

Should South Africa Embrace a Feminist Foreign Policy to Respond to Gender Inequality?

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Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to critically examine whether South Africa can adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) that speaks against biphobia, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, inequality, and patriarchy. The authors argue that South Africa should consider adopting a feminist foreign policy that is gender inclusive of women, children, and gender non-conforming persons. Currently, South Africa does not describe its policy as feminist but rather as having women on the foreign policy agenda, i.e., women's representation in parliament. We argue that the state has failed to oppose all forms of gender dominance and oppression. During the second Presidential Summit on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) in November 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa reiterated GBVF as the first pandemic in SA, as we continuously see the increase of rape and murders against women, children, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community. This study, therefore, sought to critically unpack the possibility of a safe and inclusive South Africa for women, children and gender non-conforming persons through the adoption and implementation of a feminist foreign policy. The first country that implemented the feminist foreign policy was Sweden. The goal of Sweden's policy implementation in 2014 was to address the country's gender disparity issues, and as a result, they also sought to consider all gender perspectives in all policy creation and decision-making. The researchers reflect on Sweden's foreign policy from a feminist perspective as possible lessons for South Africa and attempt to clarify South Africa's position with regard to gender emancipation and whether this could serve as a platform to implement a feminist foreign policy.

Keywords: South Africa, foreign policy, feminism, gender equality, patriarchy

Introduction and background

The origins of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) date all the way back to Sweden, the country that pioneered efforts to promote peace and development through transnational feminist solidarity. As Sweden places such a strong emphasis on the concepts and practices that support women's utilisation of their human rights, it does not view these challenges as women's or gender-related, but as human rights-related. Through feminist foreign policy, we can effectively oppose the violent global power systems, such as patriarchy, racism, cultural nationalism, imperialism, and militarism, which keep the majority of the population in a perpetual state of vulnerability and despair. This is feasible due to the fact that feminist foreign policy provides a potent lens through which these power systems could be combated. When the Swedish government announced it would pursue a feminist foreign policy, its objectives were also established.

These objectives are commonly known as the "three Rs." The letter R represents "rights" first. The purpose of rights, according to Egnell (2017) and Regeringskansliet (2015), is to "protect the human rights of women and girls and combat all forms of violence and discrimination based on gender" (Egnell, 2017:573; Regeringskansliet, 2015:13). The objective of representation is to increase the number of women involved in decision-making at all levels. Resource allocation is the pursuance of a gender-balanced distribution of assets and resources. Occasionally, a fourth R is added to the conclusion of the phrase. A genuine and contemporary understanding of women and their circumstances is one of the objectives of reality. The agenda calls for the promotion of sustainable peace and development, as well as the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (Wallstrom, 2015:7). Work toward a tranquil and prosperous future for all people is also on the agenda. A feminist foreign policy is first and foremost a new perspective and practice through which gender equality is methodically and consistently incorporated into all aspects of the foreign policy agenda. According to Lackenbauer (2016:14), this strategy will be implemented in international politics through promotion, dialogue, cooperation, and negotiation, among other means.

Research on Sweden's feminist foreign policy is rare since it is a phenomenon that is still relatively young. The study seems to have focused mostly on clarifying its goals, obstacles and what it actually means (Egnell, 2017; Lackenbauer, 2016). This is likely due to the confusion and doubts that it initially raised when it was first introduced. The controversy between ideology and practice stems from the fact that feminism is incompatible with some of Sweden's political pragmatism. Critics of the policy mostly point out a few issues that keep coming up: the fact that it is likely to face opposition from other countries because some of its goals are seen as controversial, like promoting SRHR; the idea that a feminist foreign policy is the same thing as soft power and will not be enough to solve some important security problems; and the disagreement between theory and practice. Therefore, even though feminist foreign policy has been called into question and opposed (in addition to being acclaimed), it has not yet been studied in the context of South Africa.

This study attempts to answer the following question: "Is it possible for South Africa to adopt a feminist foreign policy to reduce the widespread gender inequality that exists in the country?" This inquiry is framed in accordance with the premises of the feminist foreign policy theory known as the "4 Rs". The incorporation of feminist approaches to foreign policy into this research has the potential to shape gender equality legislation in South Africa. The discussion on feminist foreign policy is mostly focused on two questions: What exactly do the terms "feminism" and "feminist foreign policy" mean? What kind of thing should it be? How can we assess the feminist foreign policy that governments are actually implementing in light of both its own objectives

and broader feminist viewpoints? After the political activity, academic efforts to clarify concepts and create theory have followed, building on feminist methods in a variety of fields of study. The purpose of this study was for the researchers to attempt to elucidate South Africa's position with regard to gender liberation and to determine whether or not this may act as a foundation for the implementation of feminist foreign policy.

Feminist Foreign Policy: Explained

The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) describes feminist foreign policy (FFP) as a multidimensional political framework designed to rethink traditional foreign policy by approaching the hierarchical global system with an analytical lens, navigating it through a gendered lens and centring the well-being of marginalised people within its policy.



Figure 1: Evolution of Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy. Source: own data

Figure 1 depicts the evolution of FFP since Sweden first proclaimed its intention to implement the new policy. After Sweden's announcement, think tanks such as CFFP were established, and nations, including Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, and Mexico, declared their intent to adopt FFP. The Swedish government adopted a progressive foreign policy in 2014. Sweden's Prime Minister described the transition to a distinctively feminist foreign policy as the country becoming more courageous, stating that "it is about standing against the systemic and global subordination of women" (Nordberg, 2015; Aggestam & Rosamond, 2019). Aggestam and Rosamond (2019) contend that the implementation of feminist foreign policy in Sweden was largely attributable to the domestic "pro-gender values" that have been ingrained in Sweden's pursuance of feminism abroad and in the state since the 1970s.

The feminist foreign policy of Sweden was initiated from the top down and refined through consultation with the entire Swedish Foreign Service. Before implementing a feminist foreign policy, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested input from all departments on how it could be implemented in each department. With close to a hundred responses, ideas, and suggestions, the initial plan for instituting feminist foreign policy in all of Sweden's foreign

affairs departments was developed. Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019:34) identifies this process and unambiguous leadership during the implementation of its feminist foreign policy as success factors (Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Since Sweden's feminist foreign policy is still a comparatively new phenomenon, research on it is limited. Due to the confusion and questions, it sparked when it was first introduced, research appears to have primarily focused on delineating what it actually means and what its objectives and challenges are (Egnell, 2017; Lackenbauer, 2016). Criticism of the policy focuses primarily on a few recurring issues: the international resistance it is likely to encounter, as parts of its agenda can be perceived as controversial (such as the promotion of SRHR); the assumption that a feminist foreign policy is equivalent to soft power and will be insufficient to address some pressing security issues; and the controversy between ideology and practice, implying that feminism is incompatible with some of Sweden's political practices. Consequently, even though feminist foreign policy has been questioned and criticised (as well as celebrated), it appears that the issue of its applicability to the African context has been rarely raised. Given South Africa's reputation as one of the world's most progressive countries, it is difficult to disregard this policy.

Motivations behind the Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden

Women have participated in diverse ways in the development and implementation of foreign policy initiatives. Several women have held the position of chief of state, including Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Golda Meir in Israel, and Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka (Mintz & DeRoue, 2014:143). In addition to serving as chiefs of state, women have held important positions in international decision-making, including Condoleezza Rice, the former national security advisor and secretary of state of the United States, Ann Linde, the current minister of foreign affairs of Sweden, and others. Angevine (2021) indicates that women in high politics "have a history of expanding the policy agenda to address the political interests of women as a group", which is frequently implemented in foreign policy.

Angevine (2021) argued that the shared experience of being a woman (between Congresswomen and women internationally) "fosters a global affective gender tie" due to international and domestic gender discrimination systems. Human rights violations are frequently cited as the underlying cause of domestic and international conflict by scholars of international relations. Sweden adheres to this principle, placing human rights at the forefront of its foreign policy and positioning women and LGBTQ+ individuals "at the center of its bilateral and multilateral relations" (Carlson-Rainer, 2017: 82). Sweden's diplomats emphasize that a nation that oppresses more than half of its population cannot support a democratic society (Carlson-Rainer, 2017).

Margaret Margot Wallstrom, the former prime minister for foreign affairs of Sweden and the person responsible for the establishment of a feminist foreign policy (Foster & Markham, 2023), discusses the implementation of the policy in an interview, explaining that she wanted to establish parameters that Sweden's embassies and diplomatic representation could use to create real change in the world. She desired that these adjustments in foreign policy be practical (Vogelstein, 2019). Sweden's implementation of a feminist foreign policy followed several years of the country's emphasis on gender equality and human rights. The motivation for advocating a sincere feminist foreign policy was "based on the conviction that sustainable peace, security, and development can never be achieved if half of the world's population is excluded" (Baylis, 2020).

Sweden's commitment to human rights and a progressive foreign policy is reflected in its foreign policy shifts with certain nations. Sweden was the first country to alter its aid policy toward Uganda when the death penalty for homosexuals became public knowledge in the early 2000s

(Terkel, 2009). Sweden severed a military agreement with Saudi Arabia in 2015, primarily due to Saudi Arabia's discrimination against women (Kouvo, 2019). During the first three years of Sweden's feminist foreign policy implementation, these new policies contributed to numerous global outcomes. In a communication released by Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, examples of results include an increase in the focus on women, security, and peace in the United Nations Security Council, an increase in publications on human rights situations in 135 countries, the adoption of legislation prohibiting the purchase of sexual relations in other countries, and the training of thousands of midwives in developing countries (Walfridsson, 2023).

As a result of Sweden's emphasis on resources for women and girls, analytical tools to assess the effects of trade on women and gender equality have been developed, raising awareness of the impact of trade policies on gender equality (Bergman Rosamond, 2020). Sweden prioritised gender mainstreaming in its grant management and pursued gender-responsive budgeting as a method of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to achieve economic parity. Sweden collaborated with the World Bank to survey and monitor discriminatory legislation in 173 nations, raising awareness of gender discrimination in countries other than Sweden. The support for women's organisations increased by 35 per cent between 2015 and 2016 as a consequence of Sweden's focus on resources for women and girls (Bergman Rosamond, 2020).

The six external goals of Sweden's feminist foreign policy are human rights, freedom from violence, participation in peace efforts, political participation, economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive rights and health (SRHR) (Bergman Rosamond, 2020). According to research conducted by UN Women and the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, not only the participation of women in foreign policy decision-making, but also their influence, increases the likelihood of international and domestic peace (Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019: 60). This study demonstrates the need to create a platform that elevates the diverse ideologies expressed by women at the table, rather than merely ensuring their presence at the table. Enloe (2014) notes the exclusions that diverse women face in international politics, describing these exclusions as a systemic issue that must be addressed in order to genuinely include women in foreign policy decisions. Women's contributions to international relations create a more diverse, progressive, and intersectional foreign policy that elevates the experiences of marginalised individuals.

Sweden's Shift Away from Feminist Foreign Policy in 2022

This section of the study unpacks some reasons why Sweden, after being the first country in the world to adopt FFP in 2014 to later dismantled it in 2022. There are varying voices and reasons as to why Sweden would have taken this stance. Unpacking and understanding these reasons will provide some sort of a lesson for South Africa to not fall into the same trap. In October 2022, Sweden formally discontinued its pioneering Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), a move announced by the newly elected centre-right coalition government led by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. This decision marked a significant departure from the foreign policy paradigm introduced by the Social Democratic government under former Foreign Minister Margot Wallström in 2014, which had positioned gender equality and women's rights as central to Sweden's international engagements (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). In the same vein, Walfridsson (2023) reveals that Sweden's FFP's revocation was "framed by a harsher political and security context, where the FFP was seen as at odds with Swedish interests and values – thereby signalling a step back from normative". As argued by these authors, Sweden's shift away from FFP can be attributed to a combination of ideological, strategic, and geopolitical factors. First, the change in government brought a reorientation of foreign policy priorities. The new Foreign Minister, Tobias Billström, stated that the government would not use the label "feminist" in its foreign policy,

arguing that “labels on foreign policy tend to obscure rather than clarify” (Reuters, 2022). This statement reflected a broader effort to depoliticise and rebrand Sweden’s diplomacy, aligning it more closely with what the government described as “Swedish interests and values” rather than ideological commitments.

Second, the decision to abandon FFP reflects a shift toward *realpolitik* and pragmatic diplomacy. Critics of the FFP had argued that its ideological framing occasionally generated diplomatic tensions, such as in 2015 when Sweden condemned human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, leading to a temporary breakdown in diplomatic relations and the cancellation of a major arms deal (Wikström, 2015; Aggestam et al., 2019). By de-emphasising ideological commitments, the new government aimed to recalibrate its foreign relations based on strategic and economic considerations. Third, geopolitical developments, particularly Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, further influenced the recalibration of Sweden’s foreign policy. The government of Sweden is argued to have prioritised its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) accession process and the enhancement of regional security cooperation, particularly within the Nordic-Baltic context (Smith, 2022). Notably, these developments necessitated a foreign policy framework focused more on security and defence alignment than on value-based diplomacy.

Finally, domestic political dynamics played a crucial role in shaping the new foreign policy direction. Wolf (2022) notes that the inclusion of the nationalist and anti-immigration Sweden Democrats in the governing coalition, albeit informally, brought to the fore political actors with limited commitment to gender-focused international agendas. As such, the abandonment of the FFP, therefore, can also be seen as a reflection of changing ideological preferences within Sweden’s political establishment. With all these varying reasons, it should be stated that Sweden has insisted that the abandonment of the FFP label does not equate to a rejection of gender equality. Rather, officials have claimed that issues related to women’s rights and gender remain integrated into Sweden’s foreign aid and diplomatic efforts, albeit without the explicit feminist framing (Billström, 2022). The authors of this study argue that South Africa should adopt an FFP to curtail its escalating gendered violence problems. However, having seen Sweden abandoning its FFP commitments after having been the first country to adopt such a policy in 2014 can provide a valuable case study for South Africa in the contemplation of its own feminist-oriented foreign policy frameworks. Arguably, while Sweden’s FFP served as an influential model globally, its discontinuation also reveals critical structural, political, and ideological challenges that can arise in implementing and sustaining a feminist approach in international relations.

Can an FFP truly advance global gender equality?

While admiring the possibility of a global commitment to end gendered violence, there is a need to also offer a critique of how the FFP can enable readers, researchers, and policy makers, with South Africa as a case study in this research to have a clear picture of the policy as a whole and be able to consider and put into context effectively. Undoubtedly, the rise of FFP has marked a transformative shift in the normative orientation of international relations, particularly since Sweden first adopted the approach in 2014. FFP explicitly aims to place gender equality, women’s rights, and intersectional justice at the heart of diplomatic, development, trade, and security agendas (Aggestam, Rosamond & Kronsell, 2019). While the emergence of FFP has generated optimism about the potential for gender-just global governance, it has also provoked significant criticism and scepticism. This paper explores whether FFP can meaningfully advance global gender equality and outlines the major theoretical and practical critiques of the framework.

Advocates argue that FFP offers a radical reimagining of international relations by challenging patriarchal, militarised, and state-centric approaches to global politics. Unlike traditional foreign

policy, which often marginalises gender as a secondary concern, FFP re-centres power, agency, and justice from a feminist lens. Aggestam et al. (2019) argue that FFP aims not only to promote gender equality but to transform the structures that reproduce gendered violence and exclusion. Feminist foreign policy also draws upon intersectional approaches that consider race, class, sexuality, and colonial histories, thus broadening the scope of diplomatic justice (Thomson, 2023).

In practice, FFP has led to tangible policy shifts. Sweden, under FFP, redirected development aid to support sexual and reproductive health rights, implemented a feminist trade policy framework, and increased women's participation in peace processes (Schulz & Yeung, 2021). Mexico and Canada have incorporated feminist principles in peacebuilding, indigenous diplomacy, and aid delivery. These efforts demonstrate that FFP can create institutional entry points for marginalised voices, particularly in areas traditionally dominated by masculinist paradigms such as security and defence (Enloe, 2014). However, despite its normative aspirations, FFP faces substantial critiques both in theory and in practice.

One notable critique stems from the postcolonial feminist perspective, which cautions against exporting Global North definitions of feminism to the Global South. There is concern that FFP can reproduce imperial logics by positioning Western states as saviours and framing women in the Global South as passive victims in need of rescue (Mohanty, 2003; Acharya, 2018). In that regard, it is argued that without meaningful partnerships with local feminist movements and contextual sensitivity, FFP risks becoming a top-down, technocratic intervention rather than a collaborative effort for justice. While taking this critique into cognisance, the authors argue that SA has a strong history of feminist movement organising, coupled with solid domestic legal frameworks championing gender equality. Therefore, an implementation of FFP in SA can be an integration of a long-standing intersectional and genuine commitment to peace and gender equality. For SA, we argue that the future of FFP depends not only on who adopts it but how it is implemented, who it serves, and whose voices are centred in shaping its goals, embracing an intersectional lens.

Why does South Africa need to consider Feminist Foreign Policy?

Global advancements in the promotion and protection of women's rights have occurred over the past few years. Even though there is still much work to be done, there have been significant milestones that should not be ignored. For instance, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security are both landmark events for the global promotion of gender equality. The UNSC Resolution, also known as the WPS agenda, requests that all UN member states "ensure the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding" (Thompson et al., 2021).

In addition, the resolution urges all parties to take special measures during armed conflicts "to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse" (Resolution 1325 of the General Assembly). 98 UN Member States have issued national action plans to implement the agenda since the implementation of the resolution, and several foreign ministers have sought to advance the resolution (Jutta, 2022). Consequently, the implementation of an FFP by some nations could be regarded as a step forward for gender equality, as expressed in UNSC Resolution 1325. This is supported by authors such as Aggestam and True, who have stated that in recent years, an increasing number of states have taken the initiative in promoting gender equality in global affairs. Through its constitution, the South African government has defined the advancement of women's issues, representation, gender equality,

empowerment, and leadership as diplomatic and economic prudence. New research indicates that increasing women's participation in peace processes as delegates and representatives, as well as in politics and civil society initiatives, can lead to a world with fewer conflicts (Thompson et al., 2021). Considering this, the implementation of an FFP appears to be the correct step towards a more gender-equal and inclusive world.

Due to the novelty of the FFP concept, there is presently no internationally accepted definition for it. Therefore, each country that has implemented an FFP has done so according to its own interpretation of feminism. This entails establishing their own priorities and strategies, while maintaining common principles and goals. FFP does not arise from a fixed definition of feminism in various contexts, and this presents both opportunities and challenges as the agenda continues to evolve. As a result, South Africa has the chance to define and redefine its own direction concerning rape and homicides against women, children, and the LGBTQI community.

South Africa and Sweden's 4Rs

As the Swedish example demonstrates, a feminist foreign policy is a comprehensive foreign policy that seeks to eliminate all forms of gender dominance and oppression as well as gender stereotypes. It also aims to provide women with the opportunity to participate in decision-making, represent the state, and execute "tough" issues about a country's external relations and status (van Wyk, 2019). Thus, a feminist foreign policy requires both abolitionism and democracy: the abolition of male dominance and patriarchy and the facilitation and maintenance of women's access to power at all levels. To accomplish this, norms, numbers, and practices must be coordinated. Haastrup (2020: 199–216) has examined gender in the context of South African foreign policy by concentrating on commitment, substance, and practice—aspects on which this contribution expands. These factors align with the 4Rs of the Swedish feminist foreign policy: rights, representation, resources, and reality.

The South African Constitution expresses the country's normative commitment to women's rights, empowerment, and gender equality. In addition, Chapter 9 of the Constitution established seven 'state institutions supporting constitutional democracy', including a Commission for Gender Equality (van Wyk, 2019). Contradictions have emerged between the law, society, and reality in relation to the concepts and definitions of woman, gender, and feminist/feminism, despite the laudable nature of this commitment to women's rights and representation. Legally and socially, a woman in South Africa is primarily identified by her heteronormativity. The terms *woman* and *gender* are frequently used interchangeably, resulting in contradictory policies, squandered resources, ineffective responses, and unfavourable results (reality). Moreover, in South Africa, gender-based violence (GBV) is viewed primarily as violence against women, highlighting the disregard for the nuances of women and gender. President Ramaphosa, speaking on National Women's Day in August 2022, equates gender-based violence with only violence against women (Ramaphosa, 2022). This presents an occasion to discuss the protection of other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTIs.

In his first address to the South African parliament as president, Cyril Ramaphosa acknowledged the existence of gendered and racialised disadvantages in South African society. This is, although South Africa has adopted and ratified significant international commitments to gender inclusion, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Similarly, South Africa ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), presently one of the most progressive and feminist legal frameworks. Moreover, South Africa led the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2011 to adopt Resolution 17/19, the organisation's first resolution challenging

it to consider discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) peoples seriously (Jordaan, 2017). CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol should link South Africa's internal propagation of pro-gender justice norms with its actual actions. Specifically, if the domestic ostensibly affects the international, it is worthwhile to consider the extent to which domestic constitutional protections have been effective in practice.

South Africa, like every other society, contends with gender inequality. In this context, gender inequality is typically viewed as a dichotomy between women and men, in which women and femininities remain subordinate to men and masculinities. Despite this, there is an acute awareness of the need to address these binary inequalities, which has led to the creation of the Commission on Gender Equality. Since 1994, more South African females have completed secondary and tertiary levels of formal education. Nonetheless, inequality exists in terms of employment rates and types of employment, with more men employed and a persistent gender pay disparity (International Labour Organisation, 2018).

Aside from this, it is well known that South Africa has a very high rate of gender-based violence, including femicide against women and gender non-conforming individuals. The South African Police Services (SAPS) recorded 49,455 sexual offences in 2017 — a record low. South Africa has a persistent gender problem within its borders (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2019). Posel (2004) observes that many of the debates surrounding sexual violence are frequently reactionary, as opposed to demonstrating a consistent commitment to a feminist policy against sexual violence. Despite the rhetorical and some material investments in gender equality, state interventions have not been viewed as diminishing these. Despite domestic conditions, South Africa's foreign policy trajectory suggests a different path for foreign policy.

The ANC's 1997 foreign policy outline states:

“An African Renaissance should be primarily characterised by a commitment to gender equality and the abolition of women's oppression, as well as a vision of gender equality. This necessitates that South Africa and our movement in particular play a significant role in these struggles globally and on the continent, including the revival of a pan-African women's movement. No renewal can occur in Africa so long as gender inequality remains entrenched on the continent and worldwide. The development of perspectives and approaches to international relations that emphasise gender equality and women's emancipation is crucial in this regard” (ANC, 1997).

It is reasonable to assert that the apartheid state was distinguished by its militarised heterosexual masculinity, which was enacted as the opposite of the feminised liberation movement (Conway, 2008). In the ANC, explicit feminist concerns about the distribution of power and the impact of gendered hierarchies were acknowledged but subordinated to class and race discourses. Possibly, the organisation of South Africa in the twenty-first century has been affected by the gendered conditions of society and the absence of response.

Lessons from the past implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy in Spain and Canada

The most important thing to do is to identify the problem which needs to be fixed. The problem identification ensures or directs the implementation of FFP.

Table 1: Routes to FFP

	Sweden	Canada	Spain
Nature of the problem	Gender inequality	Global poverty	Gender inequality
Solution to the problem	Strengthen all women's and girls' rights, representation and resources based on the reality they live in (4Rs)	Eradication of poverty through the empowerment of women and girls	Closing global gender gaps: -Making gender equality a priority in the Spanish External Action -including a gender equality focus in all areas of foreign policy
Outcome	FFP	FFP	FFP

Source: Own data

Table 1 illustrates the various routes countries have taken to develop and implement their feminist foreign policies. While Spain and Sweden share a common concern regarding the nature of the problem, as gender inequality, Canada faces a unique challenge, designating global poverty as its primary concern. The identification of the issue is a crucial initial stage in the formulation of foreign policy. Therefore, it is essential to have a problem closely related to feminism. Feminism is “a movement advocating for women’s social, political, legal, and economic rights to be equal to those of men” UN Women, n.d.). Therefore, for a policy to be considered feminist, it must, at least, seek to advance the equality of women’s and men’s legal rights.

The identification of gender inequality as a problem already demonstrates that women and men are unequal. As feminist policy, it can be assumed that the foreign policy will seek to advance the social, political, legal, and economic rights of women to promote gender equality (Parisi, 2020). The Canadian identification of the issue as global poverty diverges from that of Spain and Sweden. Although poverty affects women more than men, and therefore, battling poverty may help promote gender equality in some economic respects, it ignores other factors. Poverty is only one way in which women are discriminated against (Millar, 2018). By emphasising global poverty as the primary issue, Canada ignores the fact that women experience inequality in numerous other ways.

The comparison of these three nations in relation to the problem’s classification reveals that Spain and Sweden have policies consistent with the definition of feminism. This is because they identify gender inequality as the issue, and feminism seeks to achieve equality between men and women in their economic, social, political, and legal rights. As a result, this section’s analysis helps us comprehend how South Africa will need to define its feminist foreign policy.

Towards a Sustainable South African Feminist Foreign Policy

South Africa, like Sweden, Canada, Spain, and Norway, has consistently supported the nine Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council over the past two decades. As with other nations that assert a feminist foreign policy, the focus of implementation has been on the Global South, particularly Africa, as part of its Africa-first foreign policy. A feminist foreign policy prioritises the advancement of gender equality, gender non-conformity, and women’s rights. Locally (South Africa), regionally, and globally, a feminist foreign policy aims to draw attention to international peace institutions where women and other gender non-conforming individuals can participate in peace process agreements promoting gender equality. It should be noted that feminist foreign policy is relatively new, and Sweden is

well-known for implementing this policy. Therefore, South Africa, as a democratic progressive nation, may capitalise on feminist foreign policy to emancipate women. The feminist foreign policy aims to advocate for the amplification of voices opposing gender bias, which would aid in the gradual elimination of exclusive masculine agencies. South Africa can implement a feminist foreign policy that provides equality to people of all genders and sexualities, deconstructing the entrenched patriarchal mindsets that continue to prevail among men and women. It is no secret that gender norms and stereotypes continue to obstruct the path to equality, as evidenced by the rapidly increasing number of cases of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa. South Africa must be deliberate in its pursuit of gender justice, recognising that there is an urgent need at this juncture to examine its development and foreign policies through the lens of gender, aiming for a transformative and rights-based approach across all its national policies. The reimagined South African feminist foreign policy should aim to have a translation solidarity to fight against:

- Gender based violence and femicide.
- Hate crimes against gender non-conforming citizens.
- The trafficking of women and children
- The promotion of education for women, girls and gender non-conforming individuals
- Economic emancipation for women and gender non-conforming citizens
- Endorse women's leadership in politics, royalty and decision-making.

Today, international relations specialists with expertise in intersectional gender analysis are urgently required to evaluate socio-cultural, economic, and political matters. This will foster a more profound understanding of the gender-specific effects of reactions to both current and emerging circumstances. Feminist foreign policy seeks to confront the global system of labour division that marginalises women by relegating them to repetitive and poorly compensated positions. Spain has introduced a feminist foreign policy as part of the implementation of the Action Agenda in 2021. This policy acknowledges that the active involvement of women is crucial for democracy, peace, prosperity, and social progress. The objective of feminist foreign policy is to promote an anti-racist and decolonising approach. The concept of feminist foreign policy and feminist diplomacy, rooted in transnational feminist solidarity efforts from 1975–85, draws inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Foster & Markham, 2023). It urges states to actively promote values and adopt effective measures to ensure gender equality and the protection of women's human rights through diplomatic relations and practice.

The Swedish foreign feminist policy has undertaken the same initiative, intending to achieve gender parity in diplomacy through the elevation of women's representation in the role of ambassadors. The global community must prioritise this as a duty in accordance with our international obligations as well as a necessary step towards achieving a wider foreign policy agenda focused on promoting peace, security, and sustainable development. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret this universal understanding through an intersectional feminist lens that considers the socio-cultural context shaped by post-colonialism, the power dynamics in international relations, and the real-life experiences of citizens. Nations possess varied perspectives, and it is imperative to incorporate a feminist viewpoint in global affairs. This entails dismantling dominant power structures and institutions that perpetuate policies favouring minuscule minority groups on Earth. Therefore, it is crucial to confront the patriarchal system characterised by inequity, marginalisation, and oppression. It is crucial to acknowledge that patriarchy has a significant role in shaping our perceptions of gender, which in turn impacts our self-perception, relationships, and worldview.

Hence, by adopting a gender perspective, we can exert influence on policies at the local, national, and international levels, thereby shaping our developmental and revolutionary agendas.

Conclusion

The adoption of a feminist foreign policy is pertinent to the worldwide efforts to combat gender inequality. Nevertheless, the lack of a widely recognised definition can lead to confusion and uncertainty among nations. Therefore, it is essential to establish a specific set of defining features that can operate as a reference for distinguishing the primary elements of an FFP. South African policymakers can discern challenges that impact the country by employing a bottom-up approach that magnifies the difficulties experienced by its population. While this study has provided suggestions, it is important to note that these are not a definitive solution or cure. A thorough and practical consultation is necessary. According to Irwin (2019), countries must create explicit rules for the practical implementation of feminist foreign policy when adopting it. In addition, Irwin contends that nations adopting feminist foreign policy should proactively guarantee that gendered perspectives are integrated into the daily lives of foreign service personnel through integration and assistance. It is crucial to promote gendered thinking within households at the state level to adequately implement a feminist foreign policy.

To effectively combat gender-based violence and femicide, hate crimes against gender non-conforming individuals, human trafficking of women and children, and to promote education for women, girls, and gender non-conforming individuals, as well as economic empowerment and women's leadership in politics, royalty, and decision-making, South Africa and other countries must enhance their domestic policies to align with these objectives. By doing so, they can strive to achieve similar outcomes as those seen in Sweden. The FFP employs a human rights framework that focuses on advancing and safeguarding the human rights of women and marginalised groups in the community. The FFP in South Africa should strive to provide the complete fulfilment of fundamental liberties and individual freedoms for all. Presently, there is a slow rise of unforeseen opposition, nativism, and populism directed towards vulnerable communities, including the LGBTQ. The primary objective of the South African FFP should be to advance and safeguard the fundamental human rights of these neglected populations. The primary objective of the FFP is to integrate the endeavours of all civil society organisations and advocate for human rights. Hence, the excluded groups are entitled to the benefits of the FFP due to the presence of dispute resolution mechanisms integrated into the decision-making process.

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