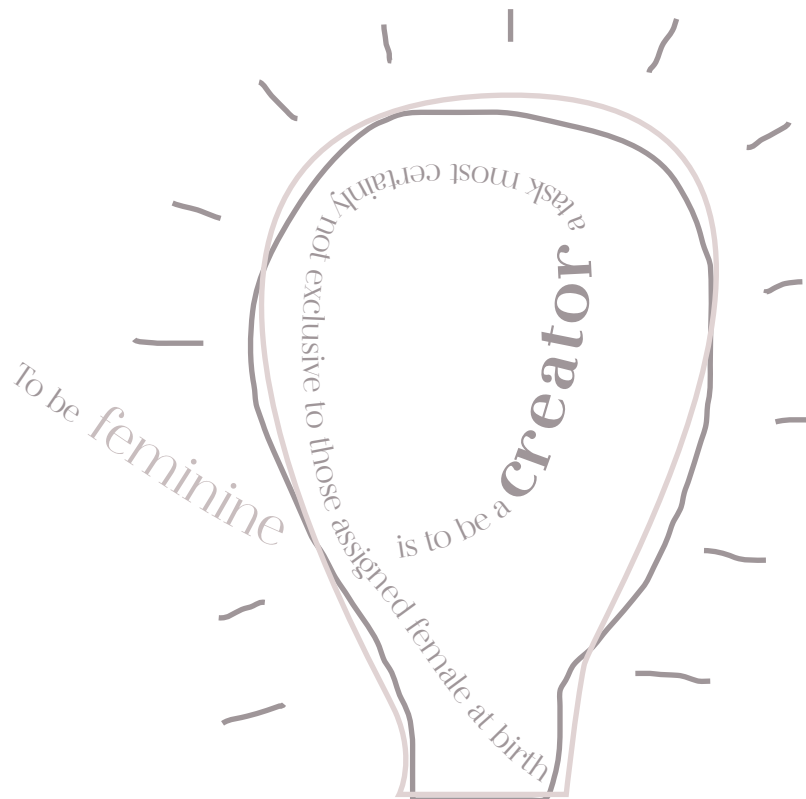
Of course, my work is still to check vital signs and refill medications, but maybe my job, and everyone’s job, is to bring light into those darker parts of ourselves when we can. At some point, life will undoubtedly drag us to the underworld and lay us bare. And what happens when solving problems with violence (even in subtler forms such as habitual self-blame or burying our personal grief) fails us on an individual and global scale, as it does now? The only place left to go is within.

To be feminine is to be a creator, a task most certainly not exclusive to those assigned female at birth. To embody wholly this “feminine” aspect of our humanness is to create from a mental and physical space that is compassionate, loving, accepting, and, above all, safe. Foundational to any policy, whether it be personal or global, should be a clear recognition of our human multidimensionality, intersectionality, and interconnectedness; that is, true safety is only nurtured when holding with exquisite tenderness both our inner and outer worlds, recognizing that multiple aspects of our identity come together to create our unique experiences of oppression and that how I treat you is ultimately how I treat myself. In this recognition, safety finds its home, and our personal grief is experienced as profoundly universal. As Thich Nhat Hanh writes, “Understanding is love’s other name.”

Safety is only ever temporarily generated by militarization, an approach that almost certainly guarantees self-annihilation. Any action that is to result in meaningful and lasting peace must also be a form of “non-violent non-cooperation” (as coined by Gandhi) with the power structures that uphold endless war.

For me, this sort of gentle refusal comes as frequent self-reminders to tenderly hold my own grief, which opens my heart naturally to the suffering of others. I also drink lots of water to protect my kidneys and feel hopeful that my actions have some rippling effect. Of vital importance is that my grief has been reciprocally held by my community, which is only possible when these community members accept themselves for who they are; unconditional love for all humanity is both the destination and the path.

In order to change the world outside ourselves, we must first recognize the war within and, with fierce gentleness, usher out the old patterns of internalized violence, domination, and force, opening the doors for new ways of being.



# FRAMING AN AFRO-FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Written by

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OLAJIDE

What does feminist foreign policy mean in an African context? I would like to call it an Afro-feminist foreign policy. An Afro-feminist foreign policy is one that recognizes the peculiarity of women's lives in Africa and adopts strategies responsive to this situation, thereby amplifying women's voices. An Afro-feminist foreign policy recognizes that feminist activism and voice within the formal state apparatus is limited, therefore creating the need to pursue an Afro-feminist foreign policy through a two-pronged strategy of non-state feminist activism on the global stage and male ally-ship within state foreign policy institutions.

African feminism—that is, what constitutes feminist ideals and actions that are peculiar to the indigenous African context—might evade a uniform meaning. This is clearly because an essentialist notion of Africa is inaccurate and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the variants of womanism, stiwanism, motherism, and nego-feminism<sup>1</sup> have attempted to make sense of what feminism should look like and do for African women and in African societies. While it is imperative to acknowledge these contributions, I also emphasize the anti-essentialist notion of African feminism. African feminism is not one thing at the expense of something else; it is indeed, broadly speaking, resistance to the subjugation, exclusion, and silencing of women in whatever forms those may take.

African feminism has evolved through history, in terms of pre-colonial and colonial pasts, nationalist struggles, war, and the adaptation of nation-states to democracy. In contemporary times, it can operationalize a decolonial ideology to challenge white feminists to be proactive in dismantling systems of discrimination and oppression in multicultural workspaces that continue to expand due to industrialization and migration. It has also remained grounded in reiterating how the current state of women's representation in political and national leadership is a reflection of the erasure and exclusion of women following their tangible contributions to nationalist movements and peacebuilding. Rightfully so because, to a large extent, women are still being used as a gateway to political power and, worse still, as auxiliaries to men's positions. This has made the advocacy for women's political representation a consistent and never-ending fight.

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1. Womanism developed to address the inequality black women suffered based on the peculiarity of race and the social structure of black communities. Debates around womanism are varied, both within Africa and in the Diaspora. Stiwanism stands for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa, and it was propounded by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. Ogundipe-Leslie emphasizes the importance of partnership between the sexes and not an exclusionary approach to gender equality. Motherism, a feminism coined by Catherine Acholonu, centers the motherly role of African women and is less enthusiastic about African women detaching themselves from this divine assignment. Indeed, Acholonu views Africa's position in the international system from this lens—as the Mother Continent of Humanity. Understood as the feminism of negotiation and no-ego feminism, nego-feminism, as proposed by Obioma Nnaemeka, provides an end to the gender war between men and women and finding a middle ground where everyone wins. This middle ground is, however, based on existing social realities, even if characterized by inequality.

Contemporary African feminism is also adaptive to current realities of the digital age. The digitization of activism and use of technology to amplify feminist causes and the voices of women has been one of the discoveries of the dynamic nature of African feminism. This singular factor has enormously increased transnational and sub-regional solidarity within the feminist movement in Africa. Through digital media, injustices in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria were widely publicized through hash tags like #justiceforsharon, #menaretrash, and #femaleinnigeria.

Much like the strands of African feminism, the foreign policy of African states has been influenced by key realities. Post-colonialism, the birth pangs of independence which exposed divisions propagated by colonial governments, and the establishment of substantive sovereignty during and after the Cold War are a few. Though these circumstances are common to many African states, the foreign policy strategies that have been pursued are not indicative of a singular or fixed prototype of foreign policy. The conduct of states is however reflective of their continued emergence as agentic entities committed to solidifying their presence in global relations. A crucial part of transforming African states into polities with the agency to engage with other players in the international system is building strong institutions and domestic mechanisms that prioritize the representation and voices of women.

Though women's representation and voices have been systemically constrained, feminist activism on the African continent has consistently responded to national, regional, and sub-regional challenges: Scholar-activists have emerged in northern Africa, protests and uprisings in western Africa, and resistance to apartheid in South Africa. The feminist movement has consistently contributed to political, economic, and social development on the continent, even if women end up becoming sidelined within the structures of the nation-state, including in foreign policy organs.

In light of this conspicuous exclusion from institutions of the state directly or indirectly responsible for foreign policy formulation and practice, what avenues exist for an Afro-feminist foreign policy?

I submit that an Afro-feminist foreign policy can be pursued without boundaries or without the use of state organs and apparatus in the strict sense. This manner of foreign policy practice is fostered by digital technology and enabled by transnational solidarity. A recent example can be seen in the activities of the Feminist Coalition in Nigeria.

The Feminist Coalition (FEMCO) is an example of this Afro-feminist foreign policy in practice. It used digitization to garner support during the protest against police brutality in Nigeria by swinging swiftly into action through providing emergency services to injured protesters and facilitating the release of detained protesters through legal services. The coalition navigated financial institutions' bottlenecks by accepting donations in digital currency. The intensity of the digital presence of FEMCO attracted global attention and elicited widespread displeasure towards the happenings in the country. By supporting numerous peaceful demonstrations, which were publicized through social media, it amplified the voice of the common women, men, and youth, especially their demand for the security of their lives and better living conditions. FEMCO did not use force or violent material or immaterial weapons but instead built solidarity, perhaps the strongest

weapon against an oppressive authority. Even though FEMCO was able to interact with the global community to project an image of a society that values human and women's rights, this image was nevertheless negated by the actions of the government itself, which used political power to subvert the influence and intervention of the collective.

FEMCO operated in the manner that is suggested for feminist foreign policy strategy by implementing responses and interventionist activities through women as well as men. FEMCO's efficiency was propelled by the strategic positioning of professionals in the health services sector; legal practitioners; food vendors; media professionals and journalists; technology and innovation industry experts; and even blood donors. The efforts of FEMCO reveal that the practice of feminist foreign policy exists outside the confines of state institutions and apparatus, enabling it to communicate the position of the people and the desired areas of partnership needed to sustain transformative change.<sup>2</sup>

If an Afro-feminist foreign policy can therefore be practiced to an extent without state institutions, should we discard the traditional forms of foreign policy practice? Absolutely not, because state institutions still have legitimacy even if women are largely excluded and underrepresented. What needs to be done in order to respect the legitimate authority of state-controlled organs, however, is for Africa to focus on the progressive realization of an Afro-feminist foreign policy. This shall be achieved by working towards the increased representation of women as well as the amplification of their voices across every sector of the polity but especially in decision-making capacities in key organs of states' foreign relations. This ensures actively pursuing a feminist agenda even as the inclusion of women is progressively realized. Representation in politics, economics, trade, export, manufacturing, agriculture, information and communication technology, health, research and development, construction, core diplomacy, and many more sectors and subsectors is critical for the initiation and sustenance of an Afro-feminist foreign policy.

The visibility of women and the amplification of women's inclusion and voice from the grassroots to the more complex spaces of governance lay the foundation for a strong Afro-feminist foreign policy; but so does the presence of a vibrant and effective Afro-feminist ally-ship with men working in foreign ministries. Ally-ship is important for the progressive realization of an Afro-feminist foreign policy because it is in itself a feminist agenda. In reality, women are still not adequately represented in conventional foreign policy practice or in state subsectors in African nation-states, and this situation is not conducive to the development of an Afro-feminist foreign policy agenda. Ally-ship therefore calls on men to leverage their position, access, and voice to intensify the advocacy for women's representation and ensure that the prioritization of women's issues is consistently reiterated. Ally-ship can entail hiring women as technical specialists in foreign policy formulation or ensuring that every committee set up within the organs of the state has an equal representation of women including in leadership. It can also mean appointing women as ambassadors and accelerating women's progression to leadership positions in state organs of foreign policy practice. Deploying conscientization, male allies will propagate the participation of women as equal players in foreign relations and nation-building as well as governance and, by so doing, support the pursuit of an Afro-feminist foreign policy agenda.<sup>3</sup>

2. I am inclined to use the word "partnership" instead of "diplomatic relations" because entities such as these are non-state actors, and therefore they cannot engage in diplomatic relations.

3. Other strategies for increased representation of women are still valid and can be combined with conscientization.

By all means, the institution of an Afro-feminist foreign policy practiced without the state apparatus can co-exist with that of an ally-supported traditional practice. The most important component of the two strategies is the voice of African women and the transformative power that this voice holds for them and for Africa.

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Support and work with civil society

Prioritize human security

Reduce barriers to the representation and participation of women and other marginalized actors





# HOW TO BETTER DEFINE A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Written by

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Invoking the word “feminist” can be a profound commitment, especially when it relates to international peace and security. Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is the practice that defines a state’s interactions with other states, entities, and non-state actors prioritizing peace and gender equality. It seeks to uphold, promote, and preserve the human rights of all, including women. How far states, especially powerful ones, have embraced women’s rights and promoted an FFP in practice is questionable. Several states, like Sweden (the first to announce a FFP),<sup>1</sup> Canada,<sup>2</sup> Germany,<sup>3</sup> France, Spain,<sup>4</sup> Luxembourg, and Mexico,<sup>5</sup> have made formal announcements to integrate FFP objectives within the broader transformative and rights-based approaches to their national foreign policy. But the shifting diplomatic and political landscapes that often dictate foreign policy have put these feminist doctrines to the test.

In 2022, eight years after Sweden announced its FFP, a newly elected right-wing government decided to abandon the pioneering policy and justified its move with the words, “... because labels on things have a tendency to cover up content.”<sup>6</sup> Ordinarily, the problem with assigning labels to institutional mandates lies in the fear that decisions might favor some groups more than others—in this case, that women would gain an unfair advantage. However, no matter the political climate, enforcement of women’s rights is a concrete socio-legal necessity and therefore too big to exclude in policymaking decisions.

The Swedish example raises an important question about the implications of the word “feminist.” Often, there’s a negative implication attached to the word “feminist” due to the multiple definitions ascribed to it and the lack of awareness among societies about what the concept really stands for. But in the end, a policy is more likely to be successful when it is approached and executed in the right way—and that means beginning with a clear description. Although the creation and adoption of feminist policies by prominent countries is an important step towards the global reimagining of foreign policy,

1. Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019–2022, including Direction and Measures for 2020* (Stockholm: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.readkong.com/page/the-swedish-foreign-service-action-plan-for-feminist-foreign-9772440>.

2. Global Affairs Canada, *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2017), [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf?\\_ga=2.123895114.1311471134.1668527132-110228269.1668184613](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf?_ga=2.123895114.1311471134.1668527132-110228269.1668184613).

3. “Inclusion Rather than Exclusion: What Is Feminist Foreign Policy?” Federal Foreign Office of Germany, May 3, 2022, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/themen/feministische-aussenpolitik/2525304>.

4. “Feminist Foreign Policy,” Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, accessed November 15, 2022, <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/PoliticaExterior/Paginas/PoliticaExteriorFeminista.aspx>.

5. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, “Mexico Adopts Feminist Foreign Policy,” Gobierno de México, January 9, 2020, <http://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-adopts-feminist-foreign-policy?idiom=en>.

6. Merlyn Thomas, “Sweden Ditches ‘Feminist Foreign Policy,’” BBC News, October 19, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63311743>.

there is a fundamental disconnect between what FFP promises and how those promises are delivered in the domestic and global performance of countries. Perhaps, part of this disconnect is due to the existing limitations in the definition of FFP. If the policy is not expounded properly to fit with the realities of domestic and international governance, then it will lack widespread adoption in the future.

One way to define FFP better is to understand what feminism means and what it is intended to achieve. Feminist theory in international relations questions the binary views of the world. Prominent feminist scholars like Jacqui True, Chris Cuomo, and Cynthia Cockburn have said that violence works in a continuum, and there is no clear boundary that distinguishes war from peace.<sup>7</sup> This idea is increasingly relevant in a world where wars are advertised as strategic military operations and political hostilities ensue for decades without resolution. In these instances, FFP decision-making methods are quite helpful. They enable a realist approach to conflict resolution by centering the interests of those most affected by conflict.

What is “feminist” about a foreign policy? Does it indicate a fundamental shift in thinking about how issues like diplomacy, defense, foreign assistance, trade, or climate change are being approached? And, if it does, how far does it go in determining the course of policies in these fields? Do we intend a feminist policy to integrate itself at every step of the general policy design and implementation? Or does a feminist foreign policy still mainly consist of “agenda setting”?

How does one define FFP better and combat the deficiencies in the present approaches? Margot Wallström, the former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was the first person to define feminist foreign policy. When she first proposed it, she feared that the definition might be interpreted negatively in some places.<sup>8</sup> However, she wanted it to be a practical policy, too.<sup>9</sup> She used three paradigms to delineate the policy: that women should have the same rights, the same representation, and the same resources as men. These three paradigms emerged as the crucial standards of identification, quantification, and implementation of a feminist foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> However, in the interest of changing the global political climate and the norms of governance, Wallström’s definition requires further qualification. Feminist foreign policy should begin at home, meaning that states need to rethink their strategies and foreign policies in a way that doesn’t inherently create gendered inequalities, particularly within their own domestic framework and then subsequently abroad.

A more fitting definition of FFP can be derived from its practice and how it deviates from current foreign policy norms. I offer three ways of approaching a feminist foreign policy: prioritize human security, reduce barriers to the representation and participation

7. Daniela Philipson Garcia and Ana Velasco, “Feminist Foreign Policy: A Bridge Between the Global and Local,” *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.yalejournal.org/publications/feminist-foreign-policy-a-bridge-between-the-global-and-local>.

8. James Rupert, “Sweden’s Foreign Minister Explains Feminist Foreign Policy,” United States Institute of Peace, February 9, 2015, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/02/swedens-foreign-minister-explains-feminist-foreign-policy>.

9. Jill Stoddard and Eimer Curtin, “Spreading Feminist Foreign Policy: Interview with Margot Wallström,” October 20, 2022, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/spreading-feminist-foreign-policy-interview-with-margot-wallstrom/>.

10. Ibid.

of women, and work more effectively with civil society. Together, these constitute a new approach to FFP that can guide a country's international relations. For the purposes of this essay, I focus on North Korea as a case study to examine how the rest of the world can include feminist approaches in their foreign policy towards North Korea. Considering the country's reprobation in the international community for so long, North Korea presents a good case for how feminism could be incorporated in traditional foreign policies to deescalate tensions between North Korea and the world at large.

**Strategy 1 - Prioritize human security.** The maintenance of human security refers to identifying and understanding the widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of people.<sup>11</sup> It requires a fundamental reorientation from traditional military and security concerns towards issues like migration, rehabilitation, humanitarian relief, environmental effects of weapons proliferation, and so on. Broadening the scope of security issues will allow an improved discussion on those more traditional topics at international fora and also facilitate the engagement of the North Korean leadership (and its allies) in peace negotiations. Linking “low politics” to “high politics” presents opportunities for peacebuilding and movement towards normalized relations.<sup>12</sup> Bringing issues related to gender and child welfare gives Western negotiators a better chance to achieve North Korea's participation and compliance on peace deals. It helps rehabilitate the country's international reputation on the issue of civil rights preservation. Any discussion on the welfare of North Korean citizens should include the welfare of its female population, considering the widespread discrimination and gender inequalities that continue to plague North Korean society.<sup>13</sup>

**Strategy 2 - Reduce barriers to the representation and participation of women and other marginalized actors in foreign policy towards North Korea.** Insisting that women are at the negotiation table ensures that security concerns are viewed more holistically. It also ensures that policymakers are aware of how foreign policies towards North Korea affect the North Korean population at large. Having more female representatives on the platform will balance the optics of gender balance in foreign policy, at the very least. It may also motivate the North Korean side to enlist female participation in the policy process from their side. The balance of optics may be ignored by North Korean politicians, but it will inform the North Korean public better about international political realities, thereby facilitating gender reform from within the country. Including more female decision-makers also supports the possibility of more gender-inclusive decisions being made, which would strengthen the mechanisms of policy implementation in the country—both domestically and internationally.

**Strategy 3 - Support and work with civil society.** Due to repressive state policies, North Koreans are faced with serious constraints in freely organizing civil movements or non-governmental organizations. Despite that, there has been some organizational mobility in the economic sphere. Although information flows very restrictively within the

11. “What Is Human Security,” United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, accessed February 8, 2023, <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/what-is-human-security/>.

12. *Peace Science Digest*, “Environmental Cooperation as Peacebuilding Between North and South Korea,” *Peace Science Digest*, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://warpreventioninitiative.org/peace-science-digest/environmental-cooperation-as-peacebuilding-between-north-and-south-korea/>.

13. LinaYoon, “UN Highlights Abuses Against Women and Girls in North Korea,” Human Rights Watch, March 13, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/13/un-highlights-abuses-against-women-and-girls-north-korea>.

country, market actors have managed to keep an ambivalent relationship with the North Korean state.<sup>14</sup> The fruits of marketization are precious for the North Korean economy, which is hanging by a thread in light of heavy global sanctions.<sup>15</sup> The existence of market forces in a dictatorial regime is proof of the resilience of certain economic actors who have been instrumental in controlling and contributing to the movement of people and goods. Economic actors in North Korea could offer an entry point for the international community to engage with and indirectly assist in supporting other civil society actors in the country.<sup>16</sup> In the process of doing so, the international community should aim to include as many marginalized voices as possible from North Korea so that many diverging interests of the population are represented, including women.

Implementing a feminist foreign policy essentially involves building a bridge between the global and local political realities in such a way that power imbalances can be diminished. This begins with the identification of global and local goals and integrating them into a common workable framework. However, the method in which these goals are identified and classified are important as well. The method must be democratic and inclusive so that the ultimate objective of the process is the preservation of international security.

The North Korean case study highlights important areas where a feminist perspective can inform domestic and foreign policy to develop negotiations in one of the most precarious conflicts in geopolitics. At the root of feminism lie the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and community welfare. Therefore, a feminist foreign policy should not just focus on increasing women's representation in foreign services or the diplomatic corps. Rather, it must coalesce with broader foreign policy objectives to fine-tune both military and political strategies. Foreign policies must be developed by incorporating feminist interests at the core of international partnerships, by helping institutional identities evolve through increased female membership, and by ensuring that future policies are developed with the precondition of gender welfare and integrity.

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14. United States Institute of Peace, "The Building Blocks of Civil Society in North Korea," online panel, United States Institute of Peace, February 23, 2021, video, 1:18:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0YbX1WD9mw>.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Supra* 14.

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# RIGHT TO CHOICE AND THE HIJAB:

## CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL LEGAL REFORM

Written by

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On September 16, 2022, Iran woke up to massive protests following the death of a 22-year-old woman by the name Mahsa Amini. She died three days after her arrest by the morality police of Iran.<sup>1</sup> Amini and a few other women were arrested for wearing the hijab inappropriately, which, according to the state of Iran, is a severely punishable offense. Ever since the imposition of the hijab in 2018, Iranians have protested against it. This time, the protests have been intense and, as of December 6, 2022, 448 people had been killed by Iranian security forces.<sup>2</sup>

On December 31, 2021, six Muslim girls were barred from entering their classrooms for wearing the hijab in the South Indian state of Karnataka. In protest, the girls sat outside their classrooms and refused to enter without wearing the hijab. The right-wing political environment in Karnataka added fuel to the fire, spreading similar confrontations to other parts of the state. Meanwhile, the resistance of Muslim girls to uphold their choice also strengthened. Right-wing groups targeted the girls who were protesting. They were subjected to ostracism by neighbours, friends, and school teachers; their addresses and phone numbers were leaked. The situation reached such a level that death threats were issued against the girls who wanted to wear the hijab.<sup>3</sup>

“Right to choice” manifests differently in these scenarios. In the case of Iran, women chose to break free from the shackles of religious traditions. In the case of India, women chose to assert their religious identity. The stories are different in their underlying cause and context yet are similar in terms of the control exerted over the lives of women. Discriminatory policies on the hijab result in the infringement of the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, human dignity, and freedom of religion. In India, the restrictions also curtailed the right to education for the young girls who were on the verge of completing graduate education and carried hopes of supporting their lower- to middle-income families through employment. In this case, the girls have faced double deprivation due not only to their gender but also to their religion.

The rights of women are always subject to the prevailing politico-religious environment of any country. In both the contexts discussed here, women are subject to structural and direct violence perpetrated by the state. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the violence is justified by citing religious texts or Shariya laws.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, current right-wing politics in

1. BBC News, “Iran Protests: BBC Identifies Many More People Killed in Demonstrations after Mahsa Amini’s Death,” *BBC*, December 6, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63836921>.

2. Patrick Wintour, “Iran’s Security Forces Reportedly Open Fire as Thousands Mourn Mahsa Amini,” *The Guardian*, October 26, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/26/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-grave-crackdown-kurdish-death>.

3. People’s Union of Civil Liberties Karnataka, “Impact of Hijab Ban in Karnataka’s Educational Institutions: An Interim Study Report,” People’s Union for Civil Liberties Karnataka, September 2022, <https://www.pucl.org/sites/default/files/reports/PUCL%20Report%20on%20Hijab%20Ban.pdf>.

4. Human Rights Watch, “The Iranian Legal Framework and International Law,” accessed November 14,

democratic India continues to perpetuate violence against minority women in the name of secularism.<sup>5</sup> The states of Iran and India have actively suppressed women's right to choice and freedom of dissent.

When states fail at their duty to protect women's rights, what is the alternative? The current international law and foreign policy efforts pertaining to women's rights are inadequate in scope and action. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948) and the International Covenants on Human Rights (adopted in 1966) addressed protection and promotion of women's human rights, they failed to address discrimination and violence against women (VAW) in a comprehensive manner. This gap made way for the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, a watershed law in defining rights and freedom for women that declared gender discrimination and VAW as violations of human rights.<sup>6</sup> However, it currently falls short in addressing the emerging issues of gender discrimination because it lacks a comprehensive definition of violence. In particular, it fails to recognize structural violence, such as violations of the right to choice mentioned above, and strategies to deal with it.

Further, Iran is not a signatory to CEDAW. And while India ratified the treaty, the state machinery has not addressed the hijab issue as a form of VAW. This clearly shows that CEDAW has little impact on how states deal with issues of gender especially at a local level. This domestic-level indifference can be addressed through international efforts.

Regardless of the nature of national political contexts, human rights is a language that cuts across borders. At its core, a feminist foreign policy (FFP) is about fulfilling human rights and ensuring human dignity through strategic action and policy reform. FFP is an alternative approach to achieve gender equality. Though India and Iran have ratified the UNSC's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security during the early 2000s, neither of the states have formulated and presented National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in their respective parliaments. By contrast, states like Sweden, Canada, France, Chile, and so on that have adopted FFP have Nation Action Plans that are being implemented.<sup>7</sup> As this example illustrates, at times when economic and national security issues dominate bilateral or multinational talks, adopting a FFP is essential to ensure a gender perspective in domestic and external policies.

In the case of the contrasting contexts in Iran and India, FFP could elicit international consensus on a unified political framework to formulate gender-sensitive policies including women's right to choice, which could then be applied elsewhere. Apart from providing this framework, the adoption of a FFP on the part of these two specific states would help in achieving better coordination among governments in policy formulation and mutual exchange of strategies to address the issues that are as complex as the right to choice. In volatile political environments, it is essential to learn from one other's mis-

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2022, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/iran/Iran99o-03.htm>.

5. The nature of secularism in India is such that it establishes neutrality among all religions, not the prohibition of religion. Hence, even under the argument of secularism, banning the hijab is unlawful. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* (Chennai, India: MacMillan, 2006), <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780312426026/theargumentativeindian>.

6. UN Women, "Short History of CEDAW Convention," accessed March, 3, 2023, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm>.

7. *Feminist Foreign Policies: An Introduction*, UN Women, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/brief-feminist-foreign-policies>.

takes in order to move in the direction of gender equality. Another critically important characteristic of FFP is that, once it is adopted by a nation in an international forum, it makes the actions of the government more visible, which in turn enhances accountability and transparency.<sup>8</sup>

The states or international institutions adopting a FFP would help to usher in new women's rights treaties—such as the campaign to adopt the Every Woman Treaty (EWT),<sup>9</sup> which incorporates a FFP framework. Building on CEDAW, the EWT is calling for a stand-alone global treaty that postulates a comprehensive framework called the “whole hand approach”<sup>10</sup> to deal with VAW. The five-point framework calls, firstly, for reforming age-old legal systems like those based on religious tenets. Secondly, it asks for investment in training multiple stakeholders and respondents, and thirdly, in implementing prevention education campaigns. Fourthly, by holding states accountable for violence, it advocates for development of support systems and services for survivors of violence. Finally, the treaty focuses on the need to increase funding to prevent violence against women. The treaty also proposes a continuous process of research to stay in pace with the changing world and its ever-evolving problems.

What happened in India and Iran with respect to the hijab is an issue of severe discrimination against women. But these states have not been held accountable under CEDAW. One of the merits of EWT is that, although, like CEDAW, it calls for a treaty that is legally binding, it also encompasses a holistic framework that allows for effective monitoring and accountability while acknowledging contextual differences. Also, this treaty commits itself to supporting frontline activists, like the protestors in Iran, in their fight against the injustice. When states fail in this regard, which happens to be the case with India and Iran, the treaty would act as a redressal system for citizens to appeal to the international system of justice, along with pressurising member states to act on the concerned issue. Once these values and mechanisms are successfully put into action, one can hope to see the women of Iran enjoying a day out without worrying about their hijabs and the Muslim women in India walking freely into classrooms without having their hijabs stripped off them.

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# THE CASE FOR A FEMINIST DOMESTIC POLICY FOR MEXICO

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The foreign policy of nations has typically been linked to a statist and military strategic vision, which ignores the perspective of traditionally marginalized groups. In response, feminist foreign policy (FFP) seeks to move away from this traditional thinking and “offers an alternative and intersectional rethinking of security from the point of view of the most vulnerable. It is a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate the experiences and agency of women and marginalized groups to examine the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonization, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, Mexico announced the adoption of its FFP, highlighting that, by being “the first country in Latin America to adopt a feminist foreign policy on a par with countries such as France, Canada, Norway and Sweden, [Mexico reaffirmed] the importance of gender equality for the development of just, peaceful and happy societies.”<sup>2</sup> This decision could be interpreted as a realization and understanding on the part of the Mexican government of the need for an intersectional approach to decision-making and the design of public policies. However, the response to one of the most acute problems afflicting the country—violence—continues to be the militarization of public security. In 2022, Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, “gave the Army operational, financial and administrative control of the National Guard, which used to answer to the civilian-led security ministry.”<sup>3</sup> Putting aside the fact that military personnel are not trained with a civilian lens (much less a gendered lens) and are not typically intended to be in charge of civilian safety, the long and well-documented history of abuses, torture, and forced disappearances committed by the Mexican Army<sup>4</sup> should be reason enough not to put them in charge of civilian safety.

These two clearly contradictory approaches—a feminist foreign policy and the militarization of public security—highlight the government’s lack of a cohesive policy to mitigate violence. Mexico should be lauded for adopting a feminist foreign policy, but it should then follow its own example by adopting a feminist domestic policy (FDP) to address violence and gender inequities in Mexican politics and society.

1. Centre for a Feminist Foreign Policy, “Feminist Foreign Policy,” accessed April 12, 2023, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org>.

2. Gobierno de México, “México Anuncia la Adopción de su Política Exterior Feminista,” January 9, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-anuncia-la-adopcion-de-su-politica-exterior-feminista?state-published>.

3. Diego Ore, “Mexico Gives Army Control of National Guard, Sparks Clash with U.N.,” Reuters, September 9, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-congress-backs-army-taking-control-national-guard-2022-09-09/>.

4. Marcos González Díaz, “Es la Militarización de México”: Por Qué Causa Polémica que la Guardia Nacional Pase a Depender de la Secretaría de Defensa,” BBC World News, September 9, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-62854552>.

The issue of violence against women occupies a particularly disturbing place in the country, as one of its most acute and widespread problems. Amnesty International estimates that more than 34,000 homicides of women occurred between 1985 and 2009.<sup>5</sup> And these homicides, as the most extreme type of violence, represent just one example of crimes against women in Mexico. Amnesty International further reports that the government fails to protect women from different types of crimes and does not provide justice for victims.<sup>6</sup>

Violence is yet another manifestation of gender inequality, as women experience violence in a completely different way than men. Although “men accounted for the vast majority of homicide victims in Mexico (in 2021), at nearly 89 per cent of the total... female deaths [show] a strong association with intimate partner violence. According to official statistics, nearly one in five female homicides occur in the home, compared to one in thirteen for male homicides.”<sup>7</sup> This means that, unlike men, women have to be more careful both outside and inside their homes.

Additionally, female victims and survivors are viewed and treated differently in the official narrative and in the media. Judging and scrutinizing every aspect of women’s lives even as they are the victims is a common occurrence. If a woman is subject to a violent attack, she is often blamed whereas that rarely happens with men. And while it is true that victim-blaming is not exclusive to Mexico, of the countries that have adopted a FFP and claim to be committed to gender parity, Mexico is the only one where an average of 10 women a day are killed and thousands more are missing.<sup>8</sup>

The causes of violence against women are not monolithic or uniform. This type of violence is not necessarily the direct consequence of organized crime or drug trafficking; rather, it is the result of a combination of factors, such as poverty, gender inequalities, the glorification of violence, the invisibility of the victims, and so on. It also has ripple effects on different layers of our communities. The cost of violence in general, and violence against women in particular, is observed not only in the affected person but also in the rest of society and the country at large.<sup>9</sup> It can be measured in economic, social, political, and public health terms. Children of women who suffer physical and sexual abuse by an intimate partner are six times more likely to die before the age of five than other children, and those who survive have a higher probability of replicated patterns of violence in adulthood.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the huge cost associated with violence against women can be measured not only in terms of money directly spent on services like medical

5. Yu Liu and Thomas M Fullerton Jr., “Evidence from Mexico on Social Status and Violence against Women,” *Applied Economics* 47 (2015): 4260–4273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2015.1026588>.  
6. Ibid.

7. Olivia Adams, “Understanding the Dynamics of Femicide in Mexico,” Vision of Humanity, accessed April 12, 2023. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/understanding-the-dynamics-of-femicide-of-mexico/>.

8. Laura Gottesdiener, “Family Buries Mexican Teenager Who Has Reignited Anger over Gender Violence,” *Reuters*, April 24, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/family-buries-mexican-teenager-who-has-reignited-anger-over-gender-violence-2022-04-24/>.

9. UNAM, “The Cost of Violence Against Women in Mexico,” University Program for Gender Studies at National Autonomous University of Mexico, Ministry of the Interior, and National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women, July 2016. [https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/el\\_costo\\_de\\_la\\_violencia\\_contra\\_las\\_mujeres\\_en\\_mexico.pdf](https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/el_costo_de_la_violencia_contra_las_mujeres_en_mexico.pdf).

10. Laura Erika González Pizana, “Las Masculinidades y la Violencia de Género,” *Animal Político*, June 16, 2021. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/analisis/invitades/las-masculinidades-y-la-violencia-de-genero>.

attention, legal assistance, and so on, but also in the indirect costs of missing work or school, which impacts their and their families' ability to earn an income.

Studies estimate the cost of violence against women to be billions of dollars and to represent around 2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Latin American countries.<sup>11</sup> To address this problem, there must be an approach that takes into account both the various factors that intertwine to create it and the multilayered ways in which it impacts our society and our economy.

To be successful, such an approach should apply an intersectional and transversal vision of gender, because understanding the intersection between gender and other factors such as access to education, economic mobility, and family roles, is an essential part to the solution. A feminist domestic policy would understand the need to address the phenomenon of violence against women from different angles, such as prevention, attention, and sanction.

## Proposals with a FDP vision

### 1. Prevention

1.1 Promote a different vision of masculinity. In Mexico, gender roles are defined by patriarchy that glorifies violence and normalizes certain assumptions about women and men: that women are weak, emotional, and unable to think objectively beyond their own subjective points of view and that men are strong, rational, and objective.<sup>12</sup> If we re-think masculinity and learn that there are different ways of expressing it, the behaviors we understand as “normal” can be questioned and non-oppressive relationships can be achieved.

1.2 Promote new models of femininity. If women are present in typically “masculine” spheres (at work, in schools, in sports, in public life, etc.), their presence becomes normal and microaggressions and violence decrease.

### 2. Attention

2.1 Make visible the different types of victims of violence, as many types of victims are routinely ignored. Within this category are women with disabilities,<sup>13</sup> women in health institutions, members of the LGBTQ+ community, transgender women, and indigenous women. These people are stigmatized, rejected, and ignored, which means that there are not even reliable figures that indicate the rate of violence they suffer.

2.2 Make visible different types of violence. Violence against women is not limited to physical or even emotional violence. There is also sexual, economic, and patrimonial vi-

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11. UNAM.

12. González Pizaña.

13. Carlos Ríos Espinosa, “High Toll of Violence for Women with Disabilities New Survey Reveals,” Human Rights Watch, September 28, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/28/high-toll-violence-women-disabilities-new-survey-reveals>.

olence. Having a full understanding of different types of violence allows us to design sustainable solutions.

### 3. Sanction

3.1 Adopt a judicial system with a gender perspective. There is a need for an inclusive and comprehensive legal process. It is essential that those who are responsible for caring for and supporting the victims as well as those administering justice at police stations and government offices break with gender stereotypes and have adequate legal, bias, gender and psychological training.

3.2 Make the justice system and other relevant institutions more accessible to women. It is important to understand everything a woman must do to file a complaint—and to design accessibility with these challenges in mind. The offices where complaints are filed should be accessible and not far from towns; there must be transport facilities and affordable childcare options; and support should be provided so that women can take time off work. If there is not a complete support network (including work facilities, psychological support, and health services), women will continue without reporting the attacks they suffer, which in turn will continue to impact every aspect of their lives and the lives of those around them.

### 4. A change of vision at the macro level

To date, it is common for officials (at all levels) to blame the victims; the relationship of the president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, with feminist organizations is conflictive; and the problem continues to be addressed without modifying the persistent gender inequalities. If the vision of a FFP is not translated into internal change within Mexico, violence will continue unpunished in our country. In this sense, public policies must include the perspective and input of feminist and women's organizations, otherwise they will continue to fail. Government officials need to listen to and work with women if they ever want to design effective, comprehensive, and, more importantly, lasting policies.

### Conclusion

Violence against women “reduces their ability to make a productive contribution to the family, the economy and public life; absorbs resources from social services, the justice system, health care agencies and employers; and reduces the overall educational attainment, mobility and innovation potential of victims/survivors, their children and even of the perpetrators of said acts of violence.”<sup>14</sup> It is a problem that has catastrophic consequences for the development of the country. Adopting a feminist vision in domestic policy consistent with Mexico's feminist foreign policy and making profound changes to our way of thinking and acting can lead us to comprehensive and sustainable solutions to addressing violence against women, as well as other forms of violence.

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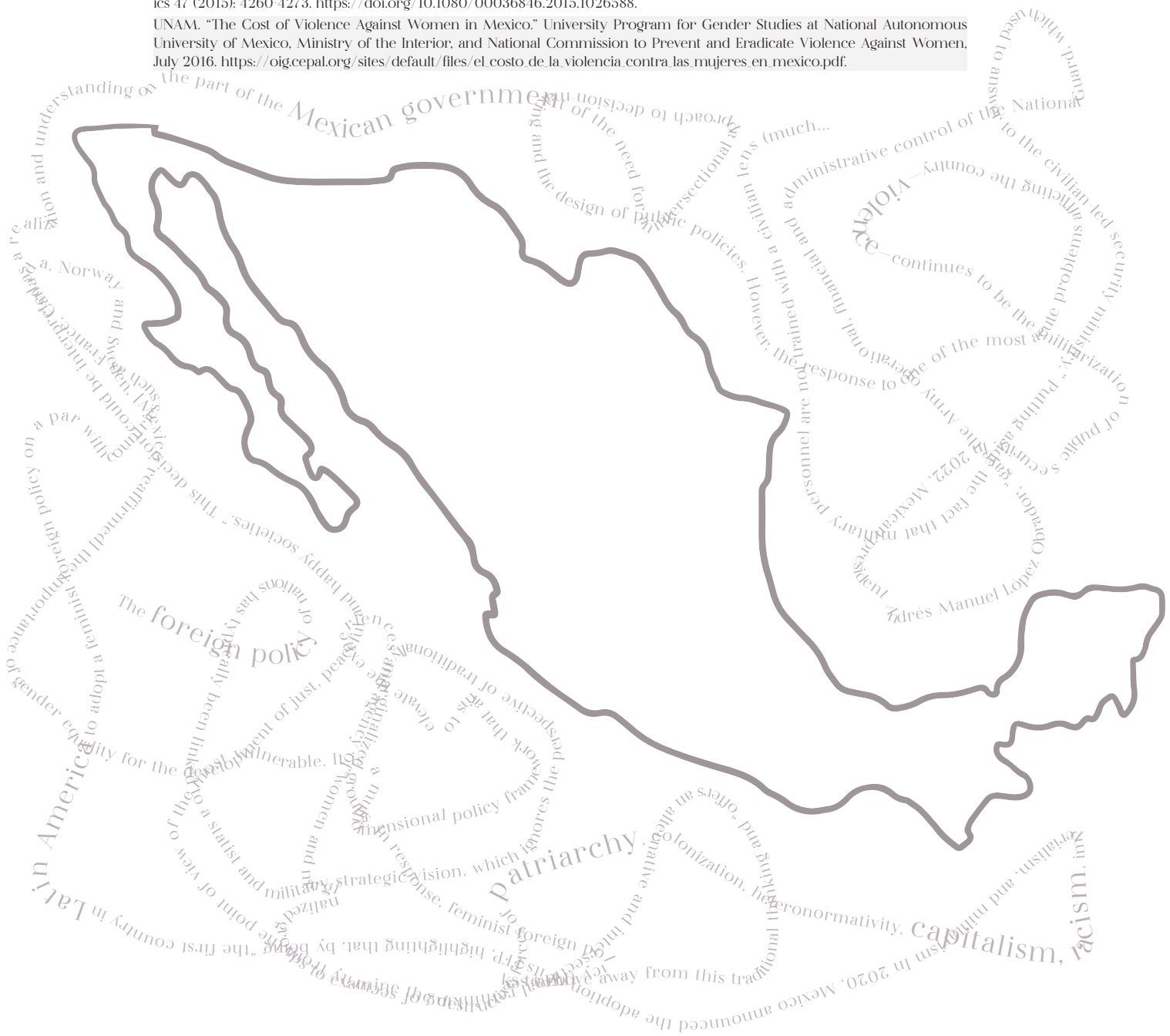
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# FROM THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS TO RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE:

## STRATEGIC EMPATHY AS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Written by

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"We see things not as they are, but as we are." – Anaïs Nin

Modern feminism challenges the patriarchal view that institutions must maintain hierarchy, aggression, and coercion to function successfully. Feminism in foreign affairs advocates for states to cooperate to prevent violence and delegitimizes the threat and use of violence as a tool of international politics. Therefore, feminist foreign policy (FFP) must be a paradigm shift in the norms and institutions that undergird international decision-making, not simply a set of policy recommendations for state interaction. While norms, like policies, can be warped to serve self-interest, they also have the capacity to create buy-in to effect change both in policy and in the imagination.<sup>1</sup> As such, FFP should include myriad measures to promote norms of cooperation and to dismantle hierarchy in the international system. In great power competition, one such measure could be a transition from brinkmanship towards strategic empathy to promote cooperative communication over attempts to make threats credible.<sup>2</sup>

Great power politics—such as the United States, Russia, and China vying for relative power, security, and influence—often results in brinkmanship.<sup>3</sup> While brinkmanship entails the acceptance of higher risk and greater instability in the pursuit of national interests, strategic empathy asks leaders to think through risk perception from the perspective of their "adversaries" (other leaders).<sup>4</sup> Strategic empathy acknowledges the gap between intention and action, specifically in the perceptions of other actors in politics. By re-reading history with a lens that helps us see the operation of strategic empathy, we can evaluate its utility as an approach to international relations and its viability as a current policy option. In this essay, I will apply FFP in two ways: I will use a feminist reinterpretation of crisis management during the Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) to highlight the mechanism of strategic empathy, and I will propose the use of strategic empathy as FFP in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

1. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

2. Naomi Head, "A Politics of Empathy: Encounters with Empathy in Israel and Palestine," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016): 95-113.

3. Introductory materials on great power politics include: Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (WW Norton & Company, 2001); Joseph Parent and Paul MacDonald, *Twilight of the Titans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); and Stacie Goddard, "Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order," *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018): 763-797.

4. Robert Powell, "Nuclear Brinkmanship, Limited War, and Military Power," *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (2015): 589-626.

The current story of the CMC in the United States is told after the end of the Cold War, known as “the end of history” because of the transition out of an era of bipolar competition and presumably into one of everlasting peace.<sup>5</sup> The image of finality in America’s defeat over the Soviet Union created a mindset of heroism, where good prevailed over evil, and, as such, Americans were anointed in creating global democracy in their image. There was a need to stick to moral sanctity, to not compromise or sully grand strategy with the influence of outside ideologies, which means the CMC was culturally constructed to be a lesson of American strength.<sup>6</sup> The story proceeds as follows: In response to the American attempt to invade Cuba’s territorial integrity during the Bay of Pigs, Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev agreed to Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro’s request for a deterrent: nuclear weapons in Cuba.<sup>7</sup> When the U.S. Air Force confirmed the presence of these nuclear missiles, the National Security Council advised American President John Kennedy to preemptively strike and eliminate Soviet warheads before the Cubans could threaten the United States with their use. Instead, Kennedy reached out to Khrushchev, offering to dismantle American Jupiter missiles in Turkey and not invade Cuba in exchange for Soviet dismantling of its nuclear missiles in Cuba.<sup>8</sup>

The retellings of this CMC narrative in American defense circles support rationalism and brinkmanship. Instead of emphasizing a moment where two countries came together to de-escalate, the common post-1991 telling cites great men out-thinking other men. In this story, rationalism, or the concept of reason trumping emotion, created a framework for decision-making that Kennedy and Khrushchev followed.<sup>9</sup> Both knew the other did not want to enter a nuclear war but wanted to test the credibility and commitment of the other side. They were playing chicken based on applied game theory. Through careful and forceful posturing, Kennedy made Khrushchev blink first, made him remove nuclear weapons while Kennedy only had to dismantle outdated systems. While there was a willingness to compromise, compromise was credible because of Kennedy’s power and posture to escalate.

Through FFP, where the narrative centers cooperation instead of competition, a reinterpretation of events shows strategic empathy is what saved the world from a nuclear war, not brinkmanship. Kennedy was not operating under the assumption that Khrushchev or Castro would never launch; he was operating out of fear, which led to a common understanding of what was at stake in nuclear war. Kennedy’s own fear helped him recognize Khrushchev’s fear. A common understanding allows leaders to put themselves in their adversary’s shoes. In other words, it allows for strategic empathy. The CMC is not a moment of toughness and resolve; both sides blinked because both felt out of control under the momentum of nuclear escalation.

5. Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

6. Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

7. The Bay of Pigs was a military invasion of Cuba by the United States in 1961 to overthrow Castro and institute a non-communist government. For more information on the American decision to invade and following actions, I recommend: James G. Blight and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs Invasion Reexamined* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

8. Jonathan Colman, “Toward ‘World Support’ and ‘The Ultimate Judgment of History’: The US Legal Case for the Blockade of Cuba during the Missile Crisis, October–November 1962,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 12 (2019): 150-173. <https://doi.org/10.1162/jews.a.00879>.

9. For rationalism, see: Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013). For critiques of rationalism, see: Ann Swidler, “The Concept of Rationality in the Work of Max Weber,” *Sociological Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (1973): 35-42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1973.tb01149.x>.



Fear of nuclear weapons can create a world of arms racing and coercion to satiate an appetite for deterrence. It can also create dialogue on the common ground of existential threat. Instead of taking the CMC as an American victory, FFP positions this moment of nuclear crisis as an unnecessary risk and strategic failure due to force posturing and highlights the necessity of cooperation and communication. Heroism and nationalism paint a grand portrait of great men who do great things to narrowly avoid the unimaginable. However, the greatness of their avoidance must be undercut with the fact that they created these crisis scenarios in the first place. When defense strategists create systems designed to lend credibility to aggression, it becomes exceedingly difficult to de-escalate. FFP-derived foreign policy narratives erase the heroics of a Kennedy. Trust and communication provide a stable basis for international relations, multilateralism mitigates great power tension, and the appeal of nuclear weapons diminishes.

Sixty years after the CMC, students of international politics must reconcile with history. Did we learn the lessons that fear of a nuclear apocalypse forced Kennedy and Khrushchev to learn? It takes cooperation and communication to stabilize situations where the lives of hundreds of millions are used as a wager. Advances in verification measures and communication technology help, but miscalculation is always a foreign policy risk that can only be decreased with trust. The story of individual success and heroism over compromise influences leaders today, however, making strategic empathy hard to implement.

The meaningful reinterpretation of events like the CMC to highlight the role played by strategic empathy can support current calls to employ strategic empathy now as a mechanism to perpetuate peace rather than escalate towards greater destruction. In Russia's war on Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened the use of nuclear weapons and employed escalatory language to deter NATO involvement.<sup>10</sup> He has shown resolve in his commitment to accepting only total victory over Ukraine through his September 21, 2022, speech ordering the mobilization of Russian troops and the following sham referendums and legislation to annex Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson.<sup>11</sup> In Western media, this war is portrayed as one of aggression, a violation of the right to self-determination promised by the United Nations, and proof that Russia remains a revisionist power unwilling to conform to the liberal world order.<sup>12,13</sup> Yet the implementation of FFP through the use of strategic empathy would offer alternative actions and narratives surrounding Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing war. If Putin is reframed as fearful, new avenues for communication and compromise open. This creates a possible way out of the crisis: an opportunity for American leaders to address Putin's motivations for the invasion while also upholding the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The acknowledgement that leaders operate out of fear instead of rationality is a vital first

10. Editorial Board, "Putin Threatens Nuclear War: The West Must Deter Disaster," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/10/03/putin-nuclear-war-ukraine-deter/>.

11. Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," *President of Russia*, September 21, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69390>.

12. Revisionism is the concept that a state intends not to follow the current norms of the international order, in contrast to "status-quo states," who do. For more information on revisionism, read: Jonathan M. DiCicco and Victor M. Sanchez, "Revisionism in International Relations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.607>.

13. Peter Dickinson, "Bowing to Putin's Nuclear Blackmail Will Make Nuclear War More Likely," *Atlantic Council*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/bowing-to-putins-nuclear-blackmail-will-make-nuclear-war-far-more-likely/>. This offers one example; others may be found in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Foreign Policy*.

step in implementing strategic empathy and creating new options for de-escalation. In interpreting the CMC as a tale of brinkmanship, America learned the lesson to assert dominance and U.S. President Joe Biden continues a “peace through strength” strategy that relegates Russia back into the role of an “empire of evil.” Instead of both sides showing resolve, active implementation of FFP would push them to prioritize communication, cooperation, and de-escalation.

Strategic empathy is uncomfortable, but it offers the chance of a new security order as seen in the resolution of the CMC. That is necessary to end wars and prevent even further loss of human life.

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# “FROM VICTIMS TO LEADERS”: LET THE SILENCED SPEAK

## CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH THE LENS OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

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We are at the eleventh hour! 2022 bore witness to apocalyptic climate catastrophes—the destructive floods in Pakistan, unparalleled heat waves in India and Europe, wildfires engulfing large areas of North America, Europe, and North Africa. The last few years have also seen a worldwide upheaval in global climate protests, with thousands of climate activists taking to the streets. Couched under the slogan #PeopleNotProfit, in September 2022, one of the largest global climate strikes across Europe, Asia, and Africa was organized by Fridays for Future, a youth-led global climate strike movement.<sup>1</sup> Voicing their demands for climate justice, protestors urged the rich and developed countries from the Global North to pay for the damages of environmental destruction, which, for years, have been having an unfair impact on those from the Global South who are impoverished and historically marginalized by the global economy. This essay argues that to challenge deep-rooted discriminatory power structures and to find ethical solutions to climate change, climate justice ought to be a core feature of a feminist foreign policy approach to tackling the global climate crisis. This novel feminist perspective on climate justice will not only draw attention to gender but also shed light on all other intertwined social markers of difference (like age, sex, race, class, ethnicity, and so on) that are shaped by oppressive power relations.

Climate justice can be interpreted in various ways. However, according to the interpretation most relevant to this essay’s argument, “climate justice recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities and communities of color around the world, the people and places least responsible for the problem.”<sup>2</sup> It is about “ensuring collectively and individually we have the ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from climate change impacts—and the policies to mitigate or adapt to them—by considering existing vulnerabilities, resources and capabilities.”<sup>3</sup> Feminist foreign policy provides the justice-driven principles and intersectional thinking necessary to see and address these intersecting socio-environmental inequalities. Moving away from technocratic and exclusionary forms of climate change policy planning, an intersectional feminist approach will allow for “more socially transformative approaches that redress the drivers of diverse, underlying, and systemic inequalities.”<sup>4</sup> The most important aspect of adopting a feminist foreign policy approach to climate change is to recog-

1. Greta Thunberg, “Fridays for Future,” accessed November 11, 2022, <http://fridaysforfuture.org>.

2. “What Is Climate Justice?”, UC Center for Climate Justice, accessed February 22, 2023, <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>.

3. Nick Banks, et al., “Climate Change and Social Justice: An Evidence Review,” Joseph Rowntree Foundation, February 18, 2014, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/climate-change-and-social-justice-evidence-review>.

4. Ana T. Amorim-Maia, Isabelle Anguelovski, Eric Chu, and James Connolly, “Intersectional Climate Justice: A Conceptual Pathway for Bridging Adaptation Planning, Transformative Action, and Social Equity,” *Urban Climate* 41 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.uclim.2021.101053>.

nize the inclusive and intersectional ethics of feminism, which is not only about fighting for equal rights and opportunities for all genders but also about acknowledging the nexus between gender and other social markers of discrimination like age, class, race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so on. True climate justice is, therefore, about ensuring no one is left behind.

Intersectionality, which has its roots in Black feminist thought,<sup>5</sup> clarifies how various forms of social categorization can overlap with each other to create distinct forms of oppression and disadvantage. The intersectional lens will allow policymakers to look beyond the effects of one particular social driver of injustice at a time (for instance, racism or gender oppression) and consider multiple overlapping power inequalities that keep (re)generating the vicious cycle of deep climate vulnerabilities. Therefore, the key to achieving climate justice lies in recognizing that intersectionality can heighten the impacts of gender inequality. Climate justice is about acknowledging the disproportionate effects of climate change and working to address them through adequate long-term adaptation and mitigation strategies that capitalize on the experiences and knowledge of underprivileged populations and ensure their representation in policymaking bodies. The power of an intersectional feminist approach to climate change with a focus on climate justice, therefore, is that it would not only seek solutions to address the primary causes of environmental degradation but also simultaneously address a broad range of racial, social, and environmental injustices. Climate justice can be achieved not only by ensuring just representation of the populations who are worst impacted by the climate crisis in policy discussions but also by implementing other accountability measures like reparations and “land back” (especially for indigenous communities), alongside a careful assessment and deconstruction of the power dynamics embedded in international policy dialogues like the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Demanding a feminist approach does not simply mean giving more seats to women at the decision-making table, as feminism is not only about women’s rights; it also includes the voices of the marginalized, exploited, vulnerable, and underrepresented people who are the victims of “structural inequalities rooted in anachronistic and (white) supremacist norms of domination”<sup>6</sup> and who therefore do not enjoy equal opportunities to contribute to policy decisions in various global platforms. Hence, to implement a feminist foreign policy, policymakers must first re-define the standard narratives by “expanding ideas of who constitutes a citizen and has rights and prioritizing people and planet above growth and profit,”<sup>7</sup> ensuring no one is left behind, especially the groups who have always been sidelined. It means thoroughly acknowledging the Global North’s dominant role in causing the climate crisis, ensuring veracious representation and participation of those who are non-elites or traditionally excluded groups, and listening to the narratives of those who actually suffer to enable the emergence of a more inclu-

5. “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” Columbia Law School Story Archive, June 8, 2017, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>.

6. Keila McFarland Dias, “Environmentalism and the Legacy of Colonialism,” Human Rights Pulse, December 7, 2020, <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/environmentalism-and-the-legacy-of-colonialism>.

7. Lyric Thompson and Tara Daniel, *Feminist Foreign Policy Discussion Series: Furthering Accountability and Centering Climate Change* (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2019), <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Feminist-Foreign-Policy-%E2%80%93-Furthering-Accountability-and-Centering-Climate-Change-FINAL-3.pdf>.

sive, equal, and peaceful world. A feminist shift would mean reassessing who will be in power to make decisions and how the climate crisis will be approached, while addressing the unequal power relations of the standard colonial perspectives. It is essential to have indigenous people at climate policy decision-making tables not only because they have faced the unequal brunt of the climate crisis for years but also because of their “in-depth knowledge of the territories that have been the source of their livelihoods for generations, ... [which] includes understandings of how to cope with and adapt to environmental variability and trends.”<sup>8</sup> A truly feminist approach to climate policy would incorporate the knowledge and experiences of the direct victims of climate-induced disasters and scarcities, which is essential to true climate justice. Instead of considering them as mere beneficiaries with no voice and agency, they must be considered as partners in resilience-building.

During COP27 in November 2022, I saw a photo<sup>9</sup> featuring world leaders at the meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt—a photo massively circulated across various social media platforms. As soon as it caught my attention, I realized something was wrong with the photo. Close observation made me realize that there were only a few female leaders in a room full of men, contrary to COP27’s Presidency Action Agenda that promised to have the voices of “youth, women, civil society and indigenous people” at the center of the discussions.<sup>10</sup> Why is this a problem? After years of protests, campaigns, and demonstrations on climate justice, even in 2022, there was a massive bias and underrepresentation in global decision-making platforms, bringing it down to the same vicious question of power dynamics: Who has the power to speak and decide on climate justice? Who has the power to be seen and heard? Whose agendas are being served by whom? It is evident that climate policymaking is gendered through the exclusion of women and women’s lived experiences with climate change but also that policy circles rarely adhere to feminist ethical and intersectional frameworks while designing climate change policies.

It is no secret that conserving nature and controlling environmental degradation became urgent only when the colonizers (the Global North) “recognized the rapid environmental decay caused by their own activities, as it acted to their detriment.”<sup>11</sup> Although framed as a universal good, deep-rooted biases of the Global North have informed how climate change policies on the global level have been drafted for decades. As such, a narrow approach to climate policy has perpetuated the deep North-South divide on climate negotiations. For example, the UNFCCC’s policies were shaped by the material interests and normative perspectives of the Global North’s developed countries. This forced developing countries from the Global South to seek institutional change, thereby ensuring the de-facto solidification of the North-South contestation in the UNFCCC policy processes, absolutely sidelining the Global South’s interests and priorities.<sup>12</sup> Women and certain social groups—like religious and ethnic minorities, children, persons with disabilities, older people, indigenous people, migrant workers, displaced persons, peo-

8. “Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change,” UNESCO, accessed February 22, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/links/climatechange>.

9. “UN Chief Says World Risks ‘Collective Suicide,’” Dhaka Tribune, November 7, 2022, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/2022/11/07/un-chief-choose-climate-solidarity-or-collective-suicide>.

10. “Presidency Action Agenda,” COP27, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://cop27.eg/#/>.

11. Dias, “Environmentalism and the Legacy of Colonialism.”

12. Philip Coventry, “North-South Division and Injustice in the UNFCCC Climate Finance Policy Process: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective” (PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2019), <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/89069/>.

ple of color, sexual and gender minorities, economically disadvantaged people—are the ones who bear the worst impacts of the climate crisis despite having the lowest carbon footprint.<sup>13</sup> Such global inequality “grows out of a patriarchal system that is also entangled with racism and white supremacy and extractive capitalism.”<sup>14</sup>

This is why we need a feminist approach to climate change to ensure a people-centered attitude, focusing not only on protecting the victims of the climate crisis but also on ensuring their representation in decision-making. Instead of systematically neglecting the insights and voices of the most affected populations, a feminist approach would promise their inclusion as opposed to traditional approaches that seek solutions only from those of dominant identities or from the Global North—“the very demographic that is most complicit with causing and benefiting from exploitation and environmental degradation.”<sup>15</sup> It would also ensure holding the developed countries responsible for the damages they caused, instituting just reparations, and providing platforms where the visions and strategies of the historically “silenced” would be acknowledged in policymaking processes.

This vision might seem far-fetched and even utopic, but that is how changes happen—by being ambitious and by dreaming to achieve the impossible. To achieve climate justice in practice, we need to keep pushing, often beyond our limits, to try and be more ethical and to keep raising our voices about why it is essential to change the status quo. It is high time we need a decolonized, intersectional feminist approach to climate change, involving “critical and intentional listening to communities experiencing injustices firsthand.”<sup>16</sup> If not, if governments continue to pursue domestic and foreign climate policies as they currently are, environmentalism might become the imperialism of the 21st century, and the designed solutions will never be equitable or just. To create a climate-just world, the voices of those most marginalized and impacted by climate change need to be centered in policymaking and in decisions about how to dismantle intersecting power imbalances.

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14. Nicole Greenfield, “What Is Climate Feminism?” NRDC, March 18, 2021, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-climate-feminism>

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16. Cam Humphrey and Skyler Jackson, “Yale Experts Explain Intersectionality and Climate Change,” Yale Sustainability, July 28, 2022, <https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-intersectionality-and-climate-change>.

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