

As Germany prepares to join other European countries in adopting/implementing a feminist foreign policy (FFP), it is also well positioned to learn from the current gaps in the formulation and practices of other FFP approaches.

Given the persistence of global power hierarchies that are steeped in colonial logics, the practice of FFP within the current state system must go beyond reproducing commitments that already align with the status quo. FFP should examine the implications of continued land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources within the international system; the appropriateness of state institutions to foster inclusive feminist peace; as well as the status of the control of gender and sexuality. Importantly, it should also consider knowledge making – how we know and interpret the world around us, including those who are recipients of foreign policy practice since this matters for foreign policy design itself.

To unpack how these may happen, it is useful to explore the promise of FFP and acknowledge its limits. Furthermore, identifying and understanding the ways in which oppression and exclusion function can help new FFP countries mitigate the greatest harms, and move beyond the platitudes to effect real change towards a more just world.

Origins and Evolution

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) became a reality with Sweden's declaration in 2014. Since then, feminist foreign policy (FFP) has now gone beyond Sweden, to include countries like Canada, Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Libya, France and recently the Netherlands as well as Germany. Scotland too is exploring the possibilities. The definition of feminist foreign policy is contested, however. Whereas some civil society groups have sought to define ideals of FFP, to a large extent, the scope of FFP is determined by the adoptee country. Moreover, the academic literature suggests that FFP is the entry point to more ethical foreign policy practices. To what extent the ethical manifests in the practices of states is highly debateable, however.

In any case, there are two common threads consistent across FFP. The first is the centrality of challenging gender inequality within global politics. FFP has raised the priority of tackling gender inequality as already highlighted by global policy and normative frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. In so doing, FFP calls on practicing states to foreground human rights as a value and practice and meet core international commitments to this end.

While gender equality is a necessary component of FFP, it is not a sufficient condition in of itself to make foreign policy feminist. So, what is feminist here? This question brings us to the second thread consistent to FFP discourses. Feminism within foreign policy conveys a normative shift concerning what foreign policy prioritises. Here, advocates of FFP outside the state apparatus emphasise the integration of feminist concerns outside gender programming or 'soft' areas like international development. FFP, in a normative sense, calls for the embedding of feminism across all areas of foreign policy including defence, security, migration, trade, climate change policy among other areas of international relations. The ethos of feminism challenges the status quo and seeks transformation of the current systems of foreign policy. This FFP is however aspirational, I argue. Specifically, when considering that there are multiple feminisms, and powerful actors exploit the 'loopholes' brought on by these differences in policymaking itself, but also in the advocacy for FFP. As such, it is important to note that FFP as practiced is constitutive of significant blind spots that inhibit its emancipatory potential (Ansorg, Haastrup & Wright, 2021). As one of the newest adopters of FFP, Germany's attention to these will make for a more effective foreign policy that is truly aligned with a feminist ethos that delivers justice.

Addressing Oppression & Exclusion in Foreign Policy

These moves towards foreign policy informed by feminism is important; it is even more important to be nuanced and reflective. Who is this foreign policy for? To paraphrase Canadian political scientist Yolande Bouka – are these foreign policies made as if black and brown lives matter (Bouka, 2022)? One of the key gaps in foreign policy practice has been the persistence of racism. Whereas feminisms that draw on postcolonialism or incorporate intersectionality explicitly acknowledge the racist hierarchies of the global international system, this understanding of feminism is not intrinsic to FFP itself. Some of the scholarship on FFP has acknowledged the

ways in which FFP can be complicit in some of the more pernicious aspects of the function of foreign policy (Haastrup/Hagen, 2020; Haastrup, 2020)

Yet, FFP is an opportunity to create a reparative foreign policy based on anti-colonialism and anti-racism as core values. The lack of consideration of race, and how racial hierarchies are in fact often reinforced in the practices of feminist foreign policy simply underline enduring blind spots within the field and practice of international relations. We are often so concerned by the actors who enact FFP not those who it is enacted on.

It is important that in the shift to FFP, countries like Germany also understand foreign policy practice as being in a dynamic relationship between the global North and global South through technologies and practices that are situated as global have not always benefitted the most marginalised. An emancipatory FFP must challenge this.

Another dimension to Bouka's question concerns who is excluded in this new awareness of what foreign policy ought to be. Work undertaken by scholars like Hagen (2016) has highlighted the persistent marginalisation of LGBTQ+ peoples. Queer approaches to feminism challenge the heteronormative hegemony and the gender binaries that privileges heterosexuality and often women in foreign policy. This approach not only marginalises sexualities, but also gender identities that do not conform to the 'norm' thus excluding, for instance, transgender people.

As noted in a recent report, directing our focus to queering foreign policy within the broader context of FFP "breaks with the fixation on cis-gendered men and women whose gender identity corresponds to the gender assigned at birth" (Zilla, 2022). Feminism that is transformative would also seek to challenge these norms.

For the most part however, FFP as practiced by states tends to lean on the familiar. The focus is mainly on doing something for/to cis-women rather than the structures of power that underpin a gendered and racialised international relations/global politics. Such considerations would reveal that examining oppressions and exclusions in the context of foreign policy on the basis of a transformative feminist ethos blurs the lines between the 'domestic' (internal) and the 'foreign' (external). When these lines blur, the lives of those elsewhere matters just as much as those at home.

What Prospects for a German Feminist Foreign Policy?

Considering all of the above, a FFP that makes a difference must be able to answer in the affirmative to key questions:

1. Does the **whole of foreign policy** engender transformative feminist futures grounded in anti-racist/intersectional feminism for all its external partners?
2. Does a country practicing FFP support its most marginalised **at home**?
3. Do foreign policy practices **challenge the status quo** of the international system?

For Germany, this must also consider its unique role as a leader within the EU where the internal/external explicitly blur.

For FFP to provide a transformative alternative to the current practice of foreign policy, an explicit consideration of race is necessary – it must thus be anti-racist, and to be anti-racist, it must be anti-colonial (i.e. seek to undo all sources of global power hierarchies that exist within the international system). Practically this will mean concrete actions across a range of foreign policy area, for example and in brief

Peace/Security/Defence – Despite multiple crises in Europe, peace over militarism must be the ideology that drives action in this area. This, to my mind, does not preclude self-defence military means. It does however demand that the default for ending conflict is not violence and that alternatives are constantly sought so that the most marginalised get justice

Economy/Trade – Whereas capitalism has been the core driver of Germany and other Western countries and institutions, it has also had the worst impact in perpetuating inequalities. Acknowledging this and actively mitigating inequalities within and outside the state must a priority for German FFP.

Development/Aid – It is often the case that donor countries determine the scope of development support in the Global South especially. It is essential that any conception of FFP for Germany champion the agency of recipients of this aid so that its design is based on the priorities of the recipients. Importantly, end result of development interventions should actively seek to undo completely the extractive nature of development practice.

Climate Change – there can be no justice without the possibility of a future. A future German FFP must therefore prioritise tackling climate change. Yet, policy interventions must acknowledge indigenous knowledges that have contributed to exposing the impact of industrialisation on climate injustice. Consequently, responses for mitigation must work to also eradicate persistent coloniality in policy implementation and outcomes.

Migration – Migration is a fact of contemporary global interactions; in Europe it is narrated largely narrated as a crisis with detrimental impacts, particularly for immigrants. This applies to migrants moving within Europe, but also and especially those coming from outside. If human rights are central to FFP, it cannot be exempt from how governments deal with migration. Often the vulnerabilities of women migrants as well as their agency is ignored in migration policy formations. Migrant men are often positioned as threats to hosting societies by political narratives and policy interventions, while intersecting vulnerabilities such as racism, homophobia and transphobia are absented from policy frameworks. For Germany's foreign policy to be remotely feminist, it must consider the gendered and racist nature of status quo responses at the national and supranational levels.

Concluding thoughts

Addressing these issues comprehensively will not come easily as it challenges the foundation of the state system and embedded policy practices. It is for this reason that FFP must be considered a process for change, rather than an end point. It is iterative and continuously informed by praxis. Overall, a different way of doing foreign policy that is people-led rather than state-led and emphasizes solidarity over interest is the only means toward justice for all.

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