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# CONCEPTUALIZING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: NOTES FOR MEXICO

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# Conceptualizing feminist foreign policy: notes for Mexico

The Mexican Government considers itself a feminist government. With this belief, it has carried out a series of actions aimed at achieving substantive equality between men and women. One of the guiding principles of Mexico's multilateral policy is gender equality and non-discrimination, based on the conviction that to achieve social well-being and development, no one can be left behind. In this context, during the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on September 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, claimed that "Mexico is a feminist country and our foreign policy will also be feminist"<sup>1</sup>.

Building on said announcement, during the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of Mexican Ambassadors and Consuls, celebrated on January 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE for its acronym in Spanish), introduced the basis and actions of Mexico's "feminist foreign policy", becoming —alongside with Sweden, Canada,

Norway<sup>2</sup> and France<sup>3</sup> — the fifth country in the world to adopt a similar initiative, and the first in Latin America and the Caribbean to put at the front gender equality in the international agenda and promote a progressive feminist agenda.

The conceptual proposal of Mexico's feminist foreign policy contains five lines of action aimed at orienting the government policies to reduce and eliminate structural differences, shortcomings, gaps and gender inequalities in

[1] SRE, "Discourse pronounced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, during the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", New York, September 28th, 2019, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/data/file/497977/280919\\_Mensaje\\_del\\_canciller\\_Marcelo\\_Ebrard\\_Casaubon.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/data/file/497977/280919_Mensaje_del_canciller_Marcelo_Ebrard_Casaubon.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[2] In 2018, France presented its National Strategy on Gender Equality 2018-2022, aimed at women empowerment around the world through the fight against sexual violence, labor equality and education for girls. See Directorate-General for Global Affairs, Culture, Education and International Development, *France's International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)* (Paris: French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018), [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/meae\\_strategie\\_-\\_en\\_cle076525.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/meae_strategie_-_en_cle076525.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[3] On September 2016, Norway presented a new Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. It has five goals that seek to promote gender equality in its foreign and development policy: 1) egalitarian, inclusive and equitable education; 2) parity in politics; 3) economic rights for women in equal conditions on the labor market; 4) eradication of violence and harmful practices against girls and women; 5) health and reproductive rights for girls and women. See Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Freedom, Empowerment and Opportunities. Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016), [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/fn/womens\\_rights.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/fn/womens_rights.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

order to build a more just and prosperous society. Later on, they will be analyzed.

The purpose of this note is to propose a theoretical and conceptual analysis of the feminist foreign policy, in order to contribute to the development of this approach.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, a historical account of the trajectory of feminism is given and the main actions and experiences of Sweden and Canada are recovered, as they were the first countries to participate in this initiative. Moreover, this paper outlines some actions to be taken by Mexico to develop this policy, which being in its first phase has great potential.

The main premise is that we have had significant improvements in gender equality but, in order to have a feminist foreign policy, not only must gender be recognized and reflected upon, but it is also necessary to involve, tag and make visible other categories to name the vulnerabilities to which many societies are currently subject. In this way, a profound change can be achieved in the way we think and carry out our foreign policy.

Moreover, to reach its goal, Mexico's feminist foreign policy must be in line with the national and international agenda on gender equality. Apart from having and active participation in multilateral fora, it is necessary to recognize and change the reality of discrimination,

[4] This is based on Anneris Chaparro's statement that "feminist thought is nourished by theoretical approaches, which at the same time imply a political positioning, because feminism involves both theoretical and practical thinking tools to reinterpret the world, to account for the mechanisms with which subordination is reproduced, to make a criticism of the inequalities that exist, to reveal them, to denaturalize them". Anneris Chaparro, "Las generaciones de feministas: un mosaico", *Letras Libres*, March 1, 2020, <https://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/revista/las-generaciones-feministas-un-mosaico> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

violence and inequality that women and girls face in the country's society.

Although Mexico has the institutional and legal framework to face challenges as femicides<sup>5</sup> and other forms of violence towards women<sup>6</sup>, a tangible proof of its commitment announced at the United Nations, the coordination between government institutions will be central to implement the current legislation. A feminist foreign policy can be a catalyzer for national policies. An equal society does not have to be limited only to gender equality, but it can be a good point of departure to address other inequalities. Hence, the feminist foreign policy should be integrated in other national efforts, such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, unlike other feminist foreign policies, the one from the Mexican government has been developed in a particular context with

[5] According to data presented by the Executive Secretariat of the National System on Public Security, the number of femicides in Mexico went from 426 in 2015 to 906 in 2018. Presidency of the Republic, *Estrategia Nacional para la Implementación de la Agenda 2030 en México* (2020), <https://www.gob.mx/conavim/es/articulos/logros-y-acciones-del-sistema-nacional-por-la-seguridad-de-la-mujer?idiom=es> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[6] Apart from the General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free from Violence, there are other legal instruments at the state and municipal levels that have been replicated in other countries. For more information: National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, "Logros y acciones del Sistema Nacional", Government of Mexico, 1 de noviembre de 2019, <https://www.gob.mx/conavim/es/articulos/logros-y-acciones-del-sistema-nacional-por-la-seguridad-de-la-mujer?idiom=es> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[7] In fact, Mexico's vision for 2030 is "Work to guarantee a life free from violence for all girls and women, in the public and private sphere, as well as human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other types of exploitation". Presidency of the Republic, *Estrategia Nacional para la Implementación de la Agenda 2030 en México*.



important public security challenges that, as happens with migration, climate change and other phenomena, affects girls and women differently. Regarding security, it can lead to a greater number of crimes perpetrated against them<sup>8</sup>, which is why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must establish an effective communication with all the areas in government in charge on implementing national policies. Precisely, one of the pillars of the feminist foreign policy is aimed at achieving this goal.

[8] For more information, review the most recent data of the Executive Secretariat of the National System on Public Security “Información sobre violencia contra las mujeres (Incidencia delictiva y llamadas de emergencia 9-1-1), febrero 2020”, Government of Mexico, March 25, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

## Feminism and its historical trajectory

Feminist theory can be understood as a social movement and a theoretical proposal. Both are complementary and have in common the critique of the patriarchal values and dynamics on which the world’s states and societies were structured, ideas that have their remote origins in the 18th century, when the first favorable opinions regarding women’s social integration were shaped,<sup>9</sup> as a consequence of the enlightened debate on terms such as *equality*, *freedom* and *rights*.

Despite the ideas that resulted from these reflections, the change in thinking brought about by the Enlightenment did not alter the binary

[9] Yetzy Villarroel Peña, “Los aportes de las teorías feministas a la comprensión de las relaciones internacionales”, *Politeia*, vol. 30, no. 39, July-December, 2007, 66.



conception of man and woman,<sup>10</sup> whose space assigned within society according to their sex continued to draw the line between the public and the private sphere; in other words, despite the reflection on rights and freedoms, and regardless of their social situation, enlightened thinking deprived women of their own sphere of citizenship and freedom.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid-19th century, the first wave of the feminist movement (1850-1920) emerged,<sup>12</sup> demanding rights from male power systems, the inclusion of women in the institutional apparatus, and clearing the path for the debate of equality in relation to men.<sup>13</sup> This was the first stage of a series of reforms that the feminist movement carried out in the political organization of women

and work life.<sup>14</sup> This made it possible to identify the mechanisms of exclusion,<sup>15</sup> which were thoroughly discussed in the following stages of the movement, as well as instruments of organization to counteract the omission of women in public spaces. The distinctive element of this first wave was the right to vote.

Despite the strength of the issue of women's suffrage, the feminist movement suffered a setback after it was won. One of the reasons behind this was the reduction of a whole social revolution to a single problem; that is, the capitalist nature of the movement did not pay attention to social class barriers and neglected the needs of working women, who were subject to greater vulnerabilities. Being disconnected from the realities of other women, the suffragist movement was unable to undermine the patriarchal structure at a level deep enough to promote the transformation of social attitudes and structures, instructions and personality.<sup>16</sup>

This led to the emergence of the second wave (1970-1990)<sup>17</sup>, marked by the struggle for

[10] Thinking about a "beyond the binary" perspective involves two important elements: reconsidering how the distinction between masculine/feminine and male/female has been conceptualized, and reflecting on whether the conceptualization of gender is actually strictly social, and whether that of sex is strictly biological. Joy L. Johnson, Robin Repta, "Beyond the Binaries", in *Designing and Conducting Gender, Sex, & Health Research*, eds. John L. Oliffe y Lorraine Greaves (London: Sage Publishing, 2012), 17, [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/40428\\_Chapter2.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/40428_Chapter2.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[11] Cfr. Amelia Valcárcel, *La memoria colectiva y los retos del feminismo* (Santiago: UNO-ECLAC Women and Development Unit, March, 2001), 8-9, <https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/5877/S01030209.pdf?sequence=1> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[12] In feminist theory studies, the concept of *waves of feminism* is often used to describe different stages. Despite their usefulness, it is imperative to recognize that these categories are a simplification of reality, since each wave has its particular characteristics, but there are elements present in all of them and, in addition to the ruptures, certain continuities can be identified.

[13] "Corrientes feministas. Entrevista con Andrea Franulic", in Andrea Franulic Depix, December, 2014, <https://andrea-franulic.cl/videos/entrevista-corrientes-feministas-122014/> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[14] Kate Millett argues that education was the most pressing goal at the beginning of the movement, because throughout the 19th century, women's access to this right was restricted to a minimum of training, a gentle veneer that was not supposed to exceed the threshold of instruction. Kate Millett, "The Woman's Movement", in K. Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 72-73.

[15] Mary Nash, *Mujeres en el mundo. Historia, retos y movimientos* (Madrid: Alianza, 2004), 70-71.

[16] K. Millett, "The Woman's Movement", 166.

[17] Some authors agree that the second wave can also include the decade of 1950 and 1980s. Cf. Melissa Fernández Chagoya, "Olas del feminismo: la perenne búsqueda de la igualdad", *Agnosia. Revista de Filosofía del Colegio de Filosofía y Letras*, [http://www.ucsj.edu.mx/agnosia/index.php/component/k2/item/414-olas-del-feminismo-la-perenne-busqueda-de-la-igualdad#\\_ftn1](http://www.ucsj.edu.mx/agnosia/index.php/component/k2/item/414-olas-del-feminismo-la-perenne-busqueda-de-la-igualdad#_ftn1) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).



sexual and reproductive rights, and the questioning of prevailing patriarchal structures. While the importance of women suffragettes was recognized, this stage was marked by the desire to bring about a profound transformation of society, beyond vote and encompassing everyday life, institutions and politics. Among other rights, they demanded recognition of the economic value of domestic work, equality on wages and opportunities for women and men, and the decriminalization of abortion.<sup>18</sup> The feminists of this second stage claimed that a change in legislation (the right to vote) did not liberate women, because the structures of oppression persisted, a Marxist concept that encompassed economic aspects that put women at

disadvantage compared to men.<sup>19</sup> One of the most important slogans of feminism emerged from this stage: “the private is political”, whose main argument is that “the private world, daily life, family and work are articulated through power relations that establish multiple disadvantages and forms of discrimination against women”.<sup>20</sup>

The third wave of feminism (1990 to date) has been marked by a criticism of the previous waves, since it considers that their political and economic demands do not take into account the multiplicity of cultural, sexual and gender identities. This third stage aims to deconstruct gender (which is dictated in binary terms) and

[18] Gabriela Cano, “El feminismo y sus olas”, *Letras Libres*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/revista/el-feminismo-y-sus-olas> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[19] G. Cano, “El feminismo y sus olas”.

[20] G. Cano, “Las generaciones de feministas: un mosaico”, *Letras Libres*, March 1, 2020, <https://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/revista/las-generaciones-feministas-un-mosaico> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

to highlight the political advantages of plurality. At this point, concepts such as *intersectionality* emerge, which seeks to make visible the problem of exclusions created by the overlapping of power relations that occur in diverse historical and geopolitical contexts, thus making it possible to recognize the different forms of oppression.<sup>21</sup> In other words, it highlights the importance of considering the vulnerabilities created from other categories such as *race*, *class*, *ethnicity*, and *sexual preference*, among others. This feminism speaks out against universal concepts that do not consider particular contexts and focuses on women's specific experiences.

### **Incorporating gender theories, gender equality and feminism in foreign policy studies**

Having analyzed the origins and claims of the different trends of feminist theory, it is important to note that gender theory, gender mainstreaming and feminism are different, albeit related, concepts. Given that Mexico has a foreign policy with a gender perspective, it is crucial to understand its meaning and connection with a feminist foreign policy.

The Fourth World Conference on Women celebrated in Beijing, China in 1995, reached an explicit definition of the gender perspective, which "implies that before making any decision, their effects on women and men, respectively,

should be analyzed".<sup>22</sup> By considering how public policies, and other decisions, have an impact on men and women, it is possible to develop positive measures for equality between the two. However, this does not mean that the structures that make exclusion practices possible and normal are addressed. As will be discussed below, the difference between a gender perspective and a feminist policy lies in questioning and addressing the structural causes of these inequalities and, by using gender as one of the categories of analysis, understanding the State in a different way.

The study and building of relations between States has historically been made from a traditional perspective, through a practice based on the figure of the State itself, which focuses specifically on observing what exists beyond its borders. This is known as "conventional foreign policy analysis", and its epistemological function is to explain the decision-making process through a problem-solving approach.<sup>23</sup>

This analysis has two downsides. The first is that, despite the interdisciplinary nature of international relations, foreign policy has been studied without considering the contributions that other theories, such as the feminist theory, can make to the analysis, since the traditional approach interprets the decision-making subject as the ultimate instrument of rationality.

[21] The concept of *intersectionality* was coined in 1989 by African-American lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw (see Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167.

[22] United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1 (New York: UNO, 1996), 28, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[23] Columba Achilleos-Sarll, "Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)", *Journal of International Women Studies* (2018): 37.



The figure “subject” refers to the second downside, because it represents a bias that inadvertently implements a male perspective and, therefore, is partial and incapable of recognizing how in the political arena, gender identities and discourses framed in a “binary” logic produce multiple oppressions that affect the exercise of foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> A study based on this binary differentiation establishes the preeminence of an analytical lens, whose perception of the terms

*gender* and *sex* is not neutral, because it defines the behavior of the State as masculine by taking for granted the universal legitimacy of this traditional approach.<sup>25</sup>

In order to reduce the bias of this interpretation of reality, a “non-conventional analysis” has gradually incorporated gender as a social category that contributes to the study of foreign policy and, with even greater effort, has sought to problematize the overlapping<sup>26</sup>—that is, the interweaving of gender issues with social and racial issues— of different categories

[24] The binary division of masculinity/femininity, national/international, external/internal and other categories constitutes that violent separation that legitimizes practices and social interactions that perpetuate the partial vision of foreign policy. In this case, the binomial creates an interaction between the state and the international system, which leads to the assumption that within the state there is a society with a problem-free identity, a ‘homogenous’ space to which domestic conflicts are reserved, while the external is reserved for those subjects capable of safeguarding the internal. A protected/protective dichotomy based on the notion of the self/the other (Cfr. C. Achilleos-Sarll, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised”, 38-39).

[25] Cfr. Kristen P. Williams, “Feminism in Foreign Policy”, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

[26] The claim is that feminism cannot avoid integrating other forms of domination into its analysis and questioning of patriarchal domination. See Zahara Ali, “Mujeres, feminismo e Islam: descolonizar, liberalizar y liberar el feminismo”, *Viento Sur* (August 14, 2012): 3.



instead of naturalizing them,<sup>27</sup> contrary to what has been done by the conventional perspective, which discursively constructs the State and the international system through an approach of otherness, legitimizing the existence of a homogeneous identity within borders.

Of course, gender is not the only variable that can be incorporated into the analysis, since it must be understood as a category that operates through a complex interaction with other social categories, which makes it possible to draw attention to the different forms of violence experienced by other societies in their different historical and geographical contexts. Beyond the “unconventional” approach, which has shown progress in the incorporation of gender as a category of analysis, a perspective has emerged that, from post-colonial feminism (see *infra*), suggests thinking critically about the study of these social categories, in order to dismantle the Euro-American feminist perspective that built a very specific concept of brotherhood, leading to a single liberal and emancipatory discourse, and recognizing only one form of oppression.

This post-colonial analysis reconceptualizes foreign policy based on the following elements: re-centering intersectionality, overcoming geographical segregation and reconfiguring the normative order.<sup>28</sup> In other words, it highlights the omission of race, gender, sexuality and other categories as ignored elements of analysis in the study of foreign policy in order to reincorporate them. It seeks to fight the homogeneous vision of a State’s identity and to

counteract that notion charged with a gender stereotype that normalizes an asymmetry of power between the States themselves and the identity groups within their borders, and proposes not only to encourage the representation of women in decision-making, but to go further and reflect on that category, to avoid interpreting it from a simplistic narrative that assumes their experiences and oppressions as identical.

The third element of this analysis is fundamental because it raises the possibility of rethinking the term *woman* as an identity and as a category of political representation, and helps to recognize that, despite the fact that women have managed to insert themselves and be subjects of representation in decision-making spaces, the terms *woman* and *gender* are not constituted coherently in the different social contexts, but rather their construction as concepts is interwoven with racial, ethnic and class modalities, which makes it possible to recognize that the interpretation of these is changing constantly.<sup>29</sup>

This simplifies the observation of the binary as an element in which gender and the variables that intersect with it are a complexity that is not complete at any moment in time. The existence of this certain incompleteness that characterizes these categories opens up the possibility of moving towards a normative ideal devoid of coercive force. In other words, bringing to the fore the multiple elements that make up the different identities (not only sex and gender) will encourage a dialogue that constitutes an open coalition, where these previously recognized identities can exist in turn, transforming

[27] C. Achiellos-Sarll, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised”, 39.

[28] C. Achiellos-Sarll, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised”, 40-45.

[29] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 16.



themselves, depending on the objectives of the moment and their different contexts, into an open set that allows for multiple coincidences and discrepancies without observing a normative objective of closed definition.<sup>[30]</sup> It would take a long time to get to this point. However, this is the direction that the instrumentation of a feminist foreign policy can take.

Based on the above, this note takes up the following definition of feminist foreign policy: it is a framework that brings the daily experience of vulnerable communities to the fore and—starting from the recognition of the different forms of violence that women and other communities have experienced—provides a broader and deeper analysis of global problems. It thus goes beyond the black box approach of traditional foreign policy thinking and its focus on military force, violence and domination, by offering an alternative and intersectional rethinking of security from the point of view of the most marginalized. It is a multi-dimensional policy framework, which aims to elevate the experiences and agency of women and marginalized groups to examine the destructive forces of

patriarchy, capitalism, racism and militarism.<sup>[31]</sup> The first feminist foreign policy projects in the world were analyzed according to this definition.

### Feminist foreign policy in the World

Based on the previous approaches, the cases of Sweden and Canada will be tackled, as they were the first two countries to adopt a feminist foreign policy. In October 2014, Sweden became the first country in the world to publicly assume a feminist foreign policy.<sup>[32]</sup> To prove that the implementation of this strategy would have an impact on both the external and internal levels, the Government appointed a cabinet tending to gender parity in the executive and legislative branches—parity in 2018, the year in which it ranked among the first five countries with the greatest gender equality in economic opportunity and participation, educational

[30] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14-17.

[31] Center for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), <https://centre-forfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>.

[32] Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Handbook Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*, Government Offices of Sweden, August 23, 2018, 9, <https://www.government.se/reports/2018/08/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).



performance, health and political empowerment on a consistent basis.<sup>33</sup>

The actions that were implemented to follow up on the achievement of these goals were set out in the *Handbook Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*, a document that includes the strategies that the country has implemented to increase the number of women in areas where their participation is visibly unequal to that of men. This document points out that feminist foreign policy entails the systematic application of the gender perspective in foreign policy, since gender equality is an objective in itself, which is also essential for achieving other goals such as peace, security and sustainable development.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, its strategy is based on three axes (or three "Rs"):

*rights, representation and resources*;<sup>35</sup> each has lines of action in the internal sphere, in order to contribute to the achievement of a specific goal: global gender equality.

Based on the three axes and this specific goal, the Swedish Government designed a strategy that it plans to execute at the international level, so that men and women have the same power to influence their own environment politically, socially and economically. This transition strategy consists of six objectives that come with a series of actions at the international and domestic levels:<sup>36</sup>

[33] World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2018), 18, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf) (Accessed April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[34] Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Handbook Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*.

[35] The outline of the three R's shows that the main objective of the Swedish government in each axis is to promote the representation and participation of women, particularly in peace processes; to defend that women's rights are human rights; and to work towards a redistribution of resources that is more sensitive to gender equity, respectively. Karin Aggestam y Annika Bergman-Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender", *Ethics & International Affairs* (2016): 325.

[36] Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Handbook Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*.





1. *Human rights of all women and girls.* By promoting the declarations of the United Nations General Assembly on child, early and forced marriage and on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. *Women and girls free from mental, physical and sexual violence.* Based on the Swedish momentum for the Security Council to establish sexual and gender-based violence as an international sanctioning criterion.
3. *Participation of women and girls in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and the restoration of peace.*
4. *Political participation and influence of women and girls in all areas of society.*
5. *Rights and economic empowerment of women and girls.* This objective has

two main components: 1) favor women's participation in the labor market and provide the tools girls and women to access better jobs; 2) include gender perspective in workplaces and international organizations.

6. *Women's and girls' reproductive health and rights.* It recognizes that health and reproductive rights are human rights, and that girls and women have the right to make decision on their own bodies.

As can be seen from the six goals, the common thread of the Swedish feminist foreign policy is deeply linked to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325,<sup>37</sup> which recognizes the impor-

[37] "The Security Council adopted resolution S/RES/1325 on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in



tance of women's participation in peace processes and urges governments to ensure the protection of women and children in armed conflicts.

Three years later, in June 2017, Canada launched the world's first Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) with the premise that supporting the eradication of poverty and vulnerability in the world has a positive impact on a country's own security and prosperity, based on encouraging initiatives that enhance the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls; increase their participation in equitable decision-making, especially when it comes to sustainable development and peace; and provide more equitable access to and control over the resources they need to ensure their economic and social equality.<sup>38</sup>

To this end, it is implementing a plan consisting of six lines of action:<sup>39</sup>

1. *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.* By promoting awareness campaigns on the different types of violence to which women and girls are subjected.

all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts". Office of the Special Adviser on Gender, "Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security", UNO, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[38] Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2017), 8, <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[39] Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy*, 13-64.

2. *Human dignity.* By eradicating hunger and safeguarding the protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls.
3. *Growth that works for all.* From the economic empowerment of women.
4. *Climate action.* Encouraging women's leadership and decision-making in climate change mitigation.
5. *Inclusive governance.* By increasing women's political participation.
6. *Peace and security.* To involve women and girls in peacebuilding processes and ensure the protection of their rights in the process.



Through these lines of action, the Canadian Government seeks to achieve the following goals: eradicate poverty, increase food security, guarantee a secure future for children and youth, stimulate sustainable economic growth and promote democracy, the consolidation of peace, stability and security. It also aims to devote the largest possible percentage of its foreign assistance to gender equality gradually.<sup>40</sup>

The initiatives of both governments deserve recognition. However, it must also be understood that both strategies respond, to a large extent, to the liberal feminist trend (present in the first and second wave), whose main demand is equal conditions and access to opportunities for women with respect to men. This is a timely first approach, because it recognizes the problem of inequality and takes affirmative action to counteract it.<sup>41</sup> But, the challenge is even greater, because beyond parity in public spaces, it is still necessary to reflect upon this binary notion that has already been analyzed, in order to move towards its dismantling and the rethinking of a foreign policy that not only recognizes and reflects on gender, but also involves other categories that name the vulnerabilities to which many societies are currently subject to.

[40] Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy*.

[41] "Positive discrimination or affirmative action is the term given to an action that, unlike negative discrimination (or simply discrimination), seeks to establish policies that give a certain social, ethnic or minority group, or one that has historically suffered discrimination because of social injustices, preferential treatment in access to or distribution of certain resources or services as well as access to certain goods". Alma Arámbula Reyes *et al.*, *Acciones afirmativas* (Mexico: Centro de Documentación y Análisis-Cámara de Diputados LX Legislatura, August 2018), <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/spe/SPE-ISS-12-08.pdf> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

Mexico can build on these examples and take a step further to distinguish its feminist foreign policy from others, as a country in which equality and rights in the public sphere are intertwined with inequality and historical discrimination against diverse groups in a situation of vulnerability.

### Considerations on feminist foreign policy for Mexico

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs understands feminist foreign policy as the "set of principles that seek, from the perspective of foreign policy, to guide government actions to reduce and eliminate structural differences, gaps and gender inequalities in order to build a more fair and prosperous society".<sup>42</sup> In addition, the Ministry affirms that it proposes a different alternative to the world's feminist foreign policies that only "prioritize gender equality and human rights".<sup>43</sup>

Based on the above, it is clear that Mexico's feminist foreign policy is geared towards addressing structural causes, beyond recognizing and protecting the existing rights in gender equality included in national and international legal instruments. This policy, which Mexico announced at the UN General Assembly in September 2019 and presented for the first time in January of this year, is the first and meaningful

[42] SRE-Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, "Agenda de política exterior multilateral: la política exterior feminista del Gobierno de México", Martha Delgado-una política con causa, January 8, 2020, <http://martha.org.mx/una-politica-con-causa/agenda-de-politica-exterior-multilateral-transformadora> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[43] SRE-Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, "Agenda de política exterior multilateral: la política exterior feminista del Gobierno de México".

effort by a country of the Global South to implement this type of approach in an international policy. This represents a great commitment and, at the same time, may represent an example for a region of serious inequalities.<sup>44</sup>

Since a few years ago, Mexico has included the gender perspective in the National Development Plan (PND),<sup>45</sup> and has focused on the need to incorporate it into all Government actions, including, therefore, foreign policy. Possibly, the starting point was the organization of the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, where the first guidelines in multilateral fora on gender equality were established.<sup>46</sup> From that moment onwards, and in line with Mexico's activism to include the gender perspective in the UN development agenda<sup>47</sup>—particularly the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995—the multilateral actions have been transformed into national policies. In 1998, the National Commission for Women (CONMUJER) was established

within the Ministry of the Interior and transformed in 2001 into the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), with other state and municipal institutions that followed.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the institutions that are in charge of combating and eradicating violence against women have their antecedent in the Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence in Ciudad Juárez (2007), and later on, in the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (2009) (CONAVIM).<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, in 2006 and 2007, two of the pillars of the national legal framework on gender equality were established: the General Law for Equality between Women and Men, and the General Law for the Access of Women to a Life Free from Violence<sup>50</sup>; other legal breakthroughs followed, such as the categorization of femicide in the National Criminal Code in 2011, as well as the electoral reform in 2014 that allowed political parties to guarantee that 50% of their

[44] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019* LC/PUB.2019/22-P/Rev.1 (Santiago: ONU, 2019), [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44989/S1901132\\_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44989/S1901132_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[45] The PND 2019-2024 includes as one of its axis gender equality, non-discrimination and inclusion.

[46] In this conference participated representatives of 133 governments. UN-Women, "World Conferences on Women", <https://www.uwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[47] Mexico has presented and lead initiatives on the main international fora on human rights, including the UN Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Mexico as also chaired the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) and it the only country that has made financial contributions every year since 2004.

[48] In 2020, the totality of Mexican states included the gender perspective on their legislation and programs. National Institute for Women, "Matriz de Indicadores de Resultados: Programa S010 Fortalecimiento a la Transversalidad de la Perspectiva de Género" (2020), [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/542809/MIR\\_S010\\_2020.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/542809/MIR_S010_2020.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[49] "Decreto por el que se crea como órgano administrativo desconcentrado de la Secretaría de Gobernación, la Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres", *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (July 1st 2009), [http://www.conavim.gob.mx/work/models/CONAVIM/Resource/312/1/images/normateca\\_1.pdf](http://www.conavim.gob.mx/work/models/CONAVIM/Resource/312/1/images/normateca_1.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[50] This legal instrument established, for the first time, the institutional coordination to prevent, protect, and eradicate violence; it also has a specific budget to ensure its implementation. SUMS SEG Project, "Los derechos humanos de las Mujeres en México", Ministry of Government of Guanajuato, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, <http://genero.seg.guanajuato.gob.mx/2017/02/02/los-derechos-humanos-de-las-mujeres-en-mexico/> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).





candidacies are for women, as well as the recent reform on gender parity in the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches. It is important to highlight that Mexico has earned its place in international fora on gender equality due to its active and engaging role during multilateral negotiations.<sup>51</sup>

Due to the aforementioned, and after three decades of designing a legal and institutional framework in international organizations, there is a consensus on the need of guaranteeing gender equality transversally; in other words, to include it in every governmental policy. However, it is important to question whether the current foreign policy departs from

a feminist approach, gender theory or gender perspective.

As mentioned above, women have succeeded in occupying decision-making spaces (although much remains to be done);<sup>52</sup> however, if the power structures that normalize exclusion practices are not addressed and deconstructed, affirmative actions and representation policies will have only restricted results. In order to break with this structural violence and move forward, not only the gender equality agenda, but its feminist agenda, Mexico must address the challenge of discrimination and violence against women. In addition, it is necessary that Mexico recognizes girls and

[51] However, the challenge is bigger; apart from reaching parity in public spaces, it is still necessary to think about the binary —already analyzed— in order to disarticulate it and rethink a foreign policy that not only recognizes gender, but also other categories that name vulnerabilities present in societies. Mexico can go further and establish a different feminist foreign policy.

[52] For example, according to UN Women, in February 2019, in 27 countries less than 10% of women were in parliaments and only 11 are Heads of State and 12 are Heads of Government. ON-Women Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political participation", <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).



women in their diversity and their contributions to distinct areas of the private and public life. Having a feminist foreign policy requires tackling the structural causes of violence that go beyond the gender category.

On the basis of the above, Mexico's feminist foreign policy is being developed under the following pillars:

1. Foreign policy with gender perspective and feminist agenda plus. The goal is to mainstream human rights, gender perspective and intersectionality in every area of foreign policy, including treaty law, agreements, resolutions, candidacies, composition of delegations, among others. It also proposes to boost concrete actions that have an impact on the gender agenda, such as the Gender Equality Forum, The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security agenda, and The Enhanced Lima Work Program on Gender and its Action Plan, renewed at the recent UN Conference on Climate Change (COP 25).
2. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs with parity. It proposes a series of institutional and legal strategies to eradicate structural differences and reduce inequality at all levels of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs free of violence and safe for all. It seeks to eradicate all expression of violence based on gender at the Ministry, as well as to

provide adequate assistance to Mexicans abroad.

4. An equality that can be seen. It aims at making visible the contributions of women to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to foreign policy in general. Among other actions, it proposes gender parity during conferences, events and meetings; promotes an effective communication that is inclusive and non-sexist; training and create awareness on gender equality to all members of the Ministry.
5. The Ministry is feminist and intersectional. Every axis of Mexico's foreign policy will be guided by the principle of feminism, for example, cooperation and assistance with a human rights component; cultural promotion that recognizes the contributions of women; and promotion of tourism with a gender perspective. Moreover, it considers that, although international instruments on human rights are mandatory, they should also be promoted as guiding tools for national policy on gender equality and women empowerment.

As mentioned, Mexico has played a pivotal role in multilateral fora, where it has promoted the highest standards in terms of gender equality, and human rights of women and girls. Among others, Mexico has been a promoter of access to health and sexual and reproductive rights, emphasizing women's diversity, unpaid care work, recognition of multiple forms of gender

violence, and of the differentiated effects of climate change for women.

Nevertheless, alongside the promotion of gender issues at international level, Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy must be designed to be implemented domestically in order to be consistent.<sup>53</sup> For that purpose it is positive that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs take the lead for national implementation, as has been the case for example, of human rights international treaties. For this purpose, policymakers must also recognize the challenges posed by a federal system, such as the various degrees of development, cultural patterns and regional particularities that can affect legislative alignment at the local level.

A long-term endeavor as it is, the Feminist Foreign Policy can contribute to ensure consistency between foreign and domestic actions, through an effective communication. Either directly or indirectly, communication between the three levels of government will reinforce the messages Mexico delivers abroad. In this regard, the pillars A Violence-Free and Safe Ministry of Foreign Affairs for all, An Egalitarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Equality is visible, will be a clear signal from the Ministry to other Federal, State, and local institutions.

In response to the need of implementing international standards domestically, a nationwide consultation has been carried out in order to design the National Plan for Equality among

Men and Women 2019- 2024 (PROIGUALDAD) and the National Program to Prevent, Address, Sanction and Eradicate Violence against Women and Girls 2019- 2024 (PIPAVISEM). Additionally, the political reform carried out in 2019<sup>54</sup> allows women to be candidates for elected office in equal conditions, as well as ensuring parity in all levels of government and in the three Powers (Executive, Judiciary and Legislative). Moreover, seven laws have been recently reformed in order to prevent, sanction and eradicate political violence against women, establishing protection and damage repair measures.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, it is also to be noted that as of 2020, the federal cabinet is close to parity, and affirmative actions are being taken in several fields to reach equality in the federal government shortly.

It is to be noted that "feminist foreign policies are 'living' documents, frameworks for a continuous process of learning and adaptation".<sup>56</sup> This means that even when other expe-

[53] Mexico has a long trajectory and interest in the implementation of mechanisms to gradually eliminate the gender gap. It has also promoted the prevention of gender violence in armed conflicts, the participation of women in peace processes (as in the case of Colombia), the promotion and protection of human rights, the awareness of the different effects of phenomena such as climate change, and the importance of including a gender perspective in the development agendas.

[54] For more information, consult the blog of the National Institute for Women. "Paridad en todo: 50% mujeres y 50% hombres en la toma de decisiones", Government of Mexico, <https://www.gob.mx/inmujeres/articulos/paridad-en-todo-50-mujeres-y-50-hombres-en-la-toma-de-decisiones> (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

[55] Approved on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Mexican Senate. The opinion, still in the process of being published, reforms and adds several provisions to the General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free from Violence, the General Law of Institutions and Electoral Processes, among others. It should be noted that, for the first time, it defines political violence against women by reason of gender, as well as every action or omission, included tolerance based on gender elements and exercised in the public or private sphere, that results in limiting, annulling or diminishing the electoral or political rights of women.

[56] Lyric Thompson, *Política exterior feminista: un marco* (Washington: International Center for Research on Women, 2020), 3, [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FFPFramework\\_d7-translatn-SP-pages.pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FFPFramework_d7-translatn-SP-pages.pdf) (Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

periences can be taken as examples, each policy is different. It depends on the objectives and interests of the State that is implementing it. Even so, a proposed general framework comprises five components: 1) purpose, which allows to ensure consistency among foreign and domestic action; 2) definition, which underlines its differences with other foreign policies with an intersectional approach; 3) scope, to identify relevant actors and institutions; 4) expected results and points of reference, indicating the objectives and a timeline; and 5) plans, to propose specific actions, such as training.<sup>57</sup>

After analyzing Mexico's feminist foreign policy, still on the making, it can be argued that it takes into consideration the five elements previously mentioned. Considering the actions carried out by international organizations, as well as the inclusion of gender perspective in its foreign policy for some years now, the new feminist proposals set the tone to construct its own feminist foreign policy that is in line with the country's national and foreign reality, whose actions are reflected positively in both spheres.

## Conclusion

The feminist foreign policy, understood as a framework that provides a broader analysis of

social problems by considering in its study the overlapping of different categories, is a useful tool for making visible the experiences of communities that have been historically vulnerable and excluded in the traditional exercise of foreign policy, in order to observe the different realities from the point of view of the most marginalized societies and to transform—through the disarticulation of the binary conception of reality—the different social interactions.

As the first country of the Global South to participate in this initiative, whose political, economic and social reality is different, the adoption of a feminist foreign policy obliges Mexico to acknowledge the complexity of its social interactions and the diversity of its society. This recognition opens up the possibility of analyzing and transforming its environment from a collective perspective that upholds an open dialogue and recognizes gender and identity as unfinished concepts, in constant transformation.

## Images

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[57] Lyric Thompson, *Política exterior feminista: un marco*.