

# Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of a feminist approach to foreign policy has and continues to challenge the ways in which states and foreign policy actors engage with issues of global importance. Much has been said about the transformative potential of a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in effecting substantial and lasting change. However, this is a challenging goal to achieve given the diverse and committed theoretical interventions that constitute feminism, and the practical and embedded masculinised ways of “doing” international politics that continue to persist today<sup>1</sup>. Tackling this tension between idealism and pragmatism requires thinking deeply and thoughtfully about, on the one hand what feminism is/should be, and on the other hand, how to put feminism into practice. It also requires recognising that these two dimensions – the theory and the practice or the “thinking” and the “doing” of feminist politics – cannot be separated; rather, they must be seen as constituting one collective project. Thus, this paper re-introduces a values-based approach to practicing feminist foreign policy<sup>2</sup>, and offers concrete suggestions on how to deploy a feminist approach in the everyday workings of the German Federal Foreign Office.

## 2. Critiques

As Germany continues to work towards developing its first FFP, it is of great importance that the Foreign Office reflects on the concerns and critiques that have been raised in response to the adoption and implementation of FFPs around the world:

### 2.1 *Diversity is not Intersectionality*

The Foreign Office's use of a “3R+D” formula “to promote the rights, representation and resources of women and marginalised groups, as well as to enhance diversity”<sup>3</sup> is not a reflection of intersectionality<sup>4</sup>. These two terms should not be conflated, rather,

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<sup>1</sup> Parisi, Laura. 2020. “Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy: Business as Usual?” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (2): 163–80.; Aggestam, Karin, and Annika Bergman-Rosamond. 2016. “Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender.” *Ethics and International Affairs* 30 (3): 323–34.

<sup>2</sup>Cheung, Jessica, Dilek Gürsel, Marie Jelenka Kirchner, and Victoria Scheyer. 2021. “Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit.” [https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/211112\\_WILPF\\_FFP\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/211112_WILPF_FFP_Toolkit.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Federal Foreign Office. 2022. “Inclusion rather than exclusion: What is a feminist foreign policy?”

<sup>4</sup> “Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences of everyday life.” (Hill Collins, Patricia, and Sirma Bilge. 2020. *Intersectionality*, pg.3). This must be contrasted against diversity which is a term that is often used in

the Foreign Office should approach its foreign policy work from an intersectional perspective whilst also encouraging diversity as a means to increase representation amongst marginalised and underrepresented groups and communities.

## 2.2 Colonialism Shapes Our Past, Present and Future

Germany's history of colonialism has not been addressed publicly by the Federal Government or Foreign Office. As scholars within Germany have noted, this neglect of the country's colonial history and sense of "colonial amnesia"<sup>5</sup> fails to account for Germany's participation in the production of unequal and unjust power relations at a global level. As colonialism continues to shape global politics and have a profound impact on the lives of many, Germany has a responsibility to reflect on the consequences of its past actions and resist engaging in further acts of neo-colonialism.

## 2.3 Consistency

For a FFP to have a substantive impact it must be applied consistently across all areas of foreign policy. There must also be a strong link between what the Foreign Office says it will do (rhetoric) and what it actually does (practice)<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the feminist work that is being done at a foreign policy level should also be reflected in domestic policy. A failure to internally practice the same politics would serve to undermine the legitimacy of the government's claims to an ethical politics.

## 3. Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday

This paper advocates for a values-based approach to constructing a FFP<sup>7</sup>. Rather than defining a FFP in narrow and limiting terms, the adoption of a values-based approach offers a strong set of principles to guide the development and implementation of a context specific foreign policy. By centring a FFP on a set of core values, it allows for a greater degree of flexibility to move within a structured set of ethical guidelines. It also works to demonstrate a high degree of commitment and encourages accountability, whilst also recognising the potential for change over time. Cheung and co-authors have developed a Toolkit<sup>8</sup> that outlines what a values-based approach is and what it should include. A values-based approach to FFP is guided by "Five Core Values" that work collectively to produce a code of ethics. These five values are intersectionality, empathetic reflexivity, substantive representation and

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management and organisational strategies to refer to visible differences and representation as opposed to (in)visible power relations.

<sup>5</sup> Perraudin, M., & Zimmerer, J. (Eds.). (2010). *German Colonialism and National Identity* (1st ed.). Routledge.

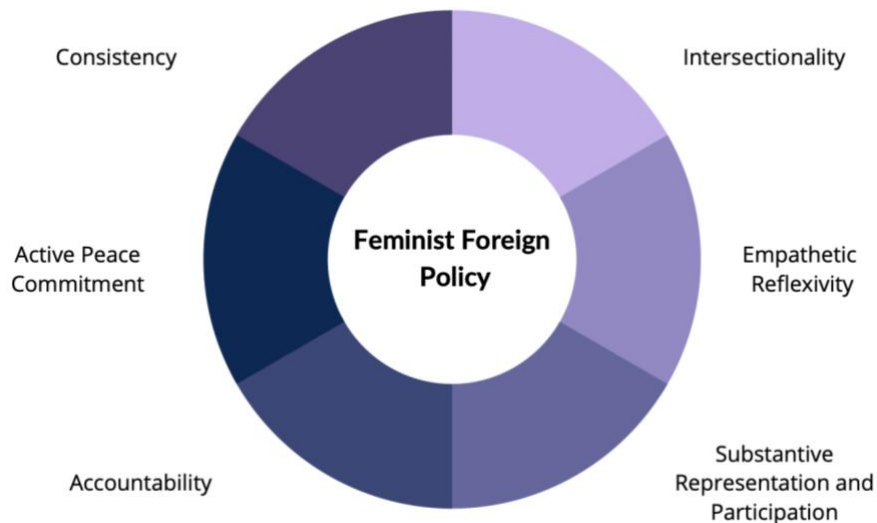
<sup>6</sup> Tiessen, Rebecca. 2019. "What's New about the Feminist International Assistance Policy: The Problem and Possibilities of 'More of the Same.'" *University of Calgary the School of Public Policy Publications*. Vol. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*; p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Cheung, Jessica, Dilek Gürsel, Marie Jelenka Kirchner, and Victoria Scheyer. 2021. "Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit." [https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/211112\\_WILPF\\_FFP\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/211112_WILPF_FFP_Toolkit.pdf)

participation, accountability and active peace commitment<sup>9</sup>. As per the discussion in 2.3, this paper also proposes including “consistency” into the framework as a core value.

**Fig 1. Core Values**



Grounded in these Core Values, the key to realising a sustainable and effective FFP relies on long-term incremental change across *all* areas of foreign policy. One way of approaching this is by thinking through feminism as an everyday practice<sup>10</sup>. This means adopting and implementing a feminist perspective in the performance of everyday politics regardless of how big or small the conduct may appear. From diplomatic meetings to policy planning, speech writing and signing trade agreements, a feminist perspective must guide and inform all these actions. This also includes the seemingly innocuous and most routine aspects of everyday political work – for example, drafting an email to a colleague or greeting staff members – these seeming insignificant actions cannot be forgotten as they collectively constitute the larger work of the Foreign Office.

#### 4. Applying a Feminist Practice

The two practical interventions introduced in this paper are designed to demonstrate how a values-based approach to FFP can be enacted in the everyday. These interventions also serve to further the work of the Foreign Office as it continues to engage in a number of pro-gender equality practices (e.g. advocating for a gender perspective in international politics, financial support for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in other states, promoting women’s

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*; p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

networking around the world, etc.)<sup>11</sup>. They also aim to respond to and correct the deficiencies and 'blind spots' within these practices (e.g. substantive representation, accountability mechanisms, addressing root causes, etc.). Although at first glance these interventions may seem insignificant, what they seek to do is challenge and change the masculinised attitudes and patriarchal culture that dominates foreign policy making through the use of a feminist praxis.

## 4.1 Asking Feminist Questions

The starting point and most basic action the Foreign Office can take up as an ongoing practice within its FFP is to "ask feminist questions". "Asking feminist questions" is an active strategy that calls upon foreign policy actors to reflect on their own positionality within any given situation, and acknowledge the underlying power relations that privilege the voices of some, whilst limiting the voices of others. This requires actors to ask critical questions so as to identify the issues that often remain unspoken and, in turn, develop a solution to respond to these problems. By starting with the simple task of self-reflection, it can work to expose the blatant inequalities that affect any given situation or task. It will also encourage foreign policy actors to think about individuals and communities that are continuously excluded from and neglected in matters of international politics.

To illustrate this intervention a small selection of self-reflexive guiding questions will be suggested in relation to Germany's new security strategy, climate change and regional conflicts. These questions are informed by the Core Values discussed above:

### 4.1.1 *Germany's new security strategy*

- What is security, who is defining it and what do people need to be secured from?
- Who will be affected by the Strategy and how?
- Who is excluded from the process of designing the Strategy? What has prevented their participation, and what can be done to include these individuals and/or communities?
- What role does militarism and violence play in the Strategy?
- What are the root causes of (in)security and how have they been addressed?

### 4.1.2 *Climate change:*

- What areas, regions and locations are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change?
- How and why are marginalised groups disproportionately impacted by climate change?

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<sup>11</sup> This also includes the work the Foreign Office is doing within the diplomatic service in terms of gender conscious training and education programs, and the increased representation of marginalised groups and peoples.

- How does climate change intersect with other power structures/sources and sites of inequality (e.g gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, age, etc.)
- What resources are impacted by climate change (e.g. access to healthcare, education, food and clean water, etc.)
- What substantive action is being taken to combat climate change? Are all sectors of society being held accountable?

#### 4.1.3 Regional conflicts:

- What structural forms of violence are causing the conflict (e.g. poverty, racism, gender inequality, etc.)?
- What groups of people are involved in the conflict and how can approaches to solving or preventing violence amongst divergent positions be mediated?<sup>12</sup>
- Who is excluded from the decision-making process and how can they be included?
- How can vulnerable groups of people in conflict be protected without purely victimizing them?<sup>13</sup>
- What peaceful/non-militarised/non-armament methods can be adopted in order to alleviate conflict?<sup>14</sup>

## 4.2 Ownership

The second practice the Foreign Office should encourage is ownership. Ownership refers to the need for foreign policy actors to feel **a part of the process** in order to be **responsible for the process**. By increasing engagement and participation in the development, implementation and trajectory of the policy, the very people who are expected to represent and work according to a feminist perspective are personally invested and accountable to the policy at large. This also requires humanising foreign policy by emphasising the wide and diverse range of peoples involved and affected by foreign policy outside of traditional state and non-state actors.

## 5. Conclusion

The work the Foreign Office has done thus far to pursue a FFP demonstrates an openness to exploring the untapped potential of feminism as a more just and ethical alternative to traditional foreign policy. However, as the country's FFP continues to be developed it is crucial that the everyday acts of politics that collectively constitute the work of the Foreign Office are taken into consideration. Approaching these acts from a feminist perspective through the use of self-reflexive questioning and policy ownership represents a small yet committed step towards realising the transformative potential of a FFP.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*; p. 21

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*