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Theorising feminist foreign policy

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Abstract

A growing number of states including Canada, Norway and Sweden have adopted gender and feminist-informed approaches to their foreign and security policies. The overarching aim of this article is to advance a theoretical framework that can enable a thoroughgoing study of these developments. Through a feminist lens, we theorise feminist foreign policy arguing that it is, to all intents and purposes, ethical and argue that existing studies of ethical foreign policy and international conduct are by and large gender-blind. We draw upon feminist International Relations (IR) theory and the ethics of care to theorise feminist foreign policy and to advance an ethical framework that builds on a relational ontology, which embraces the stories and lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups at the receiving end of foreign policy conduct. By way of conclusion, the article highlights the novel features of the emergent framework and investigates in what ways it might be useful for future analyses of feminist foreign policy. Moreover, we discuss its potential to generate new forms of theoretical insight, empirical knowledge and policy relevance for the refinement of feminist foreign policy practice.

Keywords

dialogue, ethics of care, feminist foreign policy, feminist theory, gender, inclusion, international ethics

Introduction

In 2014, the Swedish red–green coalition government adopted a feminist foreign policy, which signalled a substantial change in its external conduct. Its pronounced ambition was to become the ‘strongest global voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights by all women and girls’.¹ Sweden’s feminist foreign policy platform also

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signals a strong support for United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, and related resolutions on women, peace and security (WPS). Moreover, the advancement of a distinctively feminist foreign policy was closely linked to Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, a top diplomat with past experience as the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict. On numerous occasions, Wallström has emphasised both the link between women's participation in global politics and sustainable peace and the notion that women's empowerment positively impacts on national and international security.² While Sweden's comprehensive and explicit commitment to pursue a feminist foreign policy is exceptional, other states have also sought to advance pro-gender norms and the WPS-agenda, as part of their foreign policy conduct. For instance, during her tenure as the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton launched the 'Hillary Doctrine' which framed the subjugation of women as a security threat to the United States and the world.³ Under the leadership of former British Foreign Secretary William Hague, the United Kingdom promoted a normative shift towards the eradication of sexual violence in conflict⁴ and Australia's first female foreign minister, Julie Bishop, consistently promoted gender mainstreaming in international institutions while in office.⁵ Norway has a long track record of actively supporting gender mainstreaming in areas of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development assistance.⁶

This article approaches the theorisation of these new patterns of foreign policy practice and discourse through a feminist lens, in particular by drawing on scholarship on ethical foreign policy,⁷ feminist theory⁸ and the ethics of care.⁹ A key contention is that feminist foreign policy is in itself ethical since it places at the centre of the analysis such things as gendered discrimination, inequalities and violence as well as the lack of inclusion and representation of women and other marginalised groups.¹⁰ Yet existing research on ethical foreign policy is, by and large, gender blind. Hence the rise to prominence of the 1325 agenda and notions of global gender justice call for a distinct analytical framework located within feminist ethical reasoning and theory. Nonetheless, we recognise that gender-sensitive foreign policies are frequently couched within ethical consideration for the needs and wants of distant others as well as policy pragmatism since the practical conduct of foreign and security policy is mediated through a variety of policy options and compromises across a range of diverging political positions. By implication, the making of foreign policy may, at times, necessitate deviations and trade-offs from the ethical ideals that one might otherwise expect from the feminist and gender-based conduct of foreign policy.¹¹

The article is structured as follows. We commence by situating our discussion of feminist foreign policy within the broad confines of international ethics scholarship, in particular, notions of ethical foreign policy, good states and international citizenship. Our key premise here is that debates on ethical foreign policy and good international conduct are generally gender-blind, but that this can be rectified through the theorisation of feminist foreign policy. Second, we elaborate on the ways in which feminist international relations (IR) theory contributes to the theoretical advancement of feminist foreign policy. We note that feminist IR theory not only provides opportunities to focus on the role of women in global politics but also probes a broader set of questions about states' efforts to place issues of intersectional relevance on the global agenda through inclusive and localised dialogue. The third section turns to the ethics of care and the idea that open and

inclusive feminist-inspired dialogue provides fruitful ground for theorising the significance of local stories and experiences in the making of feminist foreign and security policy. More specifically, the ethics of care approach employs a relational ontology that unveils moral relations between humans and their individual ethical experiences, which enables a critical analysis of the extent to which a feminist foreign policy is grounded in the locality of those at its receiving end. This entails moving away from the structural bias that has historically taken IR theory away from an ethics that is inclusive and dialogical, centring on women's as well as other marginalised groups' experiences. We contend that the analysis of feminist foreign policy through the lens of the ethics of care and the notion of empathetic cooperation, associated with Christine Sylvester's work,¹² provide fertile ground for thinking through how to explore the ethical underpinnings of foreign policy. Furthermore, feminist scholarship provides insight into the ways in which gendered power hierarchies, privileges and institutions impede on such things as gender equality, justice and bodily integrity, all of which are key impediments to global gender justice. By way of conclusion, we draw attention to the novelty of the theoretical framework and its potential to enable future studies of feminist foreign policy and ethical foreign policy more broadly.

Feminist foreign policy as a practice of international ethics

Classical realist thought¹³ stipulates that states' international behaviour and interaction are principally guided by their pursuits of self-help, survival, security and their maximisation of national interests defined in terms of power. Neo-realists¹⁴ put more emphasis on the structure of international politics than the distinctiveness of states' domestic and international characteristics. The position of the latter is that the restraints emanating from the logic of anarchy and the global distribution of power capabilities impose restrictions upon the freedom and choices of international actors. In an anarchical international order then there is little opportunity to pursue foreign and security policies that rest on either ethical considerations or emancipatory messages such as feminism.

Located at the other end of the scholarly spectrum are a large number of critical analyses of international ethics, many of which are broadly located within the tension arising from 'our statist obligations to our own political community and our cosmopolitan duties to distant others'.¹⁵ Communitarians tend to view states as 'situated selves and their sense of morality and solidarity is both socially constituted and confined to their conationals'.¹⁶ Meanwhile, cosmopolitans do not differentiate between insiders and outsiders and assume that the same morality applies within and beyond the confines of the state. There are few examples of states that are entirely other-regarding; rather they mediate their national interests and security needs in consideration of distant others. As we discuss below, a feminist foreign policy is an illustrative case of such a mediation process. Our position here is that the study of a feminist foreign policy should be situated among central debates on ethical foreign policy and good international conduct. More specifically, the study of feminist foreign policy can enrich the study of international ethics by exposing injustices and struggles for gender justice at the international level. This includes the analysis of the empowerment and protection of women and girls, the reduction of gendered inequalities and violence, as well as uncovering the experiences

and stories of other marginalised groups. These areas are usually not given much attention within the study of ethical foreign policy, although they are of central concern for feminist IR theory. The transformative ambition of feminist foreign policy requires sensitivity to the study of new practices, actors, policies and ethical frameworks. The assumption that foreign policy practice and discourse are located within ethical reasoning and conduct is a contested one. To fundamentally challenge deeply engrained patriarchal structures and gender bias is likely to be met with global resistance. Yet there are a range of scholarly studies on international ethics, broadly defined, that have sought to refine our understanding of the ethical underpinnings of foreign policy and good international citizenship, both in practice and theory. Tim Dunne and Nicholas Wheeler have explored the turn towards ethical foreign policy in the British context by evaluating the extent to which the United Kingdom under the leadership of Labour Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in the 1990s was to be considered a force for good. States that profess to be 'good citizens not only have to place order before the pursuit of narrow commercial and political advantage, they are also required to forsake these ... when they conflict with human rights'.¹⁷ Andrew Linklater has constructed a conceptual yardstick for such good international citizenship against which states' ethical efforts can be critically evaluated. The criteria include such things as respect for human rights, humanitarian international law and courts, the laws of war, the right of non-sovereign communities and minorities. Although such ethical considerations are highly relevant for the analysis of feminist foreign policy, there is no principle of gender justice within Linklater's elaborated framework.¹⁸

David Chandler notes that there is a

shift, from the openly declared pursuit of national interests in foreign policy to the growing emphasis on ethical or moral duties to protect the rights and interests of others, often in areas where western states have little economic or geo-strategic interest'.¹⁹

Yet Chandler posits that ethical foreign policy provides states with an opportunity to take the attention away from domestic political shortcomings by 'buttressing the moral authority of governments, often under question in the domestic context'.²⁰ This insight could help to elucidate the co-constitutive relationship between domestic and international gender practices and forms of subordination.

Key here is also scholarship on so called 'good states' and the idea that such actors use their foreign and security policies to impact on global justices beyond borders. Peter Lawler notes that the internationalist-inclined Scandinavian states in particular have sought to 'pursue authentically other-regarding values and interests' suggesting, he argues, 'the possibility of a more modest, open and thus sustainable understanding of the Good State'.²¹ Our position here is that the conduct of ethical foreign policy builds on a commitment to transformative change of global politics through the pursuit of good international citizenship, which requires sensitivity to the needs and wants of 'others' in foreign policy practice.²² As Dan Bulley notes, 'both ethics and foreign policy consider how we constitute and relate to otherness'.²³ This entails that any attempt to separate ethics and foreign policy is unproductive since both strands concern identity, otherness

and responsibility. Yet, scholarship on ethical foreign policy almost entirely lacks a focus on gender (in)justice.

In contrast, feminist scholarship places gender equality, discrimination and violence at the centre of the analysis of foreign policy conduct and discourse.²⁴ Critical and feminist scholars view the academic study of foreign policy as having too narrow a view of politics, which tends to privilege the state as the 'proper' unit of analysis.²⁵ State-centred institutional frameworks often are not considered conducive to the promotion of feminist ethical agendas since they are embedded within patriarchal and oppressive power structures.²⁶ This brings Jacqui True to argue that feminist theory 'has yet to be translated into guidelines for ethical conduct by state and non-state actors in international relations'.²⁷

Civil society and transnationalism are instead seen as key sites of ethical transformation, brought about by the challenge of gendered binaries and power relations in global politics. In this regard, feminist IR theory²⁸ is a champion of the study of non-state actors, transnational forces and individual human beings by paying attention to ethical transformations of global injustices. Hence, a critical investigation into the transformative potentials of feminist foreign policy takes account of the linkages between political elites and civil grass root movements, which in turn provides a normative framework for challenging widely held assumptions about the prevalent differences between the interests held by ordinary people and those espoused by political elites. In this regard, research on state feminism is informative and shows how gender equality can be enhanced by states in close collaboration with social movements and civil society.²⁹

The scholarly study of feminist foreign policy entails exposing global ethical dilemmas, such as sexual violence in conflict and the subordination of women in peace-making processes, and propagating for new ways of giving voices to those harmed by global injustices, in particular through the act of listening. Cynthia Enloe suggests that we should listen to the stories of women who have been subjected to violence and conflict.³⁰ This also involves being sensitive to the gendered practices that states pursue domestically and to the constitutive links between gender(ed) justice at home and abroad.³¹ For scholars, this requires reflexivity and awareness of their own situatedness within hierarchies of privilege versus the subjects of the study.³² Below we further develop the idea that a feminist ethical approach to the study of foreign policy requires critical engagement with notions of open and inclusive dialogue to expose the lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups. Utilising such an approach, new knowledge can be gained and integrated into the actual practices of gender-just international conduct,³³ which in turn can inform the study of ethical foreign policy more broadly.

A critical scholarly engagement with feminist foreign policy delivers

a more rigorous ethical yardstick than is currently available against which to evaluate the normative and feminist contents of states' international orientations, identities, and concrete policies. Indeed, those ethical norms are at the heart of the conduct of feminist foreign policy.³⁴

States that are wedded to the idea of purposefully conducting a feminist foreign policy tend to derive their ethical impetus from the WPS-agenda. Sweden's feminist foreign policy is a prominent example of such an endeavour. Sweden has actively sought to

adopt principles of gender justice, peace and security, which are associated with UN SCR 1325, as a platform for its external conduct. This commitment is also echoed in the foreign policies of Australia, Norway and Canada, all of which have clearly expressed their ethical commitment to the WPS-agenda in their foreign policy orientation and practice. This commitment, we argue, signals a departure from traditional elite-oriented foreign policy practices and discourses towards a more inclusive foreign policy. Such policy change is guided by broad ethical principles associated with contemporary international discourses on human security and a willingness to address embedded patriarchal power relations and practices beyond borders. Yet, the WPS-agenda is not in any way exhaustive of what a feminist foreign policy entails. Its contents, framings and implications have been subject to substantive critique among feminist scholars. Laura Shepherd, for example, notes that the WPS-agenda is in itself gendered and sustains deeply engrained myths of the woman as in need of masculinized protection.³⁵ Others critically probe the conceptual foundations of the WPS-agenda and its impact on policy-making and, as such, focused on how social and political dynamics are conceptualised in the resolution and to what extent it is applicable to different regional conflict settings.³⁶

Finally, it is important to highlight that the practice of foreign policy is frequently mediated through a variety of policy options and compromises, some of which might be inconsistent with the explicit ethical ideals and gender-just principles that are key to discourses and practices of feminist foreign policy. For instance, the foreign policies of the United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden are not solely inspired by the ethical contents of the WPS-agenda but also based on national interests that might constrain notions of ethical global obligation in significant ways. For example, Sweden's record as a world leading arms exporter is often highlighted to illustrate the inconsistencies embedded in its feminist foreign policy.³⁷ Hence, states that are committed to the conduct of feminist foreign policy and the normative ideals of the WPS-agenda are also constrained by their perceived national interests. Such interests may need to be balanced against commitments to an ethically informed feminist foreign policy. To frame pro-gender policies as 'smart' soft diplomacy is one attempt to circumvent such dilemma.³⁸ Canada, for example, mediates peace activism and soft power diplomacy within global ethical obligation, gender justice and notions of pragmatism on one hand as well as hard power to manage security threats on the other.³⁹ By exploring the tension between normative and interest-driven contents of a feminist foreign policy, we can gain new knowledge and policy insights into how pragmatism in foreign policy is exercised, and how it is managed within notions of global ethical obligation. To study and identify such linkages can also provide new insights into the way in which pragmatism at times impedes the ethical contents of a feminist foreign policy. For instance, feminist scholars in general hold a sceptical view with regard to the commitment of liberal states in promoting pro-gender norms as the latter is rarely accompanied by a denouncement of militarism.⁴⁰ The question how a state, claiming to pursue a feminist foreign policy, handles such tension between ethical considerations and national military security interests is challenging and interesting to study. In the following section, we will elaborate on the different ways feminist IR theory can advance the study of feminist foreign policy.

Feminist IR theory and the study of foreign policy

Feminist IR theory is key to the study of foreign policy because it challenges the invisibility of gender and the absence of women in international relations on many fronts, both in theory and in the practice of foreign policy and global politics more broadly.⁴¹ It is a body of critical engagements, which embraces liberal feminist, radical, post-structural and postcolonial perspectives. What all these strands of feminist research share is an overarching ambition to critically unpack gender inequalities in the prevalent global order and challenge the power hierarchies, privileges and gender institutions within it. Hence, most of the theoretical and methodological approaches rest on reflexivity and inclusivity as key components of the overall research process.⁴² So while mainstream IR theory largely tends to view states, nations, sovereignty and identities as given entities, feminist IR scholars argue that such categories are socially constructed and framed within gendered practices and power relations. For instance, polarised gendered binaries are frequently utilised in the political rhetoric that emerges from conflict and war as a way to call on citizens to support their nation when faced with perceived security threats and conflict.⁴³ Oftentimes such rhetoric builds on stereotypical understandings of what it means to be a male or a female citizen, and what gender-differentiated obligations individuals might have to the state and the nation in times of peace and war. Although international leaders, such as Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, are increasingly challenging the employment of gender binaries in the making of foreign policy, they are still highly present in states' diplomatic practices. For instance, a recurrent theme in Swedish feminist foreign policy is the assumption that many distant other women beyond national borders are in need of Western masculine protection. Indeed, the powerful dichotomy of the protector and the protected has been decisive for how international politics have been conducted and understood.⁴⁴ By applying feminist IR theory to the analysis of such themes, we can expose the usage of gender binaries in constituting ethical obligation in foreign and security policy practice, in particular by taking account of women's experiences of global affairs. This involves recognising that 'although women and girls are the predominant victims of sexual violence and men and boys the predominant agents, we must also be able to account for the presence of male victims and female agents'.⁴⁵

Feminist IR theory also offers a useful critique of state-centric theories and the ways in which they render invisible existing power hierarchies and gendered boundaries that determine the outcomes of foreign policy. The public sphere of state institutions has largely been associated with men and masculinity, and, this in turn, defines the international as the space in which women have no room, and, where femininity is excluded. As noted above, feminist scholars are highly sceptical of the transformative potential of state-generated feminism, in particular, the constraints that the institutionalised patriarchal order places on the state's ability to support and sustain feminist values and practices within and beyond borders.⁴⁶ Hence, a feminist assumption is that the involvement of civil society in domestic and foreign affairs is needed to emancipate women and men, at home and abroad. A critical examination of the ethics of feminist foreign policy could therefore enable a deeper analysis of this co-constitutive relationship. This would also involve asking whether the conduct of feminist foreign policy gives rise to a new range

of actors – state and non-state ones, practices and policy areas. If so, to what extent do they challenge embedded gender inequalities and forms of subordination in international society?

Representation and inclusion are recurrent features in feminist political theory and activism, dating back to the early suffrage movements and women's struggle for involvement as political actors in the public sphere. However, within the spheres of foreign policy and diplomacy, the underrepresentation of women continues to be strikingly high. Despite significant inroads in recent decades, the statistics still reflect persistent gender inequalities in global affairs.⁴⁷ This is why inclusion and representation are emphasised within the 1325 agenda. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, several states have integrated feminist and pro-gender norms in their foreign policies, advocating gender-just inclusion and more diverse representation as key to successful peace processes. For instance, the Swedish government has explicitly targeted representation as one of its three pillars of its foreign policy (the other two are rights and resources).⁴⁸ A framework for studying feminist-informed foreign policy would therefore need to take account of such moves, in particular, the ways in which feminist theory, with its emphasis on representation and inclusion, can enable a critical investigation of women's presence in peace negotiations, and how their inclusion can lead to a more equitable distribution of power in conflict ridden societies. For instance, in 2012, only 2.5 per cent of all chief mediators and 9 per cent of all negotiators were women.⁴⁹

Theorising the significance of peace, security and gender justice for the conduct of feminist foreign policy entails analysing (and contesting) stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity in relation to key sites of power and leadership, the deconstruction of gender binaries that are present in states' international conduct, the focus on women as a universal category and the (re)production of intersectional relations in foreign policy practice. Developing such a framework for the study of feminist foreign policy then implies the recognition of other social categories, including class, ethnicity and sexuality, all of which interact with gender to produce intersectionally gendered subjects.⁵⁰ It also involves engaging with questions surrounding states' efforts to place issues of intersectional relevance on the global agenda by moving beyond simple gender binaries and opening the study for a variety of gendered subjects, which in turn enables open, inclusive and localised ethical dialogue across contexts.

Ethics of care and feminist foreign policy

Embedded in feminist notions of foreign and security policy is an ethical commitment to the care and nurturing of distant others, who reside beyond the confines of one's own political community. As noted above, scholarship on ethical foreign policy is surprisingly void of gender analysis and feminist ethical engagement despite the fact that it is situated within the subfield of normative IR that engages widely with issues related to global justice and equality. We therefore propose that the ethics of care provides fertile ground for thinking through the analysis of feminist-inspired foreign and security policy discourse and practice as well as identifying the limits to such engagement. Ethics of care scholarship has been inspired by social psychology.⁵¹ Carol Gilligan argues that care is a form of moral development distinct from the justice-oriented moral dimension

stemming from Enlightenment thinking. In the first generation of studies on ethics of care, there was an explicit association with female experiences as an alternative to male-led justice reasoning. A key contention here is that the mother's distinct relationship with her child gives her a set of caring and nurturing skills that are transferrable beyond the immediate family and nation. Sara Ruddick, among others, suggests that maternal and caring relations can bring about peace.⁵² Still, while maternal care is strongly associated with women's bodies, Ruddick insists that mothering is not a practice confined to women alone.⁵³ Yet, in *realpolitik*, women, and mothers in particular, are frequently depicted as innately peaceful, which is an assumption that has been contested and rejected in feminist IR scholarship.⁵⁴ Instead, feminist ethical theory has been attentive not to essentialise all women as peaceful, but instead to fully recognise the differences that exist between women. The second generation of care ethics scholars understand care in broader terms. For example, Joan Tronto defines care as 'everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible'.⁵⁵

We find the broad range of scholarly efforts to globalise ethics of care⁵⁶ useful to theorise feminist foreign policy because it can shed light on how care principles may be used in foreign policy in an effort to address global gender inequalities, violence and protection across borders. This necessitates taking issue with the assumption that ethics of care is inapplicable to the study of global gender politics because of its essentialisation of women's experiences and universal lack of agency. Fiona Robinson rightly notes,

concerns over the essentialism of care ethics must be taken seriously, I would argue that it is only a narrow, orthodox, ethics of care – the view of care as essentially a morality for women, belonging in the private sphere and valorising 'dependence' over 'independence' – to which these criticisms actually apply ... clearly, the importance of an ethics of care, and its transformatory potential, does not, and indeed must not, rest on its association with women. While it is crucial to avoid undermining its feminist origins ... the ethics of care is significant because it represents an alternative view of ethics which is relevant beyond the role of women within the family ... 'it' extends beyond the personal to the political and, ultimately, to the global context of social life.⁵⁷

In line with Robinson's argument, we challenge orthodox conceptions of care ethics as a 'morality for women' only, while maintaining that its emphasis on dialogue and care is a useful approach to critically unpack the moral ambitions of a feminist and gender-based foreign policy-making. Moreover, we argue that the ethical foundations of feminist foreign policy, by and large, are consistent with the normative imperative of a globalised ethics of care, which contends that 'those who are powerful have a responsibility to approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why and how the structures of existing social and personal relations have led to exclusion and marginalization'.⁵⁸ In contrast, orthodox notions of foreign policy do not consider the situatedness of the state within distinct cultural, political and ethical settings nor the intersectional subjectivities and moral preferences of the citizens inhabiting that sphere. However, an ethics of care approach to the study of foreign policy is sensitive to such variation because it is based on a relational ontology, which addresses the moral relations between human beings. Hence, an ethics of care approach to the study of feminist foreign policy takes into account the situated moral stories and experiences of individuals and in particular women

whose voices have not been considered in traditional foreign policy analysis and IR.⁵⁹ With an increasing number of states advocating pro-gender norms in foreign policy and principles of care and empathy, ethical foundations for the actual conduct of foreign policy become important to analyse. Yet, theoretical tools developed for such analysis need to embrace the criticisms that the ethics of care essentialises women's aptness for care and nurturing, and, as such reduces their agency and actual engagements in global politics and participation public life.⁶⁰

The emphasis on care and relationality also provide fertile ground for ethically unpacking the situated contents of a feminist foreign policy. As mentioned, an increasing number of states are resolutely pushing for a distinct feminist stance on foreign policy-making regarding the inclusion and representation of local women in world politics. Canada's feminist development policy, for instance, is grounded in the assumption that

women and girls have the ability to achieve real change in terms of sustainable development and peace, even though they are often the most vulnerable to poverty, violence and climate change. So we will work closely with local women's rights groups, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health ... we will make sound decisions based on evidence and closely track our progress, but in a manner adapted to the needs of different stakeholders in different contexts.⁶¹

Swedish feminist foreign policy is grounded in a commitment to engage with distinct ethical reflections, experiences, needs and wants of local populations as a way of gaining insights and knowledge how to support local peace, conflict resolution and the eradication of gendered violence. Moreover, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2015) highlights the significance of 'the participation of women and girls as actors in peace processes in conflict countries, including by encouraging parallels to the Swedish network for women mediators and supporting local women leaders, women's rights activists, women's organisations' as well as 'ensuring that women and girls are included and that their experience is taken into account in the design of mechanisms and systems for early conflict warning and in conflict analyses'.⁶² The unpacking of such discursive foreign policy statements enables a critical analysis of the presence of care values in states' actual foreign policy practice. In this way, prevalent inconsistencies in the making of feminist foreign policy can be identified, which in turn can show in what ways they may impede its operationalisation in practice. For instance, both Canada and Sweden can be criticised for not sufficiently matching their care for distant other women living in conflict or poverty-struck zones with an empathetic commitment to their own indigenous or marginalised refugee populations.

While feminist IR theory remains alert to and critical of the structural underpinnings of world politics, the ontological relationality of the ethics of care provides a key contribution because it takes stock of the experiences of the people at the receiving end of feminist foreign policy. In contrast with orthodox foreign policy practice and theory, which tends to disregard the lived histories of women and colonial subjects, an ethics of care approach would actively seek to uncover their stories to enable intersectional and situated analyses of foreign policy. This involves investigating whether states and other actors actually employ care and empathy as a normative ideal in their pursuit of foreign, security, defence and development policies. States tend to vary in their commitment to

such dialogue, but this does not mean that a global ethics of care should be dismissed in the context of foreign and security policy analysis. Instead a critical analysis of feminist-oriented foreign policy should seek to address the ethical question

how our view of security in global politics would change once we recognize and accept ... the ways responsibilities and practices of care grow out of relations of dependence and vulnerability of people in the context of complex webs of relations of responsibility.⁶³

This entails exploring to what extent the makers of feminist foreign policy take note of 'the everyday' and whether Robison's notion of 'a feminist ethics of security' which centres on 'marginalised sites' has some resonance with actual policy-making.⁶⁴

Ethics of care as foreign policy conduct is often expressed in notions of gender-just protection of such marginalised groups, in particular, the protection of women and children from gendered violence and discrimination. Here ethics of care scholar Joan Tronto highlights the shift in global relations from what previously was a 'right to intervene' and sovereign-based logic to 'the responsibility to protect' and an ethics of global care.⁶⁵ We propose here that protection, though at times requiring military means, should always rest on the act of listening to marginalised voices – a diplomatic tool that is key to the successful conduct of feminist foreign policy.

A foreign policy, which builds on the ethics of care as its foundation, rests on the idea of inclusive and ethical dialogues as well as acts of listening across borders and intersectional confines. Virginia Held holds that emotions, such as empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness, are sentiments that need to be cultivated as a significant element when making moral decisions.⁶⁶ Central to the analysis of feminist foreign policy then is the extent to which care, the act of listening and dialogical engagement really are key norms in the implementation of gender-just external relations? Here we find Christine Sylvester's⁶⁷ concept of empathetic cooperation particularly useful and closely associated with the ethics of care.⁶⁸ Empathetic cooperation challenges sovereign rights and national interests as the sole platforms for international interactions in favour of empathy across intersectional and ethical boundaries. Laura Sjoberg also suggests that emphatic cooperation is a fruitful platform for the development of a feminist international security ethic, which pays attention to care and justice as well as the gendered structures that have led to the marginalisation of vulnerable groups across international society.⁶⁹ It may also lead to 'a form of knowledge of other persons that draws explicitly on the commonality of feelings and experiences to enrich one's understanding of another in his or her own right'.⁷⁰ If empathy is an expressed willingness and ability to appreciate the other then empathetic cooperation is 'a process of positional slippage that occurs when one listens seriously to the concerns, fears and agendas of those one is unaccustomed to hearing'.⁷¹ In short, we argue that empathetic cooperation, as part of the making of a feminist foreign policy, may be a way of opening up for a global ethic and concrete expressions of politics, which do not privilege statist interests and notions of security. Moreover, it moves the agenda towards human security while respecting cultural difference.⁷² Thus, to explore the presence of empathetic cooperation in the conduct of feminist and gender-based foreign policy is key to the analysis of feminist foreign policy and to ethical investigations into ethically minded foreign policy more broadly.

Conclusion

An increasing number of states integrate feminist and pro-gender norms in their foreign policies and in some cases, with Sweden and Canada being instructive examples here, they have even adopted a feminist framing of their foreign policies. While feminist foreign policies and practices are still in the making, we have argued that there is a need to critically unpack the ethical and feminist underpinnings of these recent developments. This in turn calls for the development of a theoretical framework that builds on central scholarship on international ethics, feminist IR theory and the ethics of care. The framework proposed here is novel and analytically very applicable to the analysis of feminist foreign policy in three distinct ways. First, as we have argued throughout, it makes an original feminist contribution to the study of ethical foreign policy. Studies on international ethics have provided ground breaking insights into the conduct of ethical foreign policy and the possibility of international good citizenship and good statehood, but most interventions are gender-blind, and as such, ignore the quest for global gender justice. Our analytical framework provides a corrective by highlighting the presence of inequalities and gendered practices of discrimination that impede on states' ethical ambitions to further international justice. Hence, by paying attention to such things as gender-based violence, and by identifying the lack of inclusion and representation of women and other marginalised groups in key foreign policy processes, a richer set of reflections on the conditions, success and moral ambitions of ethical foreign policy can be offered.

Second, our analytical framework provides insight into the ways in which feminist IR theory and care ethics can be applied productively to the study of other-regarding foreign policy. The framework triggers a set of innovative questions and points to new potential areas for analysis – among other things, it invites a critical investigation of the constitutive links between the domestic ethical setting in which foreign policy is constituted and the global applications of that policy. More specifically, it enables an analysis of the extent to which a specific state's pro-gender and feminist foreign policy reflects a strong commitment to gender equality at home. Moreover, it raises questions about inclusion and representation by critically evaluating which actors and organisations are partaking in the making of an ethically infused foreign policy? Perhaps most importantly, it facilitates a critical evaluation of the capability of feminist foreign policy to capture localised experiences by taking account of the voices of women, and other intersectional subjects in the making of ethically informed feminist foreign policy.

Third, the framework can generate empirical knowledge that in turn can provide policy relevant input to the refinement and formulation of an actual feminist foreign policy. For instance, the adoption of an intersectional sensitive approach provides for greater understandings of the gendered logics and intersectional power relations that are present in foreign policy processes. Moreover, the strong emphasis on care and relationality provides fertile ground for enhancing knowledge of the situated contents of a feminist foreign policy and calling into attention the importance of listening in foreign policy practice. In contrast to other efforts to theoretically approach ethical foreign policy, our approach is grounded in an explicit employment of an ontological relationality, which takes account of actual experiences and stories that in many cases have been untold. In this regard, we have found it useful to include the idea of 'empathetic cooperation',

which highlights the full engagement of inclusive and ethical dialogue across borders and intersectional confines, thus uncovering stories that other mainstream foreign policy approaches tend to neglect. Moreover, our framework may serve as a normative yardstick against which we can critically evaluate the outcomes of a state's claimed feminist foreign policy goals. This in turn allows us to shed light on the tensions between the ethical underpinnings of feminist foreign policy ideas and the pragmatism of foreign policy practice. Our theorisation of feminist foreign policy then adds considerable rigour to existing scholarship on states' ethical conduct by adding an explicit feminist angle and by situating the study within feminist ethical reasoning.

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