# Unraveling the conceptualization of the label feminist: A Critical Discourse Analysis on the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy

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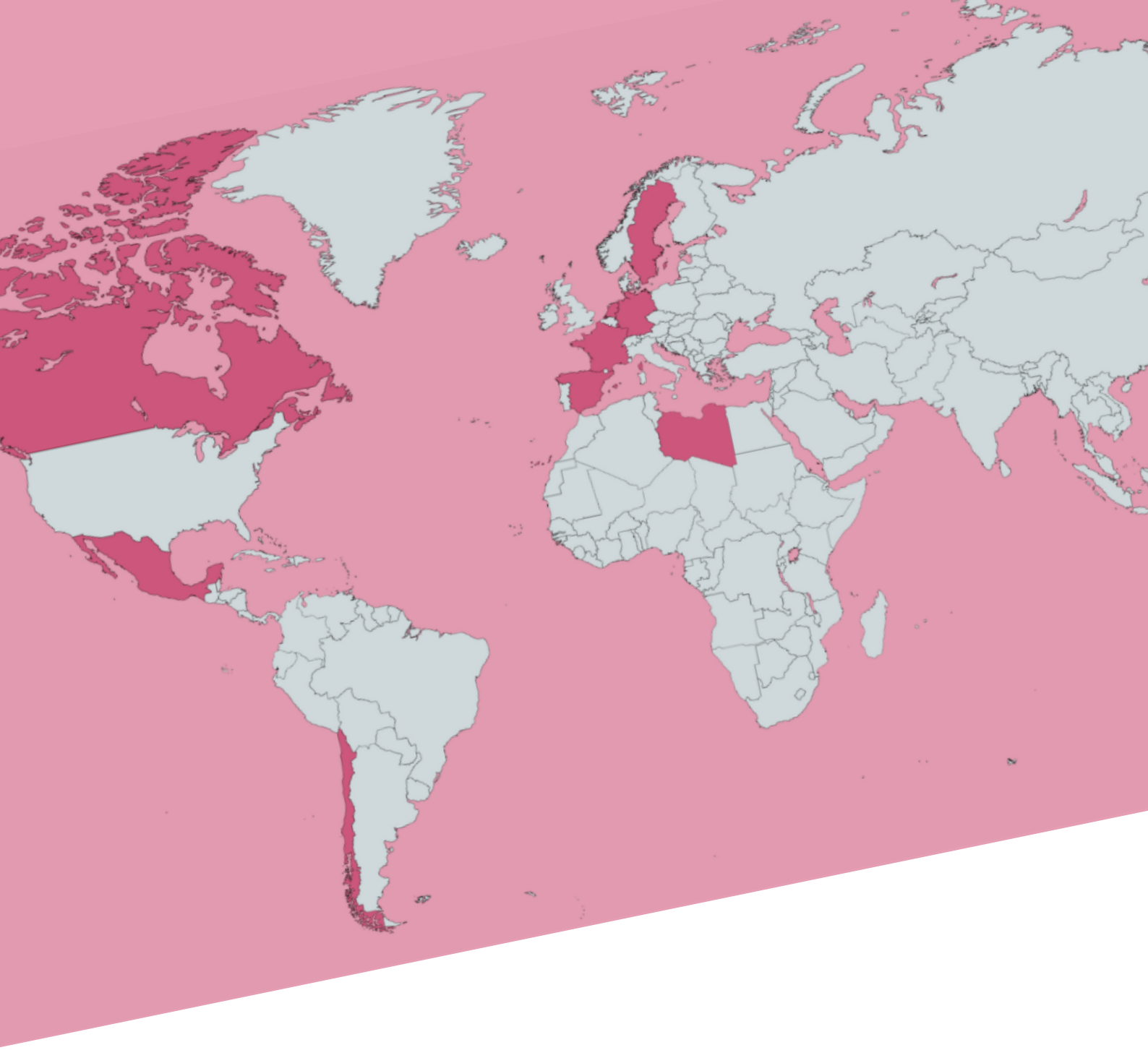

# Unraveling the conceptualization of the label feminist

## A Critical Discourse Analysis on the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy


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## Abstract

Today, ten countries in the world label their foreign policy as feminist. Nonetheless, while the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) spreads around the world, governments nor scholars agree on what it means and entails. On top of that, there is limited research that adds a gender lens to the analysis of foreign policy by combining Feminist IR scholarship with Foreign Policy Analysis. To contribute to the growing scholarship on FFP and provide a theoretical framework for policymakers, this research examines the underlying ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP. The research conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework and analyzes the discourse in interview transcripts with practitioners and in policy documents on FFP. This Critical Discourse Analysis reveals several ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP, which arise from the discourse through specific words and patterns, discursive practices regarding the use of the label feminist, and societal practices regarding the context in which FFP occurs. Accordingly, the following ideas and beliefs underpin the concept of FFP: liberal and intersectional feminist ideas, the idea that FFP is a next step in pro-gender equality efforts, the belief that FFP is an ambition that requires a step-by-step approach, the idea that a FFP increases states' accountability, and the idea of FFP being a brand. Last, the meaning of FFP varies in different global regions and in the context of conflict. Ultimately, these ideas, beliefs, and the dynamic nature of feminism challenge the existence of a common understanding of the concept of FFP.

Keywords: Feminist Foreign Policy, foreign policy, feminism, gender equality, foreign policy analysis

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## Preface

The idea for writing this thesis on Feminist Foreign Policy arose from a special meeting at my university. On the 29th of October 2021, I had the opportunity to ask Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and Dutch Prime Minister Rutte a question during an event organized by Leiden University at Wijnhaven. I asked them about Feminist Foreign Policy: As Canada has a feminist approach to its foreign policy, can PM Trudeau give some advice to PM Rutte on how the Netherlands can increase its approach regarding a Feminist Foreign Policy?

While asking this question, I did not imagine that the Netherlands would follow Canada's approach so quickly. Six months later, on the 13th of May, the Netherlands announced to introduce a Feminist Foreign Policy. A great momentum to write a thesis on a concept that I am so passionate about when my country transforms this concept from an idea to reality one week before the deadline. I am very grateful for everyone who worked so hard to achieve this milestone and look forward to continuing these efforts in the future.

I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Vanessa Newby, for her continuous trust and support. Also, I want to thank Dr. Lucy Hall for her help regarding the methodological approach. Last, want to thank everyone that took the time to participate in my research through an interview, next to those that opened doors for me and shared their ideas and networks, specifically Pascalle Grotenhuis, Petra Stienen, Blanche Voorneman, and Demi van Wijk.

Most of all, I am grateful for and want to thank my boyfriend Ishvar, my family, and my friends for supporting me throughout every step of the thesis-writing process

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## Introduction

One week ago, on the 13th of May 20202, the Netherlands became the tenth country in the world to announce its commitment to a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) (Government Netherland, 2022). With this announcement, the Netherlands followed Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France (2019), Luxembourg (2018), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Libya (2021), Germany (2021), and Chile (2022) (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021). However, as the concept of FFP increasingly gains attention among politicians, policymakers, and society more generally, questions arise about the meaning of this policy and the label feminist. Margot Wallström, Sweden's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who implemented the world's first FFP, said: "I think feminism is a good term. It's about standing against the systematic and global subordination of women" (Nordberg, 2015). But is it?

FFP is such a new concept in the international community and academics that there is no agreement on what it actually means and entails. The ten countries that labeled their foreign policy as feminist did so differently, exposing varied understandings of what appears to be one distinct approach to foreign policy (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, & Kronsell, 2019; Zhukova et al., 2021). Furthermore, academic research on FFP is still emerging, particularly on the nexus between Feminist IR Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis which enables rigorous analysis of foreign policy through a gender lens (Aggestam & True, 2020). Some scholars demonstrate that FFP challenges the current status quo of foreign policies, which disproportionately focus on men, and that it addresses gender inequalities and redefines power hierarchies (Aggestam et al., 2019). Others argue that FFP has a liberal agenda that incorporates women into existing gendered structures (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Thomson, 2020).

As scholarship, policies, and practices regarding FFP continue to develop, it is vital to examine the concept further and explore its underlying ideas and beliefs (Aggestam et al., 2019; Thomson, 2020). Therefore, this research contributes to the ongoing debates on FFP by expanding research on the

gendered aspects of foreign policy and providing a theoretical framework for policymakers, politicians, and governments in general, that work or want to work with FFP.

By conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, the research aims to answer the following research question: what are the underlying ideas and beliefs underpinning Feminist Foreign Policy. In addition, the research examines the sub-question: what are the feminist ideas portrayed in Feminist Foreign Policy. The data sources for this CDA include interview transcripts based on Schaffer's (2014) Ordinary Language Interviewing and policy papers on FFP. This research design derives from an interpretivist approach which does not derive from "a particular understanding of feminism or what it should be (…), but it is concerned rather with bringing to light the definitions of feminism that underpin these respective policies" (Thomson, 2020, p.426). Ultimately, Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework reveals how the discourse surrounding FFP arises from the textual dimension through linguistic patterns and used words, the discursive practices regarding the use of the label feminist, and the societal practices regarding the global and domestic context in which FFP occurs. Last, the dynamic nature of feminism and the existence of different feminist strands challenge the existence of a common understanding of the concept of FFP.

The research starts with providing a theoretical framework in *Chapter one*, which explores the scholarship of Feminist IR theory and its different strands of feminism, Foreign Policy Analysis and its actor-specific focus, and the nexus between these two strands of scholarship where FFP is located. *Chapter two* provides a comprehensive overview of the status of FFP in the world today. This chapter explores existing pro-gender equality norms, elaborates on the ten existing FFPs that exist today, and analyses the ethical characteristics and challenges connected to the label feminist. *Chapter three* provides a comprehensive methodological framework that explores the interpretive character of the research, Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, and elaborates on the data sources and data gathering methods. *Chapter four* analyzes the outcome of the CDA regarding feminist ideas

underlying FFP and displays how the connotation of feminism changed over time. *Chapter five* builds upon the previous chapter and highlights several other ideas and beliefs underpinning FFP. For example, the idea that FFP is a next step toward gender equality efforts, the belief that FFP is a step-by-step approach, the idea that announcing a FFP increases accountability, and the idea that FFP is a brand. Last, the CDA reveals the changing connotation of FFP in the context of Global North/South countries and the context of conflict. *Chapter six* summarizes and analyzes the findings, answers the research questions, and provides the limitations of the research.

## Chapter 1: The theoretical underpinnings of Feminist Foreign Policy

Feminist Foreign Policy is located at the nexus of two main areas of scholarship: Feminist International Relations Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis as it is a version of foreign policy which has been labeled as feminist. The following chapter provides a theoretical overview of both strands of scholarship and elaborates on their connection.

### *1.1 Feminist International Relations Theory*

Feminist International Relations (IR) theory emerged within International Relations (IR) scholarship from the 1960s onwards, alongside the second wave of feminism that spread around the world, challenging the absence of gender and perspectives of women and marginalized peoples within IR scholarship (Tickner, 2006; True, 2010). More specifically, Feminist IR scholarship critically examines traditional IR concepts, such as sovereignty, power, and security, and explores how these concepts are inherently gender-biased as they derive from masculine characteristics and men's experiences (Acker, 1992; True, 2010). Following this approach, Feminist IR scholars perceive gender to be a relational construct where masculine characteristics and identities appear to be more meaningful and more worthy than feminine ones, contributing to a problematic gender hierarchy among individuals and groups (Peterson, 1992; True, 2010). Lastly, Feminist IR scholarship challenges traditional IR scholarship's strong focus on the state and positivist nature (True, 2010).

The term Feminist IR scholarship comprises a variety of scholarship with differences in their theoretical, methodological, and ideological approach (Sylvester, 1994; True, 2010). Nonetheless, they all share an ethical approach including commitments that are strongly connected and intertwined: the commitment to inclusivity, reflexivity, and a strong focus on power relations (Ackerly & True, 2006; Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Aggestam et al., 2019; Shepherd, 2015; Tickner, 2006). First, the commitment toward inclusivity displays the moral obligation of Feminist IR scholars to incorporate the perspectives of women and marginalized groups in society, thereby challenging traditional IR

scholarship that primarily focuses on the perspective of men and elite actors. Second, the commitment toward reflexivity invites Feminist IR scholars to be critical of their own biases, shortcomings, and exclusions, contributing to the above of inclusivity. Hence, by following this commitment, they try to avoid falling into the same trap of traditional IR scholarship that uses positivist research methodologies underwritten by a set of normative assumptions that exclude alternative perspectives (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019; True, 2010). Third, the commitment to have a strong focus on existing power relations seeks to go beyond the "conventional boundaries of states and international public spheres'' (True, 2010, p.2). Accordingly, Feminist IR scholars examine the power of both those currently with and without high levels of power and their interaction (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019; True, 2010).

While most Feminist IR scholars share the above ethical commitments and considerations, different strands of feminism result in different interpretations of the label feminist. Feminist IR scholarship derives from ideological and theoretical differences and includes liberal feminism, intersectional feminism, social and Marxist feminism, and postmodern feminism. Other strands of feminism have philosophical origins, including empiricist feminism, standpoint feminism, and post-structural feminism (True, 2010; Zalewski, 1993, 2018). Because this research focuses on the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy, the following paragraphs will elaborate on the strands of feminism that are most connected to states' practices of adopting a feminist approach and provide the basis for analyzing the underlying feminist ideas and beliefs underpinning Feminist Foreign Policy.

Liberal feminism emerged in the context of liberalism, which has a strong focus on individuals and the promotion of human rights. Accordingly, liberal feminism focuses on individual responsibility as a requirement for gender equality based on the assumption that individuals, rather than societies, are responsible for both gender inequality and gender equality. Following liberal feminism, several measures can increase gender equality, for example enhancing the position of women in society, strengthening women's position in the labor market, and increasing their presence in institutions and

businesses. Additionally, liberal feminists believe that human rights, as established by the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and following human rights legal frameworks, focus primarily on the standardized stereotype of men. Therefore they have a strong focus on anchoring women's rights into existing and new legal frameworks. Examples include the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000. As such, international organizations and states often embrace liberal feminism, as they recognize and adapt the concept of gender equality on the global stage, where specifically the United Nations has a leading role in spreading this norm (Brown, 2006; Dangoisse & Perdomo, 2021; Prügl, 2015; Zalewski, 2018; Zhukova et al., 2021).

Despite the seeming success of the liberal feminist agenda on the world stage, other feminist strands criticize liberal feminism. The main reason is that liberal feminism appears to adapt women to the patriarchal and masculine status quo instead of challenging the imbalances and biases of gendered institutions and incorporating the perspectives of all marginalized groups. Additionally, some feminists raise questions about the role of the state and international organizations in advancing a feminist agenda, as they perceive these actors to be a reason behind the problematic status quo of women and minorities in the world's societies (Sunström et al., 2021; Zhukova et al., 2021). Last, a significant critique of liberal feminism is that it tends to adopt an essentialist perspective to gender, according to which women are inherently different than men based on their biological features. As a result, liberal feminism reflects a contradiction because on the one hand it perceives gender differences to be natural and on the other hand it commits towards gender equality by enhancing the position of women in society (Groenhout, 2002; True, 2010).

Intersectional feminism, sometimes referred to as radical feminism, appears to be on the other side of the feminist spectrum. It is strongly connected to the civil rights and black movements in the 60s and 70s. Intersectional feminism stands for changing the root causes of inequality, such as discrimination,

oppression, and the patriarchal system (True, 2010). Kimberley Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality, highlighting that gender as a construct cannot be understood in isolation. Instead, gender should be analyzed in a broader perspective that incorporates various identity markers, including sex, race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Dangoisse & Perdomo, 2021; Tausendfreund, 2021; Tickner, 1992; True, 2010; Zhukova et al., 2021). Additionally, whereas liberal feminism has a strong focus on women, intersectional feminism does not consider gender as a binary concept of men and women but explicitly recognizes a full and colorful spectrum of gender, thereby going beyond the essentialist tendency of liberal feminism. Also, it seeks to consider the experiences of all marginalized people (Aggestam et al., 2019; True, 2010). Last, intersectional feminism, alongside postmodern and post-structural feminism, is critical of the foundational systems and origins of our current knowledge, the majority of which originates from a long tradition of male thinkers (True, 2010).

Social and Marxist feminism derive from socialist and Marxist theories which are strongly connected to critical thinking about the current economic systems and hierarchies between social classes. According to these strands of feminism, considering the perspectives of marginalized groups in society, including women, can contribute to changing the status quo and achieving a more objective perspective on today's reality (True, 2010; Zalewski, 2018). More specifically, social and Marxist feminism challenge how women and marginalized groups are currently valued based on how much they contribute to the society and economy, following a market-oriented and capitalist approach that results in exploitation. Additionally, Marxist feminism believes gender to be part of a hierarchical structure, which contrasts with many other strands of feminism that perceive gender to be a mix of both structure and agency (Steans, 1998; Stienstra, 1994; True, 2010). Lastly, standpoint feminism derives from Marxist feminism and prescribes that feminist research should start from the perspective of women and marginalized peoples (Cohn & Ruddick, 2004; Bowell, 2022).

Postmodern feminism derives from the critical theoretical movement of postmodernism, which challenges the notion that there is one objective truth and also incorporates feminist ideas and perspectives from the Global South, and black and feminist critique (Enloe, 1996, 2000; Tickner, 2006; True, 2010). Hence, postmodern feminism believes that there is not one perspective that applies to all women, thereby challenging the above-mentioned standpoint feminist feminism. Similar to intersectional feminism, postmodern feminism goes beyond gender and the binary division of gender within IR scholarship (True, 2010).

Ultimately, while most Feminist IR scholars share the ethical approach to be inclusive, reflexive and focus on power relations, there is not one definition nor understanding of feminism. The different strands of feminism range from the more common liberal strand of feminism that mostly focusses on women in contrast to men and incorporating them into existing systems and frameworks, to feminist strands that are less well-known and focus more on changing the status quo fundamentally, such as intersectional feminism, social and Marxist feminism and postmodern feminism which incorporate marginalized groups but not exclusively women.

### *1.2 Foreign Policy Analysis*

There are different definitions of foreign policy within International Relations (IR) scholarship. However, at their core, all definitions agree that foreign policy refers to a state's relationship with and behavior towards other states (e.g., Leira, 2019; Scheyer & Kumskova. 2019; Wilhelm, 2006). Some scholars specifically highlight the structural aspect of foreign policy, referring to how states organize themselves within the international system or the structural elements of organizing their foreign affairs (Leira, 2019; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019). Additionally, the existence of foreign policy automatically means the existence of another opposite policy: a state's domestic policy. As such, foreign policy starts outside states' borders and domestic policy refers to everything that happens inside these borders (Leira, 2019).

As domestic and foreign policy constitute each other, FPA recognizes this interaction and acknowledges domestic issues in its foreign policy analytical framework.

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is a subfield of IR theory that emerged around the same time as Feminist IR Theory and is concerned with analyzing the concept of foreign policy (Brummer & Hudson, 2017). While traditional IR scholarship perceives foreign policy to be a static concept, FPA recognizes that foreign policy is dynamic a process and can change, highlighting the importance of examining foreign policy through FPA's framework (Aggestam & True, 2020; Hudson, 2005). FPA also contributes to existing IR scholarship approaches because it acknowledges and examines "the primary determinants of state behavior: material and ideational factors. The point of intersection is not the state, it is human decision-makers" (Hudson, 2005, p.3). Accordingly, while FPA retains a state-centered approach because the government of a state establishes foreign policy, FPA considers individual actors to be vital within the analytical framework of foreign policy, which most theoretical approaches within IR scholarship fail to do.

More specifically, FPA argues that analyzing foreign policy requires to explore the ideas and beliefs of foreign policymakers and anyone involved in this process because it can shed light on thought processes and meanings behind the words reflected in policy documents (Brummer & Hudson, 2017; Hudson, 2005; Smith, Hadfield & Dunne, 2016). As Hudson argues: "the mind of a foreign policymaker is not a tabula rasa: it contains complex and intricately related information and patterns, such as beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotions, traits, style, memory, national, and self-conceptions" (Hudson, 1995, p.10). By doing so, FPA aims to provide a theoretical framework behind the praxis of international relations (Aggestam & True, 2020; Hudson, 2005). While FPA mostly focused on state-related actors and mostly analyzed the Global North context, recently, more FPA research occurred on the Global South and FPA scholars started to acknowledge the role of non-state related actors (Aggestam & True, 2020; Hudson, 2014).

In addition to the actor-specific focus of FPA comes the notion of agency. Traditionally, most IR theories focus more on structure than on agency, which poses a significant theoretical shortcoming because the lack of agency poses challenges in explaining changes (Carlnaes, 1992; Hudson, 2005). States can not possess agency because they are abstract phenomena, while human beings are actors that can have agency and hence, contribute to change within international relations. Additionally, examining the role of human beings through FPA provides the opportunity to find those responsible for such changes in foreign policy, including norm entrepreneurs and political leaders, and can contribute to establishing accountability within foreign policy practices (Hudson, 2005; Aggestam & True, 2020).

Regarding the research design, FPA examines information that is available to the public, such as policy documents, and information specifically those individuals dealing with foreign policy, such as speeches or interviews. Hence, one of the challenges of executing FPA is access to data, relying on what a government publishes, next to the access to decision-makers and individuals working with foreign policy to find the specific ideas behind the current foreign policy (Hudson, 2005, 2007).

### *1.3 Feminist Foreign Policy on the nexus between Feminist IR theory and FPA*

While Feminist IR Theory and FPA both provide a clear theoretical framework to explore FFP, these strands of scholarship rarely engage. As conventional foreign policy practices are regulated mainly by masculine principles, such as patriarchy, the military, and violence (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019), only a few scholars have touched upon the gendered aspect of foreign policy (e.g., Aggestam et al., 2019; Aggestam & True, 2020; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Stienstra, 1995; Thompson, 2020). As a result, gender norms or inclusivity within foreign policy is an under-researched topic, highlighting the importance of expanding scholarship on foreign policy that obtains the feminist label (Aggestam et al., 2019).

On a critical note, there might be a valid reason to explain the research gap. As highlighted in the theoretical framework of Feminist IR scholarship, there is ambiguity regarding the role of the state in its contribution to the feminist agenda and advancement of the role of women in society. Some Feminist IR scholars argue that the state is a gendered institution enshrined by masculine and patriarchal principles and structures and, hence, cannot contribute to enhancing the feminist agenda (Aggestam & True, 2020; Peterson, 1992). This thinking mainly arises in the context of social and Marxist feminism, according to which "gender hierarchies are fixed in material structures" (True, 2010, p.10). As a result, the transformation cannot come from states and international organizations, for example, through foreign policy, as they are precisely among the root causes of the gendered issues in society. However, other strands of feminism, such as liberal feminism, believe that states and organizations could and should place an active and essential role in transforming the discourse when "gender hegemonies are located in discourse" (True, 2010, p.10).

While acknowledging the differences among feminist strands and their approach to states, foreign policy, and international organizations is important, applying a gender lens to foreign policy and combining Feminist IR theory with FPA can be extremely valuable in researching FFP. The fact that there is ambiguity on the role of the state in advancing a feminist agenda through foreign policy cannot compensate for the neglect of FPA, and IR scholarship more generally, on the role of gender and perspectives of women and minorities in society. Additionally, whereas Feminist IR theory is based on ethical commitments, foreign policy also has the potential to be ethical when it is based on the "commitment to the transformative change of global politics through the pursuit of good international citizenship, and as such being sensitive to the needs and wants of broader groups in global society" (Aggestam et al., 2019b. p.40). Furthermore, as states increasingly claim to adopt feminist principles into their foreign policy, it remains unclear which feminist ideas and beliefs they exactly refer to and what strands of feminism underlay the concept of FFP, demonstrating the significance of advancing research that combines Feminist IR scholarship and FPA.

In sum, the under-researched nexus between Feminist IR Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis demonstrates the necessity of further examining foreign policy through a gender lens. (e.g., Aggestam & True, 2020; Thomson, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021). Furthermore, the lack of a common understanding regarding the concept of FFP among scholars and countries that implemented such policy highlights the need to examine the conceptualization of FFP and develop a theoretical framework that explains the increasing spreading of FFP around the world. Therefore, this thesis combines Feminist IR theory and FPA by exploring the following research question: what are the ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy. To answer this question, the research also examines the following sub-question: What are the feminist ideas portrayed in Feminist Foreign Policy? The next chapter provides an overview of the roots of FFP and critically examines the status of FFP in the world today

## Chapter 2: The status of Feminist Foreign Policy in the world today

The following chapter discusses the emergence of Feminist Foreign Policy as a next step after pro-gender equality norms spread around the world in the past decades. Afterward, it examines the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy and provides an overview of the ten existing policies in Sweden, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, Libya, Germany, Chile, and the Netherlands. Last, it analyses what is behind the label feminist and explores the critical aspects and challenges of FFP.

### *2.1 The descent of Feminist Foreign Policy: pro-gender equality norms*

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is a newly emerging concept on the global stage, with ten states adopting the label feminist to their foreign policy in the last eight years, while other states, including the European Union, explore the possibilities of adopting a similar approach in the future (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021). Whereas the label feminist in the context of foreign policy is new, the ideas behind it are not. The roots behind Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) can be traced back to the increasing attention and commitment to gender equality and women empowerment on the global stage, leading to the rise of pro-gender equality norms (Aggestam et al., 2019). In this context, pro-gender equality norms refer to measures such as incorporating gender mainstreaming, introducing gender quotas, assigning international development aid specifically toward women and girls, and focusing on women and girls' human rights and security (Aggestam & True, 2020; Crook & MacKay, 2011; Thomson, 2020). Krook & McKay (2011) even label gender mainstreaming and implementing gender quotas as specific feminist practices.

The last decades saw a significant increase in commitment to the above measures to advance gender equality. For example, the number of states and international organizations that adopted gender mainstreaming increased significantly, including the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as they integrated a gender lens in all policies and activities, including implementation, and monitoring processes, with the purpose of

contributing to gender equality (EIGE, 2022; True & Mintrom, 2001; Aggestam & True, 2020; African Union, 2021).

On top of that, there are several key milestones to highlight. In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a legally binding framework that aims to protect women around the world against sex-and gender-related discrimination (Aggestam & True, 2020; UN, 1979; Zhukova et al., 2021). Additionally, in 1995, representatives of 189 countries gathered in Beijing during the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, where they unanimously adopted the Bejing Declaration and Platform for Action. The declaration aims to empower women worldwide and consolidated gender mainstreaming as an effective measure to achieve gender equality (True & Mintrom, 2002; UN, 1995, 2022). Ten years later, in 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. The fifth goal of this framework defines the commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by 2030 (Aggestam & True, 2020; Tickner & True, 2018; UN, 2015). In 2021, UN Women organized the Generation Equality Forum, the largest global gathering on women's rights and gender equality since the World Conference on Women in Beijing more than 25 years ago. Mexico and France co-hosted this event that took place in Mexico City and Paris (UN Women, 2021; France Diplomacy, 2022).

While the rise of pro-gender equality norms mainly derives from liberal feminism, as it is primarily states and international organizations that adopted a liberal feminist approach (Zhukova et al., 2021), the notion of pro-gender equality norms does not automatically equal liberal feminism. Following the different strands of feminism, there are different perspectives on gender equality and the role of the state and international organizations in pursuing the goal of eradicating gender inequality.

*2.1.1 The Women Peace and Security agenda*

Another important milestone to highlight is the emergence of the WPS agenda that started with the UN Security Council's adaptation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in 2000 (UN, 2000). Resolution 1325 was followed by nine subsequent resolutions that together form the WPS framework. The WPS agenda is divided into four pillars: prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery, that combined highlight the indispensable role of women in the global effort toward peace equitable (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Shepherd, 2011; Peace Women, 2022; Tickner & True, 2018). More specifically, the prevention pillar highlights that actors should prevent all forms of violence against women in the context of conflict. The pillar of participation highlights the importance of engaging women in peace processes and conflict-resolution initiatives on all levels of decision-making. The pillar of protection extends the first pillar by emphasizing the importance of assuring women's rights in conflict-related areas and protecting women from all forms of sexual and gender-related violence. Last, the pillar of relief and recovery focuses on ensuring that all relief to women should consider their gender-related needs (Shepherd, 2011; UNDP, 2019).

The WPS agenda is a key example of the liberal feminist agenda as pro-gender equality norms became incorporated into states' policies. After all, a vital element of this agenda is for states to implement specific WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) to incorporate the WPS pillars into their domestic and foreign policies (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Tickner & True, 2018). Today, 98 states have produced such NAPs, some of which are already on their fourth iteration, including The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Italy (Thomson, 2020; WILPF, 2021a, 2021b). In many states, including those that currently have a FFP, and many others, including Australia, Norway, and South Africa, the WPS agenda forms one of the core pillars of states' foreign policy, incorporating a gender lens to foreign-affairs related topics connected to peace and security. For example, Sweden, the main driver behind the concept of FFP, was a great advocate for the WPS agenda on the global stage and was among the first states to implement a NAP (Thomson, 2020; Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2016;

Zhukova et al., 2021). Ultimately, the WPS framework is based on the ethical approach to foreign policy that aims to transform states' foreign policy by adding a gender lens (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019).

However, there are some controversies with the WPS agenda in its approach toward gender, women, and agency. For instance, the WPS agenda focuses on the binary division of gender and sex and is centered primarily on women instead of people across the whole gender spectrum, that are often excluded (Aggestam & True, 2020). The WPS agenda has also been criticized for adopting gender equality norms while continuing to preserve the current status quo. Scholars argue that the WPS agenda follows the liberal version of feminism instead of intersectional feminism, which challenges the masculine dominance in today's world, focuses on all marginalized groups, and engages with more categories of power and discrimination than just gender (Aggestam & True, 2020; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Puechguirbal, 2010). In this context, the issue also arises that the WPS primarily refers to women as passive actors, including victims or vulnerable individuals needing protection from men, maintaining the patriarchal vision. However, women can also be active actors in conflict-resolution and peace processes and can also fight. For example, the female Peshmerga fighters successfully fought ISIS in Iraq (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; CNN, 2015; Shepherd, 2011). Last, while adopting NAPs appears to be a clear commitment from a state toward the WPS agenda, in many cases, this commitment is often poorly integrated into domestic policies (Newby & O'Malley, 2021), which is problematic because it diminishes the power of the WPS agenda.

### *2.1.2 Challenges to the rise of pro-gender equality norms and the empowerment of women*

While there is a noticeable increase in the attention for pro-gender equality norms on the global stage, as highlighted by the above milestones and the existence of almost one hundred NAPs within the WPS framework, it is also important to highlight another development. A growing opposition refuses to commit to pro-gender equality norms and even actively works against established (international)

commitments to women's rights (Aggestam & True, 2021). This "remasculinization of international politics" (Aggestam & True, 2021, p. 386) often occurs in states with populist leaders who are discontented with and fight the status quo, such as Brazil, Hungary, Turkey, Nigeria, and Iraq, where the rights of women and minorities are decreasing. For example, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in 2021, the Council of Europe's legally binding Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, as initially articulated by the earlier mentioned CEDAW (COE, 2021). Another example is the new law that Poland introduced in 2021, which banned women from accessing abortion even in cases of life-threatening risk to the women or in cases of rape (Amnesty International, 2021). But also in so-called liberal democracies such as the United States, there is a wave of conservatism that is impacting state laws regarding women's rights. In Texas, abortion became near-impossible last year and citizens were even encouraged to sue women who undertake an abortion (Guardian, 2021). While this research is being written, the US Supreme Court might overturn its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that gave women in the US the right to abortion. Overturning this ruling would significantly diminish the abortion rights in the country (NY Times, 2022).

These developments are problematic because women already face significant challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The co-called *Shadow Pandemic* highlights the impact that the pandemic and its restrictions had on women; violence against women and girls has significantly increased (UN Women, 2021). Before the pandemic, one out of three women worldwide experienced gender-based violence (UN Women, 2021). During the pandemic, these levels intensified significantly as restrictions to prevent the virus from spreading, such as lockdowns, increased the chances of experiencing gender-based violence. As a result, 25% of women experienced more conflicts at home, and many women increasingly felt unsafe, impacting women worldwide, from South Africa to Australia and from India to Jordan. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already existing crisis for women. (Parry & Gordon, 2021; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, True, 2020; UN Women, 2021c). Next to the *Shadow Pandemic*, the COVID-19 crisis impacted women more severely "as they are more likely to be infected by the virus

because of their principal roles as caregivers within families and front-line health-care workers, and were less likely than men to have power in decision making around the outbreak with consideration of their needs largely unmet" (Parry & Gordon, 2021, p.796).

However, it is not only women that increasingly experience challenges in the context of gender equality. For example, Poland started introducing so-called 'LHBTI-free zones from 2019 onwards, that spread across a third of the country and 100 municipalities, whereas Hungary introduced a new law in 2021 that restricted LHBTIQ+ content from children's books. Both countries risked losing EU funding over these measures (Ciobanu, 2020; EuroNews, 2021; European Commission, 2021).

Despite these anti-gender equality developments, the increase in Feminist Foreign Policies around the world also highlights that actors become more keen to use the word *feminist*. Not only states but also individuals, such as the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who declared being a feminist in 2016 (BCC, 2016; Thomson, 2020), and recently in the Netherlands Minister of Foreign Affairs Wobke Hoekstra in response to critique when he assigned a man to get a top-position in his ministry instead of a woman (NOS, 2022). Ultimately, following the above developments in the increase of pro-gender equality norms around the world, despite a developing counter-movement, some states took it a step further and announced a Feminist Foreign Policy by transforming these norms into their foreign policy framework (Aggestam & True, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021).

### *2.2 The concept of Feminist Foreign Policy*

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is not only a relatively new concept on the global stage but also within academia. Researchers occasionally mentioned it as an optional policy framework (e.g., Richey, 2001) before it became a reality when Sweden announced it in 2014. After Sweden's announcement, academic scholarship on FFP expanded, but it remains small. The few scholars who analyzed the concept of FFP agree that it is a next step in the commitment toward pro-gender equality norms and the WPS

agenda and that the policy contributes to increasing attention for women and girls and achieving gender equality on the global stage (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Aggestam et al., 2019; Dangoisse & Perdomo, 2021; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019; Sundström, Zhukova, & Elgström, 2021; Thomson, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021). After all, the spreading of FFPs around the world signals the commitment of states to work towards a world where women do not only have the same rights as men but can also enjoy these rights to the fullest (Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019). Nonetheless, the lack of a shared understanding of FFP remains and poses both opportunities and challenges, as the practical implementation and theoretical framework are still developing, and feminist scholars continue to have different understandings of what feminism means and should look like (Thomson, 2020).

Today ten countries adopted or announced the introduction of a Feminist Foreign Policy respectively Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), Luxembourg (2018), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Libya (2021), Germany (2021), Chili (2022) and most recently the Netherlands (2022) (Government Netherlands, 2022; Thompson, Ahmed, Khokhar, 2021; Zhukova, Rosén Sundström, & Elgström, 2021). While some countries used the label without much explanation, others published policy papers and handbooks. Additionally, these countries all interpreted the label feminist differently, resulting in different conceptualizations and implementations of their foreign policy (Zhukova et al., 2021). The following paragraphs provide an overview of all, ranging from the most comprehensively developed foreign policy framework to those with less available information.

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden*

Sweden was the first country that implemented a FFP in 2014 to put gender equality at the heart of its foreign policy and address gender inequalities worldwide (Aggestam et al., 2019; Tickner & True, 2018; Thomson, 2020). The Swedish FFP encompasses four main pillars, the so-called 4 R's: Rights, Representation, Resources, and Reality check. The pillar of Rights refers to ensuring that women worldwide can enjoy their human rights. Representation refers to the commitment to increase women's

representation at all levels of society, both worldwide and within the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The pillar of Resources refers to ensuring that women enjoy equal opportunities by allocating resources, for instance through targets, quotas, and gender budgeting. The pillar of Reality check refers to the commitment of Sweden to engage with the current context and status quo of the world in which its FFP operates (CFFP, 2021; Aggestam et al., 2019; Tickner & True, 2018; Thomson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021).

More specifically, Sweden's FFP is based on the idea that global challenges such as poverty result in and amplify gender inequality. Hence, the main objective of its FFP is to address gender equality around the world, and therefore, FFP should be a goal, not a means (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019; Zhukova et al., 2021). Furthermore, this idea is connected to a liberal feminist approach, where the state can have an active role in solving gender inequality (Thompson, 2020). In addition, Sweden's commitment to FFP abroad aligns with its domestic commitments, where the country also works to achieve gender equality and is already quite successful. According to the World Economic Forum, Sweden is the fifth country globally with the highest levels of gender equality, namely 82,3 percent (WEF, 2021). Last, Sweden's FFP is strongly incentivized by its commitment to and advocacy for the WPS agenda, currently being in the third round of its WPS NAP (Peace Women, 2022; Zhukova et al., 2021).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Canada*

Canada introduced its Feminist Foreign Policy in 2017, following the trend that Sweden set. Canada's FFP is called Feminist International Assistance Policy and does not cover all aspects of foreign policy but focuses primarily on development aid by helping women through economic measures and directing foreign aid directly to them. As part of this effort, Canada launched the Equality Fund in 2019, a so-called feminist fund that aims to direct more resources toward women through Canada's FFP. Furthermore, Canada's FFP is based on the liberal understanding of individualization and the economic

benefits of women's empowerment (Thomson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021; Zhukova et al., 2021). Both Canada and Sweden adopted their FFP to advance strategic interests: "Canada and Sweden are embedding liberal feminist ideas into national self-identity and self-promotion, and using these ideas as a way to distinguish them from other nations, particularly to suggest that they are more progressive" (Thomson, 2020, p.434 ). However, in contrast to Sweden, Canada's FFP is based on the idea that gender inequality causes global problems such as poverty. Therefore, its FFP is a means to end global gender inequality and contribute to a more peaceful, sustainable, and inclusive world instead of a goal in itself (Thomson, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Canada's approach toward its FFP also becomes evident in its commitment to the WPS agenda within its foreign policy framework. Canada was among the first countries to introduce a WPS National Action Plan in 2010 and is currently in its second round of NAP (Peace Women, 2022b; Zhukova et al., 2021). Accordingly, Canada's commitment to the WPS agenda is demonstrated in its FFP mainly by connecting economic and sustainable development with peace (Zhukova et al., 2021). To strengthen its commitment even further, the Canadian government also appointed its first Ambassador for Women Peace and Security in 2019, Jacqueline O'Neil, who is also committed to Canada's FFP by explicitly focusing on the parts that align with the WPS agenda (Government Canada, 2019).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in France*

France adopted its so-called *feminist diplomacy* in 2018 and later labelled its entire foreign policy as feminist. Like Canada, France's FFP is connected to the liberal understanding of feminism and is based on the assumption that gender inequality causes global problems. With its FFP, France aims to increase global gender equality, enhance the economic position of women, eradicate gender-based violence, and contribute to equitable educational opportunities (Thomson, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021). Despite the existence of a clear FFP framework, France appears to put its promises into action to a certain extent. For example, President Macron appointed an ambassador-at-large working with gender equality

in 2019. This ambassador, Delphine O, was also the Secretary-General for the Generation Equality Forum, which France co-hosted together with Mexico, demonstrating France's commitment to advancing gender equality on the global stage (Kaddouri, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021). France was among the first countries to adopt a WPS National Action Plan in 2010; ever since, it has been a vital aspect of France's foreign policy (Peace Women, 2022b; Zhukova et al., 2021).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico*

Mexico was the first country in the Global South to adopt a FFP in 2020, specifically focusing on removing structural (gendered) inequalities. Like Sweden, Mexico's FFP comprises all aspects of foreign policy. However, it is distinct in its intersectional approach, following intersectional feminism, as it goes beyond the binary conceptualization of gender and engages with more identity markers, such as sexual orientation, race, and (dis)ability (CFFP, 2021; Government Mexico, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2021). Mexico's FFP aligns with its long-standing advocacy for women's rights and gender equality on the global stage. For example, the first UN World Conference on Women was organized by and took place in Mexico in 1975. Almost 50 years later, Mexico co-hosted the Generation Equality Forum together with France. Additionally, Mexico's FFP derives from its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal of achieving gender equality by 2030 (Zhukova et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2021). However, despite this clear commitment of Mexico toward empowering women abroad and contributing to gender equality, Mexico only adopted its first WPS National Action Plan in 2021, one year after adopting its FFP (CFFP, 2021; Peace Women, 2022b). Additionally, Mexico faces significant problems regarding femicide (CSIS, 2020; Guardian, 2021) which generates questions about how it intends to deal with gender equality domestically.

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Luxembourg*

Luxembourg announced that it would advance a FFP in its 2018 coalition agreement (Thompson et al., 2021; Government Luxembourg, 2018; Sundström et al., 2021). However, while it appears that the

government of Luxembourg has adopted some feminist principles into its foreign policy, it did not launch a comprehensive FFP as of today. As such, academic scholars researching FFP barely mention Luxembourg as an example country. After all, "Luxembourg has also expressed its interest in pursuing a FFP, but it has yet to support its words with deeds" (Zhukova et al., 2021, p.1). However, possible developments might occur soon. During the 2021 Gender Equality Forum, the government announced additional commitments toward its FFP, including developing a clear action plan (Thomson, Ahmed, Khokhar, 2021; WILPF, 2021).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Spain*

Spain announced its FFP in 2021 as it published its guiding document, *Guide to Feminist Foreign Policy* (Thomson et al., 2021; Sundström et al., 2021). Similar to Mexico, Spain adopts an intersectional approach to its FFP by not only focusing on gender but also taking into consideration "ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, religious belief, disability and place of origin" (Thomson et al., p.18). Furthermore, Spain's FFP comprises all aspects of foreign policy, ranging from security and trade to diplomacy (Politica Exterior Feminista, 2021). Furthermore, Spain appointed María Jesús Conde Zabala, who became the Ambassador-at-large for Feminist Foreign Policy and also promotes the WPS agenda (CFFP, 2021; ICRW, 2022; Revista, 2021).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Libya,*

Libya's first female Foreign Minister, Fajla Mangoush, announced during an event of the Generation Equality Forum in 2021 that Libya would be the first African nation to adopt a FFP, which would have its roots in the WPS agenda (CFFP; Thompson et al., 2021). Libya's FFP specifically aims to address the root causes of the Libyan conflict and, hence, contribute to the region's stabilization. However, after the announcement, no following developments occurred as of today. (Thompson et al., 2021).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Germany*

In November 2021, Germany's new government launched its coalition agreement which explicitly mentioned the intention to introduce a Feminist Foreign Policy led by the first female German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Analena Baerbock (DW, 2022; Tausendfreund, 2021); Politico, 2022). Furthermore, while adopting Sweden's approach to base their FFP on the four Pillars, Rights, Resources, Representation, and Reality, Germany added the D for Diversity to highlight that their FFP is not about women only but about everyone who is marginalized, taking an intersectional feminist approach (Baerbock, 2022).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in Chile*

In January 2022, Chile's new president Gabriel Boric introduced a feminist cabinet with fourteen of his ministers being women. Two months later, the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that Chile would introduce a Feminist Foreign Policy. However, as Chile's FFP is still very new, there are no further developments or information available on the specific content of its approach (HRW, 2022; Government Chile, 2022).

*Feminist Foreign Policy in The Netherlands.*

On the 13$^{th}$ of May 2022, the Dutch Council of Ministers decided to introduce a Dutch FFP and send notice of this decision to both the Senate and the House of Representative. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will consult with civil society and other stakeholders the upcoming months to explore what a FFP for the Netherlands will look like in practice (Government Netherlands, 2022).

To conclude, there are ten countries in the world today that either announced or implemented a Feminist Foreign Policy. While some of them build upon Sweden's approach and its four pillars, every FFP has a different approach as all ten governments have a different understanding of the concept of FFP and its implementation. This lack of a shared understanding of FFP poses both opportunities and

challenges, as the practical implementation and theoretical framework are still developing, and feminist scholars continue to have different understandings of what the concept entails and its underlying feminist ideas. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the limited academic research on FFP by exploring the underlying ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP.

### *2.3. The label feminist - ethical considerations and critique*

In the context of states and foreign policy, words communicated are extremely powerful and influence how citizens perceive specific issues (Dangoisse & Perdomo, 2021). Consequently, by embracing feminism and using it as a label, states establish the perception that they ethically consider their actions and are "standing against the systematic and global subordination of women" (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p.323). However, as highlighted above, not all states have a similar understanding of the label feminist, which also results in critique and ambiguity regarding the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy.

Next to the differences among the countries that officially implemented a FFP, some countries seem to have an FFP or feminist elements to their foreign policies without labeling it as such. For example, Norway and Australia gender mainstreamed their foreign policy, while Ireland and Iceland targeted more than 80% of their development aid towards gender equality (Aggestam et al., 2019; OECD, 2018; Scheyer & Kumskova, True, 2014). Hence, if a pro-gender approach or ethical commitments are the main characteristics of a FFP, then many other countries would fall under the category of FFP as well. However, only ten countries today use this specific label feminist, creating the idea that such labeling practice is a clear political choice. For example, research by PRIO demonstrates that Norway incorporated a de-facto FFP but consciously chose not to use the label feminist as the government found it unnecessary (PRIO, 2018). So, what is behind the label feminist? The following paragraphs elaborate on the ethical considerations and critique regarding the label feminist.

*2.3.1 Feminist Foreign Policy as an ethical commitment*

In the last couple of years, several states have adopted a more ethical approach to their foreign policy, as they tried to make it more inclusive with a stronger focus on those who were previously not heard. Examples of such countries include Sweden and Canada, which currently have a FFP, and Australia, the UK, and Norway (Aggestam et al., 2019). Many of them build upon the ethical considerations behind the WPS agenda because it puts gender at the heart of peace and security within the international system (Aggestam et al., 2019; Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019).

As Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond (2016) argue: "the declaration of a distinct Feminist Foreign Policy signals a departure from traditional elite-oriented foreign policy practices and discourses toward a policy framework that is guided by normative and ethical principles" (p.327). By adopting a FFP, states commit to changing from a foreign policy that is based on maintaining the status quo, which originates from traditional masculine principles and a patriarchal approach, towards a foreign policy that is not only more inclusive but also challenges existing these existing principles and approaches (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019). Accordingly, FFP is strongly connected to both Feminist IR scholarship which focuses on ethical commitments, as well as Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) which argues that states are guided by ethical principles if they use their foreign policy to advance human rights and moral behavior (Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019; Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019).

Nonetheless, the current war in Ukraine raises new questions about the ethical character and challenges of FFP. Most importantly, the question arises of how states could deal with conflict and war through a feminist approach. For example, can the delivery of weapons be a part of a feminist approach to foreign policy? In the last months, Germany received criticism that it was hesitant to deliver heavy weapons to Ukraine while it had just announced its FFP (EuroNews, 2022b; Reuters, 2022). Another question that arises is whether only men or also women should be obliged to military service during a war. In Ukraine, all men between the age of 18 and 60 were obliged to stay in the country to serve in the military, while

all women and children were allowed to leave the country (Economist, 2022; CNN, 2022). Is this indeed the right and ethical thing to do, as reflected by a feminist label? Or does the discourse of protecting women and marginalized groups might strengthen "strengthen patriarchal views of protection, which would further inhibit the transformation of gendered power relations"? (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2016, p.330).

There is no straightforward answer to how states could deal with conflict and war through a feminist approach, as there are different ideas within the various strands of feminism. However, it is vital to recognize that feminism does not equal pacifism. While FFP is often connected to "soft normative power and its inability to confront aggression, hardcore security issues, and threats emanating from actors such as hostile states and transnational terror organizations" Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2016, p.330), advocates of FFP argue that there should be a balance between hard power which includes military means, and soft power through persuasion and diplomacy. Most importantly, a feminist approach to solving violence, conflicts, and wars includes tackling the root causes instead of fighting the violent symptoms only, which differs from traditional masculine approaches. Last, it is vital to highlight that security should encompass everyone, from women, children, and marginalized groups to men (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2016; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019).

### *2.3.2 Critical notes on Feminist Foreign Policy*

In the context of expressing ethical commitments by adding the label feminist to foreign policies, some discrepancies and critical issues arise. For example, Sweden is among the largest arms exporters in the world, which seems to inflict and contradict its efforts within FFP (Aggestam et al., 2019). Following a feminist approach, exporting arms can be necessary sometimes, but they can also cause high levels of harm to civilians and those not related to the conflict. As such, Sweden is not only criticized for its significant role in the global arms export, but together with Canada, it is also criticized for selling weapons specifically to actors that violate women's rights. Last, a heavy arms export goes against the

above-mentioned feminist approach that focuses on preventive measures and addressing the root causes instead of only ending the violence (Zhukova et al., 2012; Aggestam & Bergman, 2019).

Another critique of FFP and the underlying ethical commitments is the divergence between countries' foreign and domestic policies. "As David Chandler notes, the conduct of ethical foreign policy often signals a wish to divert attention away from policy failures domestically" (Chandler, 2003, in: Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019, p.40). For example, the fact that Mexico has one of the highest femicide rates in the world while also having a FFP and is committed to empowering women abroad appears to be hypocritical and raises questions about the ability to practice what you preach in cases of a substantial divergence between foreign and domestic policies (CSIS, 2020; Guardian, 2021).

Following these critiques and divergences, adding the feminist label to a foreign policy appears to be not only a purely ethical choice but also a strategic choice to strengthen a country's reputation on the global stage as an advocate for women's rights. For example, Mexico's FFP legitimizes and strengthens its credibility to improve the situation for women in the domestic context. At the same time, France's FFP adds an ethical element to the country's leadership on the global stage as part of the G7 and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Such strategic narrative behind FFP originates from liberal feminist ideas as it contributes to the individual reputation of a state (Zhukova et al., 2021).

Additionally, the label feminist creates the assumption that the policy is about women or girls, reinforcing the binary division of gender. Indeed, most countries that adopted a FFP disproportionally focus on the rights and experiences of women instead of taking into consideration all groups of society that are currently not addressed through foreign policies (CFFP, 2021; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019; Thompson et al., 2021). To avoid this, many feminist scholars highlight the importance of an intersectional approach to FFP, which goes beyond gender and recognizes social categories such as

class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality (Aggestam et al., 2019). However, only Mexico and Spain have recognized the importance of an intersectional approach within their FFP (Thompson et al., 2021).

Last, as highlighted in *Chapter one*, various feminist scholars criticize how states embraced feminism during the last decades, resulting in so-called state feminism. They argue that state feminism reinforces the patriarchic system and gender inequalities. As Rhode (1994) argues "the state is a patriarchal institution in the sense that it reflects and institutionalizes male dominance" (p. 1184). Hence, feminist IR scholars question the ability and willingness of states to implement genuine feminist policies and norms without other goals than empowering women and under-represented groups in society (Hudson & Leidl, 2015; Mcrobbie, 2009). While acknowledging these issues, other scholars have highlighted how states' efforts positively contributed to global gender equality and strengthened the feminist agenda. As Krook & McKay (2011) demonstrate: "the increasing institutionalization of feminist practice and gender mainstreaming within governments and nongovernmental organizations has had positive benefits, with feminists using political opportunity structures in new ways" (Thomson, 2020). Furthermore, too much criticism of the state's role in advancing a feminist agenda and incorporating the word feminist into states' foreign policies might strengthen the already increasing movement that refuses to commit to pro-gender equality norms (Thomson, 2020). Accordingly, while the critical approach to FFP is valid and even crucial, following the commitment of reflexivity among feminist IR scholars, they might not be a reason to refrain from adopting a FFP or pro-gender equality norms within a foreign policy framework.

In sum, the concept of FFP is new but the ideas behind it derive from previous pro-gender equality developments, including gender mainstreaming and key milestone agreements such as CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, the SDGs, and the WPS agenda. At the same time, there is a rising counter-movement that actively works against already established women's rights and LGBTQ+ people. Furthermore, there are currently ten countries that announced a FFP who have different

conceptualizations and implementations. Last, some countries have feminist elements in their foreign policy but do not use the label FFP and several ambiguities arises regarding the extent to which FFP reflects truly ethical considerations, a lack of alignment between foreign and domestic policies, the binary focus on gender, and the capacity of the state in the pursuit of changing existing gendered hierarchies and institutions.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

This research explores the ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) following an interpretivist research design based on Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework to examine Critical Discourse Analysis. The data sources for the Critical Discourse Analysis are interviews with people currently working with FFP and available policy documents from countries with a FFP. The end of this chapter discusses the limitations of the research design and measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

### *3.1 An interpretivist research design*

As O'Reilly & Bone (2008) argue, "the term interpretivism refers to epistemologies, or theories about how we can gain knowledge of the world, which loosely rely on interpreting or understanding the meanings that humans attach to their actions" (p.119). As such, interpretivism arose as a research approach challenging positivism which is based on several beliefs. For example, the belief that there is one truth that can be found through research, that research can and should be objective as well as generalizable, and that the research process to explore this objective truth is a linear process (Scauso, 2020). On the contrary, interpretivist research is based on the belief that our current world is based on subjective realities and shared meanings; in other words, reality is socially constructed. Accordingly, interpretivist research focuses on exploring, interpreting, and understanding beliefs and underlying meaning-making behind social structures and processes, where individuals are the main actors. In this process of meaning-making, the researcher has a vital role in interpreting the underlying meaning, hence the name interpretivism (Kent, 2006; Myers, 2008; O'Reilly & Bone, 2008; Scauso, 2020). Last, the research process is not linear but iterative, as it goes back and forth and evolves over time (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yanow, 2000).

Several interpretivist elements characterize the current research. Firstly, the intentional strategy is to have a flexible approach to the research by focusing on an abductive and iterative research process. In

this context, iterative refers a non-linear research process. Abductive, which is located between inductive and deductive research, refers to research that starts with some observations (inductive approach) that are incomplete, which are combined with theoretical understanding (deductive approach). This flexible approach is vital because the researcher goes forth and back from the initial understanding of the concepts, based on prior knowledge, the literature review, theoretical framework, and personal experiences, to newly learned insights from the data gathering and analysis. The fact that the researcher's initial understanding can be challenged during the research process can potentially change the original research design, which requires flexibility (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012a, 2012b). Secondly, following the interpretivist approach, the researcher has a significant role in the research as she is the "the primary instrument for accessing and making sense of (…)meaning-making processes" (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012b, p.98). As a result, the researcher recognizes the participants' agency in this research and does not aspire to control them or their environment, contributing to the dynamic character of this research (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012a).

### *3.2 Data sources and data collection*

Interpretivist research often bases its analysis of meaning-making on linguistic data sources such as words of policy-relevant actors or policy documents (Yanow, 2000). Therefore, this research uses two kinds of data sources as the unit of observation to examine the unit of analysis, the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP): interview transcripts from people currently working in one way or the other with FFP, next to available policy documents of countries with a FFP.

To elaborate on the unit of analysis, the research chooses to examine FFP as a concept instead of the ten existing cases in the world today as case studies. After all, the concept FFP spreads around the world because countries increasingly adopt the label feminist to complement their existing foreign policies. The fact that the number of countries increased significantly over the past years and is expected to increase further illustrates that FFP is not so much about singular cases per se but more about the ideas

and intentions behind the word feminist as accumulated in the term FFP. Nonetheless, the existing cases can provide essential information contributing to an understanding of FFP as a concept which is why available policy papers from countries with a FFP are a vital data source.

The first data sources for this research are interviews with practitioners in the field of FFP, defined as people currently working with FFP in one way or another, which can range from policymakers, ambassadors, and politicians, to scholars and experts in the field. After all, the interpretivist research approach focuses on the meaning-making of participants whom the researcher studies (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012a). Accordingly, the researcher conducted eight interviews with different practitioners, an overview of which is provided in *Table 1: Participants in the research - practitioners of Feminist Foreign Policy*. What unites the interviewees is that they all work, in one way or another, with the concept of FFP, ranging from those who established, implemented, and execute existing FFPs, to those working towards introducing a FFP in their country in the future and leading experts and scholars working on the concept. The researcher selected the interviewees based on prior research and purposive sampling to find practitioners that could provide the research with the most extensive and specific information (Dilley, 2000; Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). In this process of case selection, "choices of cases and access are often intertwined" (…) given the research purpose of understanding meaning-making in particular sites" (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012a, p.70).

| Reference | Position | Relevance |
|---|---|---|
| Interviewee A | Senior policy-maker in government engaged with the WPS agenda | Can provide perspective on FFP and WPS agenda from inside a Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| Interviewee B | Ambassador for Gender Equality | Can provide perspective on gender equality and FFP from inside a government |
| Interviewee C | Ambassador for Gender Equality | Can provide perspective on gender equality and FFP from inside a government |
| Interviewee D | Senator and delegate Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). | Can provide perspective on FFP from a domestic, political, European and international perspective. |
| Interviewee E | Senior Global Policy Advocate NGO | Can provide perspective of expert working with FFP and a feminist perspective within the UN context. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Interviewee F | Policy Lead at NGO | Can provide perspective of an expert working with FFP from a non-governmental perspective |
| Interviewee G | Independent researcher in foreign policy and security, with a focus on gender and climate change. | Can provide perspective of an expert on the gendered lens of foreign policy, including FFP and the WPS agenda. |
| Interviewee H | Senior scholar | Can provide an academic perspective of FFP, the role of gender in foreign policy and the WPS agenda. |

*Table 1: Participants in the research - practitioners of Feminist Foreign Policy*

Regarding the interviews, this research follows Schaffer's (2014) interpretivist approach of Ordinary Language Interviewing, which is based on the belief that there is no one truth but that every individual has their own truth, which a researcher can access through interviews. This approach is specifically relevant in research based on specific words "that posit a particular set of intentions on the part of political actors" (Schaffer, 2014, p.186), which is the case for feminist in the context of FFP. According to Schaffer's (2014) approach, the interviews in this research are unstructured because the researcher provides space for the interviewee's meaning-making process resulting in a conversation-style interview. Ultimately, the specific questions per interviewee differ, but what corresponds in all interviews is that the researcher asks questions that help expose the interviewee's understanding of FFP and the meaning of the words they use. Vital in this regard are questions that directly ask for interviewees' understanding of certain words and follow-up questions and prompts, where the researcher asks for elaborations and examples of what the interviewee is talking about (Schaffer, 2014).

The interviews are recorded with the interviewees' consent and transcribed, after which the researcher executes member-checking where the interviewees will have the chance to read and change the transcript to make sure that the transcript truly reflects their perspective on the topics discussed. As such, member-checking enables "not to erase ambiguities, but to understand their sources" (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012b, p. 108). After the member-checking, the transcripts are coded and analyzed

using Critical Discourse Analysis, which will be elaborated on in *Chapter 4.3 Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis.*

Next to interviews, this research analyzes policy documents that countries published in the context of their FFP, consisting of a detailed explanation of their FFP and what it will look like in practice. Following Thomson's (2020) research on FFP, the current research analyzes only the first publicly available documents published by countries with a FFP. By doing so, the analysis can identify "the original ideas underpinning the use and understanding of the word feminism, rather than the ways the policies have since been developing or implemented, or their influence on other states and transnational discourse" (Thomson, 2020, p.429). While ten countries announced a FFP, only three of them published these kinds of policy documents, as illustrated by *Table 2: Policy documents on Feminist Foreign Policy*.

| Country | FFP since | Name of policy document | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sweden | 2014 | *Swedish Foreign Policy action plan for feminist foreign policy 2015-2018* (Government Sweden, 2015). | Publications that followed but will not be part of the current research for reasons explained above are: *The Swedish Foreign Service action plan for feminist foreign policy 2019-2022* (2019) and *Handbook Sweden's feminist foreign policy* (2019). |
| Canada | 2017 | *Canada's Feminist Assistance Policy - #HerChoiceHerVoice* (Government Canada, 2017). | In 2020, Canadian Foreign Minister at the time, François-Philippe Champagne, announced the development of a more comprehensive policy paper outlining Canada's commitments to FFP. However, two years later the paper does not exist and discussions with civil society actors have not started yet (CFFP, 2021; Woroniak, 2022). |
| Spain | 2021 | *Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy. Promoting Gender Equality in Spain's External Action Service (Government Spain, 2021).* | |
| Countries that announced a FFP but do not have any policy document released as of May 2022: France[1], Luxembourg, Mexico[2], Libya, Germany, Chile, The Netherlands. | | | |

*Table 2: Policy documents on Feminist Foreign Policy*

[1] While France published *France's International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)* in 2018, it does not use the word feminist at all (Thomson, 2022). Therefore, this research does not perceive it to be suitable for analyzing it in the context of FFP.

[2] An external Mexican agency published a document called *Conceptualizing Feminist Foreign Policy: Notes for Mexico*, in collaboration with the foreign secretary. However, this is not an official document from the Government of Mexico so this research does not perceive it to be suitable for analyzing it in the context of FFP.

## *3.3 Data Analysis Method: Critical Discourse Analysis*

This research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology to analyze the above data sources and examine what is feminist about the concept of FFP and explore its underlying ideas and beliefs. The following paragraphs elaborate on what CDA entails in general and provide a comprehensive overview of Fairclough's approach to CDA, on which this research bases its analytical framework.

### *3.3.1 General remarks on Critical Discourse Analysis*

Before diving into CDA as a methodology, it is vital to understand what it analyzes; in other words, what is meant by discourse? In this research, discourse refers to text in the form of policy documents and interview transcripts. Accordingly, analyzing discourse enables us to find the underlying meaning of and ideas behind language (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002a). Among scholars of CDA, there are different theoretical, practical, and methodological approaches (e.g., Teun A. van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and Norman Fairclough). However, there are some common features of CDA all can agree on.

First, CDA is a tool to explore the meaning behind discourse by focusing not only on the linguistic aspect of discourse, so on the text itself, but also considering what is meant by the discourse and the context in which the discourse occurs. Second, the world around us creates the language we use, while the language we use also creates the world around us. In other words, language both constitutes and is constituted by the outside world (Catalano & Waugh, 2020; Fairclough, 2001). As Jørgensen & Phillips (2002a) argue: "language, then, is not merely a channel through which information about underlying mental states and behavior or facts about the world are communicated. On the contrary, language is a 'machine' that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world" (p.9). Third, CDA distinguishes itself from other forms of Discourse Analysis by its critical approach as it aims to expose discourse that contributes to unequal power relations, thereby contributing to social change. As a result, of this critical approach, CDA is not neutral but aims to change the status quo and is therefore often used in the context of political discourse to understand and change issues in society (Catalano & Waugh, 2020;

Fairclough, 2001; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b; Mogashoa, 2014; Van Dijk, 2001). In this approach "in the name of emancipation, critical discourse analytical approaches take the side of oppressed social groups" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b, p.5)

### *3.3.2. Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis*

Norman Fairclough is one of the founding fathers of CDA and, therefore, has the most thoroughly developed understanding of this methodology. While his approach changed slightly over time, his most recent approach understands CDA as dialectical reasoning, whereby he emphasizes the connection between *critique*, *explanation*, and *action* (Fairclough, 2018). In this context, dialectical reasoning is "a way of reasoning from critique of discourse to what should be done to change existing reality, by way of explanation of relations between discourse and other components of reality" (Fairclough, 2018, p. 13). In other words, by critically examining discourse and exploring unequal power relations (*critique*), CDA can explain the problematic status quo as conveyed through discourse (*explanation*) and hence, contribute to changing it (*action*). Following this approach, CDA can expose the role of discourse in maintaining unequal power hierarchies and social issues (e.g., Fairclough, 1989, 1993, 2014), including gender inequalities. This characteristic of Fairclough's CDA illustrates why CDA is a suitable method for analysis in feminist research. After all, Feminist IR scholarship also aims to expose (gendered) inequalities within IR scholarship and contribute to changing the status quo for the better. Furthermore, CDA provides the opportunity to both examine the textual elements of the word *feminist* as well as the meaning and labeling practices of FFP.

Regarding the role of agency within CDA, Fairclough initially focused more on structure than agency as he aimed to conduct a systemic analysis of discourse. However, this changed over time as he started to acknowledge the agency of individuals in the creation of discourse. Today, he recognizes that there are "two 'causal powers' which shape texts: on the one hand, social structures and social practices; on the other hand, social agents, the people involved in social events" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 22). Therefore, CDA

is not only applicable to the analysis of discourse as established by institutions, such as policy papers but can also be used to examine the meaning-making of individuals through interviews.

While Fairclough's approach to CDA has a strong focus on text, he recognizes that in order to understand a discourse, it is vital to examine the larger societal context in which discourse occurs. After all, the context of language shapes its meaning (Fairclough 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Therefore, he developed an analytical framework that consists of three dimensions: the text itself, the context in which the text occurs (social practice), and the connection between the text and context (discursive practice), as illustrated in *Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for CDA* (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b).

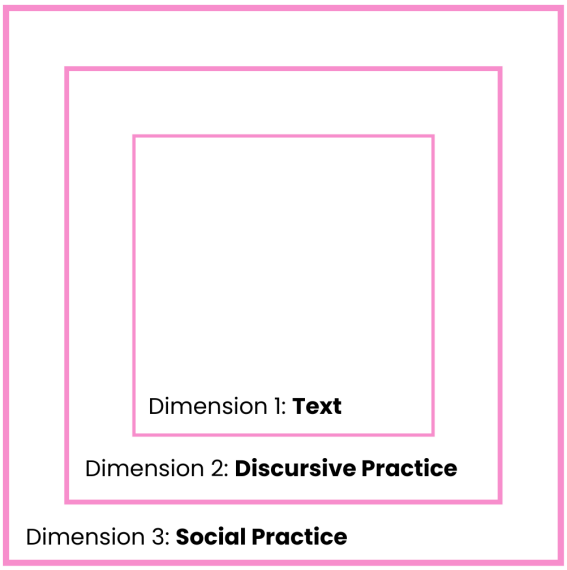


*Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional framework model for CDA*

The first dimension, *text*, is the starting point of the CDA and it focuses on exploring textual patterns and linguistic features (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b). To conduct this textual analysis, this research will use Fairclough's Textual Analysis Checklist, which can be applied to policy papers and interview transcripts (Fairclough, 2003). Regarding the coding of the text, this research uses an open

coding approach (Neuman & Robson, 2007) and conduct multiple rounds of coding using ATLAS.ti software, following the interpretivist and abductive approach as elaborated on earlier in this chapter. As such, the researcher goes forth and back between conducting and transcribing the interviews and coding and analyzing both interviews and policy documents. In the context of the current research, this dimension refers to examining the words and textual patterns that occur within the interview transcripts and policy papers.

The second dimension, *discursive practices*, focuses on the use of the text, ranging from its creation, the spreading of the text, and the different ways in which the text is used (Fairclough, 1992). Furthermore, this dimension examines "how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text, and how receivers of texts also apply available discourses and genres in the consumption and interpretation of the texts" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b, p. 8). In the context of the current research, this dimension refers to exploring the underlying meaning of the word *Feminist Foreign Policy* and the labeling practice of adding the word feminist to existing foreign policy.

The third dimension, *societal practices,* focuses on analyzing the larger societal context in which the text or discourse occur. This societal context consists of both discursive and non-discursive elements, such as larger overarching discourses or institutional structures and political practices (Fairclough, 1992). In the context of the current research, the third dimension of Fairclough's framework encompasses the overarching feminist discourse, the global status quo of FFP, and gender equality in which FFP occurs and spreads around the world, next to the domestic governmental context and structures within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Ultimately, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of CDA enables us to analyze data sources (*text*), their underlying meaning (*discursive practices*), and the context in which they occur (*social practices*) to

examine the label feminist in the context of foreign policy, labeling-practices, and identify the ideas and beliefs underpinning FFP.

### *3.4 Towards trustworthiness in the research*

As the researcher has an active role in the process of meaning-making, potential trustworthiness issues might arise from this research, most of which are related to bias. For example, the researcher might ask questions during the interviews or code the interview transcripts based on her own understanding of FFP, leaving no space for other interpretations and perspectives. While it is impossible to fully eliminate bias and dissolve the above issues, this research uses several interpretive strategies to verify the findings and guarantee trustworthiness.

First, the iterative and abductive character of the research increases the trustworthiness because going back and forth in the process minimizes confirmation bias (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012a, 2012b). This is vital for all phases, but particularly during the coding and analysis phase because this is where the ideas and beliefs underpinning FFP are to be found. Hence, there are multiple rounds of coding that enable finding ideas and beliefs that the researcher did not expect to find. Second, the interviews start with questions about the interviewees' understanding of FFP to continue the interview based on the interviewees' understanding and not the researcher's, minimizing confirmation bias, following Schaffer's (2014) approach to Ordinary Language Interviewing. Third, the researcher engages in *reflexivity,* which is the consideration and analysis of how the researcher's characteristics, access to research participants, and own meaning-making process could have influenced the data collection and analysis process and hence, the research outcome. Another element of reflexivity is the consideration of the silences and what is not mentioned in the data sources. This reflexivity is not only a vital element of interpretive research but also of ethical Feminist scholarship (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamund, 2019; True, 2010; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012b). Fourth, the researcher executes member-checking, where interviewees will have the opportunity to read and change the transcript to make sure that the

researcher fully understood their words during the interview. Last, the interpretivist approach requires the researcher to evaluate multiple perspectives, so the research conducts multiple interviews with practitioners in different positions and from different countries and analyses policy papers on FFP from different countries. Finally, these different data sources will be triangulated to strengthen the research's trustworthiness and verify the findings (Davies, 2011; Tansey, 2007; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012b).

## Chapter 4: A Critical Discourse Analysis and feminist ideas portrayed in Feminist Foreign Policy

The Critical Discourse Analysis on the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) revealed significant differences on how feminist ideas are portrayed in the policy papers and interview transcripts. These ideas became most apparent within Fairclough's textual dimension regarding the words and patterns connected with FFP, such as feminist, feminism, gender equality, women (and girls), intersectionality, and LGBT(Q+). Furthermore, the meaning behind these words and patterns occur in the discursive dimension of Fairclough's framework, which reveals the different kinds of feminist discourses, the labeling practice of adding feminist to foreign policy, and how this label has a different meaning in different contexts. On a critical note, the three dimensions appear less separable in practice than in Fairclough's theoretical model, which provides challenges to applying them. Chapter five provides a visual overview of all ideas and patterns connected to FFP in Fairclough's framework, which also considers the findings in this chapter.

The word feminism applies to different movements in society, including activists, academic scholarship, and state policies. This diversity creates challenges but also is a significant characteristic of feminism, as highlighted by one interviewee:

> It's really hard to put a three-sentence definition on it [feminism] because for us, one of the starting points is that there are many different feminist movements. There are many different ways of being a feminist and that diversity is really, really important (Interviewee F, 29-04-2022).

Accordingly, while all data sources use similar words, such as FFP, feminism, and gender equality, the connotation and underlying meaning differed. This is specifically interesting regarding what Fairclough (2018) calls *intertextuality*, which refers to how different texts relate to each other regarding the words they use and the discourse that arises. As Jorgenson & Phillips (2002b) argue, most language is used by

others before, which constructs meaning to existing words. Nonetheless, the connotation and meaning of language can change, which also occurs in the context of FFP. For example, the label feminist used to be applied to a small group of activists, stereotyped as 'not shaving and wearing woolen socks', resulting in hesitation among the general public to adopt the label. However, over the last decades, individuals increasingly felt more connected to the label feminist, which displays a change in the connotation. Hence, this research found that this change created momentum for states to adopt the label and apply it to their foreign policies. One interviewee highlights this changing meaning of the word feminism during her life:

> I was born in the 1970s when feminism had a different connotation (…). It was more exclusive to be feminist and more anti-men, anti-establishment … and felt more radical. (…) First, it [feminism] was activated for by a relatively small group in society, but that group grew. Also, internationally, also with a lot of young people, the label became more diverse compared to when I grew up. It's now about equal opportunities for all (Interviewee C, 15-04-2022).

Because of the changing connotation behind the word feminism, the research found that the underlying meaning behind feminism is not static, but changes and will most likely continue to change and adapt. As one interviewee notes: "We are still developing what it means and how to get there" (Interviewee G, 15-04-2022). In this process, previous feminist movements blazed the trail for the current developments where increasingly, individuals, groups, and states commit themselves to the label feminist. Another interviewee recognizes the importance of such efforts in the past:

> Maybe the previous generations had to fight even harder, needed to be more radical and activist. They broke multiple glass ceilings which we currently profit from. But we still have a long way to go (Interviewee C, 15-04-2022).

Furthermore, the research found significant differences regarding the meaning of feminism in the context of FFP. While the overall discourse displays that gender equality is a core aspect of feminism, a distinction arises between a feminist perspective that focusses more on a binary definition of gender, related to liberal feminism, and a perspective with an intersectional approach to gender deriving from intersectional feminism.

Regarding the first perspective, some interviewees were straightforward: "if you believe that men and women should be equal, but at the same time you recognize that it is not the case today, you're a feminist" (Interviewee B, 20-04-2022). This illustrates the tendency of FFP to focus primarily on women, which occurred in all policy papers and some interviews. As Thompson & Clement (2019) argue: there is a "tendency of governments to use the word feminist when they mean women and girls" (p.5)". For example, Canada's policy paper demonstrated the commitment to "a truly feminist approach that supports the economic, political and social empowerment of women and girls, and makes gender equality a priority, for the benefit of all people" (Government Canada, 2017, p.1). This example displays how advancing the position of women and girls would benefit all people, placing everyone that does not identify as a woman (or girl) in second place.

This essentialist perspective toward gender equality derives mainly from liberal feminism (e.g., Zalewski, 2018; Zhukova et al., 2021). Furthermore, the policy papers displayed a strong focus on the economic benefit of gender equality, representing another characteristic of liberal feminism. For example, Canada's policy paper (2017) noted: "achieving gender equality around the world could increase global gross domestic product (GDP) by $12 trillion in a single decade" (p.2). A similar discourse occurs in the policy paper of Spain (2021), where equality appears to be equivalent to wealth: "Equality is a synonym of diversity and thus also a synonym of wealth. Wealth in the exercise of rights by all citizens, but also economic wealth, prosperity and justice (p.4). Ambiguous about liberal feminism is the binary division of gender, the focus on economic gains of gender equality, and strategic considerations regarding self-

interest and reputation on the global stage. Nonetheless, the research found that the liberal discourse behind FFP still signifies a change in policy, discourse, and commitment in contrast to conventional foreign policy practices and is to some extent connected to ethical and moral considerations to advance the position of women and change the status quo.

Regarding the second perspective, the research found an increasing focus on being more inclusive beyond the binary division of gender, which derives from the intersectional approach to feminism. Furthermore, this perspective emphasizes equity, humanity, curiosity, and questioning the status quo beyond gender. One interviewee emphasizes this intersectional approach to feminism as follows:

> At its core, [feminism] it's about building more, just, equitable, sustainable, peaceful societies and economies as a world. But one that also brings an anti-racist, decolonial approach to it. So what we often do is we talk about core principles or concepts within feminism. And clearly, gender equality as a central objective, but bringing a non-binary perspective of gender" (…). This is not just talking about one definition of women. It's recognizing the diversity of women. It's about looking at power and transforming structures (Interviewee F, 29-04-2022).

This example also highlights how some interviewees specifically refer to intersectionality by using that word; others are more implicit and talk, for example, about women and LGBTQ+ people or underline the importance of other identity markers such as race. Nonetheless, interviewees' primary identity characteristic next to biological sex is sexuality, ranging from LGBT to LGBTQ+. In addition, the above quote also displays how feminism is not only defined by what it is but also by what it is not. The current research found several concepts that contradict feminism, including patriarchy, toxic masculinity, organized pushback against women, racism, colonialism, conservative nationalism, anti-democratic, and against the rights of LGBTQ+ people. This finding confirmed a significant characteristic of feminism in

feminist IR scholarship, which tends to stand up for those groups in society that are generally marginalized (Tickner, 2006; True, 2010).

All policy papers discuss an intersectional approach to FFP. For example, Canada's policy paper (2017) discusses an approach that considers: "all forms of discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, place of birth, colour, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability or migrant or refugee status" (p.2). Similarly, Sweden's policy paper states:

> To be accurate, these analyses have to take account of the fact that women and girls, and men and boys, are not homogeneous groups but have differing identities, needs, influence, and living conditions. The analysis must therefore consider other factors such as sex, such as age, place of residence, socioeconomic status, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, functional variation, level of education, belief and religion." (Government Sweden, 2015, p.17)

Next to going beyond the binary division of gender, the policy papers also emphasize another characteristic of intersectional feminism by acknowledging the existence of gendered power relations and hierarchies. On a critical note, however, this intersectional approach was only a minor element of the policy papers, as it appears only later in the papers or is mentioned sporadically while the main focus remains on women (and girls).

Last, ambiguity arises regarding the role of the state in feminism. While all policy papers are written assuming that states can play a vital role in enhancing gender equality, for some interviewees, this role was more logical than others. Most Feminist IR scholars criticize state feminism because they question whether states' objectives are genuine and whether states can change the gendered hierarchies and power relations while building on them (e.g., Sundström et al., 2021; Zhukova et al., 2021). However,

one interviewee highlights the courage of a state to adopt a feminist label because it was primarily connected to activists and civil society:

> In the context of a government, it takes a lot more audacity and courage to adopt the word feminism because it is attached to grassroots, civil society organizations and movements that are considered, maybe more radical, more militant. And governments have been historically very hesitant to use the word feminist because it was only used to describe civil society movements (Interviewee B, 20-04-2022).

Ultimately, the feminist connotation behind the concept of FFP is subject to change and today is mainly connected to liberal feminism and intersectional feminism. While these approaches to feminism differ significantly and appear incompatible regarding their approach to gender to some extent, they both reflect a change to conventional foreign policy by adding more perspectives than just those of men. The following chapter explores the other ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP, some of which are connected to the different strands of feminism as well.

## Chapter 5: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy

The Critical Discourse Analysis revealed several ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), which are connected to the changing nature of the label feminist and different strands of feminism. These ideas and beliefs include the belief that FPP is a next step in pro-gender equality efforts of states, the belief that FPP is an ambition that requires a step-by-step approach, the idea that a FPP enhances states' accountability, and the idea of FFP being a brand for states on the global stage. Last, the research found that the meaning of FFP and the use of the label feminist varies in a different contexts, primarily between global North and South countries and in the context of conflict.

*Figure 2* displays how the overarching ideas and patterns deriving from the research are related to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. In practice, the framework and the three dimensions are less distinctive than in Fairclough's theory; they are all connected and even overlap. Hence, while recognizing the dynamic characteristic of the framework, the figure displays the findings and discourse to be the best fit. The following chapter further elaborates on the ideas and beliefs underpinning FFP and their connection to Fairclough's dimension of text, discursive practice, and societal practice.

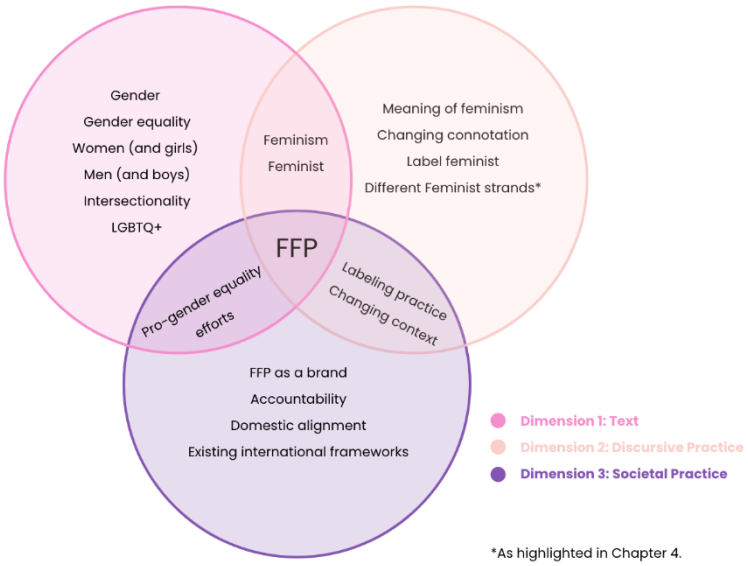


*Figure 2: The concept of Feminist Foreign Policy in Fairclough's three-dimensional framework*

### *5.1 Feminist Foreign Policy as a next step towards gender equality*

First, the research found the idea that FFP is a next step in a state's commitment to gender equality. This finding confirms what *Chapter two* demonstrates; while the label feminist in the context of foreign policy is new, the ideas behind it are not and can be traced back to the rise of pro-gender equality norms on the global stage (Aggestam et al., 2019). This idea mostly arose in connection to Fairclough's third dimension on societal practice because it relates to the broader global context in which states adopt a FFP, thereby aligning their policy with existing international laws and practices. Examples of these existing frameworks that both policy documents and interview transcripts refer to are the Beijing Declaration, CEDAW, and Sustainable Development Goals 1 (eradication of poverty) and 5 (gender equality). For example, Canada's policy paper (2017) notes that:

> Sustainable Development Goal 5 – achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – is at the heart of Canada's approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda because it will drive progress toward achieving the other Sustainable Development Goals (p.7)

Furthermore, the research found that FFP is grounded in the context of the WPS agenda. In many cases, the WPS agenda and its NAPs are vital pillars of existing FFPs, as displayed by policy papers of Spain and Sweden (Government Spain, 2021; Government Sweden, 2015). However, the research found a discrepancy between academic scholarship and publicly available information on the one hand and the discourse arising from the interviews on the other hand. While France's FFP appears to focus on its diplomatic practice and Canada's FFP appears to focus only on its international assistance policy (Thompson et al., 2021; Zhukova et al., 2021), discourse from the interviews demonstrated that both FFPs comprise more than just one pillar and also include a pillar of the WPS agenda, next to some other pillars. This finding highlights the importance of foreign policy analysis to include practitioners working with foreign policy (Hudson, 2005) because it can provide a perspective beyond official government publications.

Accordingly, FFP is a next step regarding a state's gender equality efforts because it incorporates single agreements or legal frameworks under one umbrella framework called FFP. The question arises to what extent the increasing efforts are linked to ethical commitments, which is a vital characteristic of a feminist approach as highlighted in *Chapter one* (e.g., Ackerly & True, 2006; Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). While all policy papers emphasize ethical commitments to focus on human dignity, vulnerable people and add an inclusive lens, these ethical commitments are also ambiguous to a certain extent because all policy papers focus mostly on women and not on other marginalized groups or on equity.

Ultimately, the idea that FFP is a next step in the commitment to gender equality is highlighted by incorporating existing international agreements and frameworks, including CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. However, FFP is a step further as it combines these initiatives under one umbrella framework, thereby reflecting a certain extent of ethical commitments.

### *5.2 Feminist Foreign Policy as an ambition*

Second, the CDA revealed the belief that a FFP should be a step-by-step approach. This idea arose throughout all dimensions of Fairclough's framework because using a label (discursive practice) and adding the word feminist (textual) to a foreign policy (discursive/societal practice) does not change a government and its practices over-night. Nonetheless, adopting a FFP displays an ambition (discursive) that can be achieved step-by-step (societal). Accordingly, announcing a FFP reflects a government's ambition to change its foreign policy, which mainly derives from political leaders and women's rights advocates within the government. The step-to-step approach to such ambition is vital because the interviewees highlighted that it is difficult to change the government, which has existed for decades and is enshrined by patriarchal structures and masculinity. One interviewee emphasizes this challenge:

> This organization has been existing for 230 years, you can't change it in one year, that is not even sustainable. (…) It's [announcing a FFP] a starting point, it's an ambition" (Interviewee C, 15-04-2022). This step-by-step approach also occurs in Sweden's policy paper (2015), which emphasizes the ambition of its FFP to "bring about real and sustainable change in order to achieve both gender equality and new power relations" (p.14).

Following FFP's step-by-step approach, the concept ranges from being a means to an outcome and has a dynamic character. One interviewee connects this changing nature of FFP with the characteristics of feminism:

> I'm just going to copy her [Lyric Thompson] words. She says that feminist processes are just as important as feminist outcomes. (…) So while we define feminist foreign policy for an effort to sort of come to something conclusive, we also embrace the fact that it should be something that's open to change and open to consultation and constantly evolving. Since that's what feminism is. It's always questioning our questioning ideals and our values and moving forward. So Lyric often says that if you come to an ending, it's not a good thing. You should always be moving forward and always be iterative (Interviewee E, 27-04-2022)

While Sweden is the first and leading example of a FFP and occurs in all data sources, one interviewee argues that "no country has a 100% feminist foreign policy, not even Sweden" (Interviewee C, 15-04-2022). Nonetheless, Sweden is a key example of the changing nature of the concept FFP. For example, it added an extra R for a reality check to the existing 3R approach, consisting of rights, representation, and resources, to expand its scope of FFP to consider the reality of the current global status quo for women (Government Sweden, 2015). This fourth R reflects a pragmatic approach because it focuses on what can be done today to change the status quo step-by-step instead of a more sudden and idealistic change.

Furthermore, some interviewees highlight the systemic change in government approaches when states adopt a FFP, which also occurs in the policy papers. For instance, Spain's policy paper (2021) notes that the goal is to: "bring about a structural change in working methods and institutional change, so that gender perspective is systematically mainstreamed in every action of the Foreign Service" (p.7). As Feminist IR scholarship highlights that conventional foreign policy and governmental practices focus primarily on men and masculine principles such as security and conflict (Acker, 1992; True, 2010), governments commit to leveling the playing field and be more attentive to the perspectives of women by adopting a FFP. However, the level of ambition to change the status quo differs. FFPs deriving from liberal feminism add women to the patriarchal status quo, while FFPs deriving from intersectional liberalism change the status quo to balance masculine and feminine principles and add not only the perspectives of women but also other marginalized groups.

Ultimately, underneath the concept of FFP is the ambition to adopt a feminist approach to a state's foreign policy, which requires a step-by-step approach. After all, changing governmental practices takes a long time and requires a pragmatic attitude.

### *5.3 Feminist Foreign Policy and accountability*

The fourth idea arising from the research is that states enhance their accountability regarding their commitments toward gender equality by adopting a feminist label to their foreign policy. This idea becomes apparent in both Fairclough's discursive and societal dimensions. After all, the labeling practice and the meaning of the label are connected to both dimensions, while the context in which FFP occurs, including governmental practice and the alignment of foreign policy with domestic policy, are more connected to societal practice.

Because scholars and governments do not agree on a definition of the concept of FFP (e.g., Aggestam et al., 2019; Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019; Thomson, 2020) next to the lack of a global agreement that

provides guidelines, states can choose what adopting a FFP means in practice. As highlighted by one interviewee, there is no consensus on the label feminist: "nobody owns the word feminist, you know, even far-right politicians have called themselves feminists, and nobody owns the word. Another interviewee emphasizes that such flexibility in adopting a FFP aligns with a feminist approach:

> For me, it [feminism] is also about allowing the country to find its own approach to FFP. Considering the country's background, history, national values, and ideas but at the same time, without discriminating other countries and not imposing your ideas, values, or understandings to others (Interviewee G, 15-04-2022).

However, the lack of a shared definition also brings some challenges. Countries that announced a FFP show differences in their accountability regarding their actions on the global stage, their alignment with existing domestic and foreign policies, and their publicly available information. A consensus among the interviewees indicates that actions are more important than words in the context of FFP. One interviewee highlights this importance: "For me, feminism is what you do, not what you say, and it shouldn't be evaluated as such" (Interviewee H, 09-05-2022). To illustrate this consensus, another interviewee contributes: "it's [a feminist perspective to foreign policy] about practicing what you preach, that is very important (interviewee D, 06-04-2022). Accordingly, many interviewees emphasize the importance of aligning domestic and foreign policies and recognize that this is not always the case yet, to which a step-by-step approach can contribute. For example, Sweden already had a feminist government and a strong focus on gender equality in its domestic and foreign policy before introducing its FFP. Despite discrepancies, for example, about its role as a prominent arms exporter, introducing a FFP appeared to be a logical next step to strengthen existing efforts.

Because actions are more important than words for FFP, it becomes complicated when states announce a FFP but do not reflect this in their actions. For example, Luxembourg and Libya did not publish a policy

document nor show a clear commitment to gender equality on the global stage. Furthermore, while France uses the label but does not have a policy document, its actions on the global stage show some commitment toward its feminist foreign policy, for example, co-hosting the Generation Equality Forum. However, the lack of this document makes it difficult to assess France's genuine or more strategic approach.

Nonetheless, some interviewees point out that the label feminist can help generate actions. After all, it is hard to hold a country accountable for its pro-gender equality commitments when they do not have a framework, such as a FFP, that obliges them to do so. As one interviewee highlights how the label feminist can help a state's actions:

> It is not unwillingness, but when nobody mentions it [to incorporate a gender lens] all the time, it does not happen. If you have a FFP, there is at least a reason that you can tell people: listen, we have a FFP (…) which creates a framework for change, instead of different pillars that are not well connected (Interviewee C, 15-04).

Another interviewee highlights that the label FFP continues to adapt and improve, so if states wait until they have the perfect angle, they never introduce it:

> If we wait until everything is perfect before we announce it, it would never be announced. Because it's never going to be perfect. I think this is one of the other pieces that's really, really important is that we're on journeys of learning and of incremental change of what feminist foreign policy means. And hopefully, we learn by doing. It's better now than it was a year ago, and five years from now, it will be better (Interviewee F, 29-04-2022).

While adopting the feminist label is the first step towards accountability, adopting a policy document strengthens this accountability. Some countries have published one or multiple policy documents outlining their ideas, objectives, and the implementation of their FFP, including Sweden, Canada, and Spain, while the remaining seven countries did not yet. Interviewees highlight that the documents can contribute to states' accountability to different actors, including people working in the government, civil society, and other countries. Existing policy papers reflect this awareness and incorporate accountability mechanisms. For example, Canada's policy paper (2017) notes that "Canada will strengthen accountability mechanisms, backed up by greater support for local women's organizations and movements" (p.59). Sweden's policy document (2015) notes that "the Foreign Service will collaborate actively with existing accountability mechanisms and work to ensure concrete progress for all women and girls" (p.18).

Nonetheless, following a feminist approach requires remaining critical and reflecting on the intended outcome or ethical considerations. One interviewee highlights her hesitation to the increasing use of the word feminism and using it as an accountability framework for states:

> I prefer a feminism as being reserved for sort of a more thoroughgoing ethical approach, which would require states to be more ethical and much less self-interested in the way in which we conduct foreign policy. And like, by and large, I think focusing on women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender is actually quite distinct from feminism (Interviewee H, 09-05-2022).

Regarding the commitment to changing the current status quo within governments and foreign policy practices, an overarching consensus among the interviewees is that a FFP should cover all elements of foreign policy. One interview highlights the importance of FFP being integrated into all sectors as follows:

> It should be something that's integrated across all foreign policy levels. So not just development assistance, but also kind of harder topics like security, defense, trade. Um, and it's also. We want to see it embraced across all governments and not just by the folks who focus on gender, but really beyond the people who are addressing all of those topics (Interviewee E, 27-04-2022).

Last, what occurs in all policy papers is that FFP distinguishes itself from traditional approaches to foreign policy because the policymaking happens in consultation and collaboration with actors outside the government, including civil society organizations. Multiple interviewees highlight that this way of policymaking through consultations and dialogue is a typical feminist approach because feminist perspectives are mainly added through bottom-up developments. Nonetheless, one interviewee highlights that a FFP can only occur through bottom-up and top-down efforts because, in the end, introducing a FFP is a political decision.

Ultimately, the research found that by adopting a FFP, states become accountable for their actions and commitments toward gender equality. In this context, actions are more important than words. However, the label feminist can help generate such action, and the publication of a policy document can enhance this accountability even more because civil society and other states can hold governments accountable based on such document.

### *5.4 Feminist Foreign Policy as a brand*

The last idea that occurred during the research is the idea of FFP being a brand of countries that advocate for gender equality. This idea mainly occurred in connection to Fairclough's discursive and societal dimension. After all, the label FFP becomes a discursive practice that receives meaning from its context, being that other countries also adopt it. At the same time, the research found that some countries specifically choose not to become part of the brand because of the negative connotation that the label can bring. Furthermore, joining the brand might be a genuine approach. However, there also

appears to be a strategic element to the labeling aspect of FFP, which relates to the liberal feminist focus on advancing states' self-interest. One interviewee indicates how the brand of FFP countries can help spread the feminist agenda: "You just have to make it a brand that other countries want to belong to" (Interviewee C, 15-04-2022), which demonstrates that the idea of FFP being a brand also has some normative characteristics.

Next to the ten states that announced a FFP, this research found several other FFP-groups. For example, the Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy was launched during the Generation Equality Forum in 2021. The network consists of more than thirty countries and civil society organizations that want to be connected to the concept of FFP. Another example is the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus group and aligned members, on behalf of which the Netherlands gave a speech during a high-level UN meeting on peacebuilding on the 27th of April 2022. Next to countries that announced a FFP, this group includes Albania, Costa Rica, Israel, and Tunisia and aligned member Rwanda (Netherlands at UN, 2022). Hence, FFP is not just a foreign policy but also an appealing concept to other countries that want to connect to it but not necessarily adopt it.

On a critical note, one interviewee highlights that the label not only unites states as a brand but also creates a division between states that adopted the label and not:

> I think the problem with the label is that it leaves out a number of countries that have actually made concerted efforts over a number of years to promote gender equality through their development aid and their diplomacy and through the way in which they engage in peacebuilding. (…) Those countries, say for example, might be Norway, might be New Zealand, Australia, and even countries like Colombia and South Africa. (…) But because they would not use the term feminist because that might actually limit their engagements with other countries. It might mean that they are perceived to be dominating and bringing their own agenda, and

> actually undermining their ability to serve as a trade partner, that they could be excluded from this discussion or from the way in which we understand feminism (Interviewee H, 09-05-2022).

Another interviewee adds to this challenge that some states adopt a similar approach to FFP under a different label, such as Diplomacy Femme, which means woman diplomacy (Interviewee B, 20-04-2022).

Ultimately, the researcher found an evident and sometimes strategic reason for states to adopt a FFP. Some states want to belong to a brand of states that enhances gender equality, boosting their reputation on the global stage. Other states choose not to adopt the label because it might limit their engagement with other countries.

### *5.5 Feminist Foreign Policy and its challenges in different contexts*

Next to the above ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP, the CDA also revealed that the meaning of FFP and the label feminist differs per context. This finding mainly arose in Fairclough's discursive dimension as it focuses on the meaning of FFP and the label and the societal dimension as it focuses on the context in which FFP occurs. Primarily, there are differences in the global North and global South context and the challenges regarding the meaning of FFP in the context of conflict.

The research found that the label feminist does not often occur in the context of global South countries apart from Mexico, Chile, and Libya, but some countries in this part of the world adopt feminist principles. Accordingly, one interviewee said that she consciously uses the label feminist differently in different contexts:

> I would certainly use it in [my country's] settings and in global settings and talking about feminist movements, but I wouldn't necessarily use it talking to women peace builders in rural Colombia.

> (…) I would talk more concrete. To just say like ... rather than the jargon or the label, what does it mean in practice (Interviewee F, 29-04-2022).

In this context, it is also vital to highlight, and it was mentioned during several interviews, that countries from the global South were the main drivers behind the WPS agenda, primarily Namibia and Bangladesh.

Another context that challenges the label feminist is the context of conflict, crises, and war. At first sight, these situations appear to be everything that feminism is not, but a FFP still needs to deal with them. One interviewee highlights the importance of adding a gender lens to conflict resolution and crisis management: "During a crisis, the first thing that is overlooked are women's rights and gender equality" (Interviewee D, 06-04-2022). Canada's policy paper (2017) reiterates how conflict can have a more detrimental impact on women and how their experience cannot be overlooked: "when humanitarian crises hit, women and girls shoulder a heavier burden of care for both families and the community at large. Women and girls are also at higher risk for abuse, exploitation and violence" (p.19). Nonetheless, governments continue to be so focussed on ending a conflict that they forget to incorporate a gender lens or feminist perspective despite several interviewees highlighting how a gender lens contributes to significantly better solutions to crises and conflicts in the long term.

Additionally, the current war in Ukraine sheds new light on the true nature of a feminist foreign policy and how its answer to conflict and war is different from conventional foreign policy practices. One interviewee elaborates on the lack of feminist perspective to solving the war in Ukraine and how problematic this is:

> Unfortunately, there's very little discussion of a feminist perspective, other than on which is about survival of, you know, of Ukraine or of Russia. And I think a feminist perspective must be

> thinking about .. into this war, it must, it must have a plan for post-conflict, um, and for how to sustain peace between these communities. It must have a plan for the reconstruction of those communities. (…) there is really no feminist voice focused on that because everybody's focused on winning the war. But of course, winning the war does not mean winning the peace (Interviewee H, 09-05-2022).

Furthermore, a vital part of a feminist answer to end any conflict is listening to people's needs instead of inventing a solution. As one interviewee highlights the importance of this:

> A feminist foreign policy involves listening to feminists. And what are feminists in Ukraine saying, right now, they're saying we need to defend ourselves, right? They're not saying don't negotiate. Of course, they're saying let's try to find a diplomatic solution (Interviewee F, 29-04-2022).

In addition, on FFP and the use of weapons, this research found a realistic and pragmatic feminist approach, which aligns with Sweden's 4th R based on the reality check. One interviewee highlights this approach as follows:

> I think overall, we [feminists] are all anti-weapons, but we also have to be realistic as, unfortunately, the world is still functioning with a lot of toxic masculinity politicians, they are the ones who have the power and are at the decision-making table. (…) for them, we still need the means, which they use (Interviewee G, 15-04-2022).

Ultimately, the research found that the label feminist and FFP is preferred in the context of global North countries than in global South countries, where feminist principles and commitments occur but not under the feminist label. Furthermore, the context of conflict, war, and crises challenge the concept of

FFP. Governments often forget to add a gender lens to conflict resolution respite resulting in better long-term solutions. Last, the use of weapons continues to be debated among feminists, but a pragmatic and realistic approach to weapons is most apparent.

## Chapter 6: Concluding remarks

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is a relatively new concept among scholars and states. Sweden introduced the first FFP in 2014, and today ten states label their foreign policy as feminist. While some scholars analyzed the concept and ten governments introduced it, there is no agreed definition or common understanding of what FFP entails, which shows a significant research gap. In addition, FFP is located at the nexus between Feminist IR scholarship and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), but research rarely combines these strands of scholarship. This lack of research demonstrates the necessity to further examine foreign policy through a gender lens (e.g., Aggestam & True, 2010; Aggestam et al., 2019). This research contributes to existing gaps and extends the growing theoretical framework on FFP for scholars and practitioners. Ultimately, the research explored the underlying ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP, next to the specific feminist ideas portrayed in FFP.

To answer these questions, the research took an interpretivist approach which allows exploring the meaning-making behind FFP where individuals have a vital role, which aligns with FPA. The researcher conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, consisting of text, discursive practice, and societal practice, which appeared interlinked and overlapping in the research. The data sources for this analysis were transcripts of interviews with eight practitioners, obtained through Schaffer's (2014) Ordinary Language Interviewing, and the first policy documents that Sweden, Canada, and Spain published after announcing their FFPs. Fairclough's approach to CDA allowed to go beyond the linguistic elements of the label feminist and explore what it means, on which existing discourse it builds, and discover the discursive context. Furthermore, it enabled to indicate unequal power relations and gendered inequalities conveyed through discourse.

The CDA revealed several ideas and beliefs underpinning the concept of FFP. Starting with the feminist ideas which arose in Fairclough's textual and discursive dimension, the research found the dynamic nature of feminism and how its meaning changed over time as the label feminist became more common.

Furthermore, two different feminist discourses occurred. The first discourse focuses on feminism as the pursuit of gender equality between women and men, which derives from the liberal strand of feminism. The second discourse focuses on feminism as a pursuit of global equality for everyone regardless of gender, origins, sexuality, or other identity markers related to discrimination. While both discourses believe that FFP can change the status quo, the extent to which they change gendered structures and patriarchy differs significantly and is most visible in the last one.

Furthermore, the CDA revealed several other ideas and beliefs throughout all three dimensions. First, the CDA showed the belief that FFP is a next step in states' pro-gender equality efforts, building on existing efforts and international agreements but combining them all under one umbrella of a comprehensive foreign policy with a feminist label. Second, the belief arose that FFP is an ambition that requires a step-by-step approach which is vital because a government can not change overnight by adding a label to its foreign policy. Accordingly, the concept of FFP applies to everything between a feminist means and outcome. Third, the CDA demonstrated the idea that announcing a FFP increases states' accountability regarding their efforts on gender equality towards civil society and other states. While states' actions are more important than their words, adding the label feminist can increase this accountability, and publishing a policy document intensifies this accountability. Fourth, the CDA showed the idea that FFP is a brand that some states consciously join to boost their reputation regarding advocacy for women's rights and gender equality on the global stage. In contrast, other states deliberately refrain from joining because of the negative connotation of the word feminist in some states.

Last, the CDA revealed the context in which FFP impacts its meaning and challenges the concept, indicating differences between global North and South countries where similar efforts occur under different labels. In addition, a conflict environment challenges FFP where the CDA reveals that

governments continue to overlook the importance of adding a gender lens to conflict-resolution, next to a pragmatic and realistic feminist approach to the use of weapons.

As the underlying ideas and beliefs behind the concept of FFP become apparent, the question arises whether it is problematic that there is no common understanding or definition. While it creates challenges, this researcher realized through the current research that the dynamic, diverse, and evolving nature of feminism is a vital characteristic. In contrast, imposing ideas, beliefs, and values on others and not leaving space for new interpretations or perspectives of marginalized groups is a problematic characteristic of patriarchy and contributes to existing gendered inequalities and power hierarchies. Therefore, instead of trying to fit feminism into existing structures and narrow definitions, the diversity of feminism and the concept of FFP should be acknowledged and appreciated while at the same time being reflexive of biases and continuing to evolve.

Another significant realization that arose from the current research is that intention is vital in the context of the words vs. action discourse. While there is certainly some extent of strategy, self-interest regarding reputation and economic arguments behind the labeling practice of a FFP, the researcher also found a genuine intention to do good, which links to the ethical considerations that Feminist IR scholars assign to feminism. This intention should be recognized as such while at the same time remaining critical and acknowledging that the concept of FFP is not perfect, thereby aligning with the reflexive character of feminist scholarship.

Last, the choice of words in the context of FFP reveals that in many cases, feminism and the label feminist are used interchangeably with gender equality based on a binary understanding of gender. While the researcher indicated an unexpected increase in an intersectional approach to feminism, the main focus of FFP remains on women to level the playing field for binary genders. While the researcher acknowledges that gender equality is a vital element of feminism, the primary focus on women

contradicts the inclusive characteristic that Feminist IR scholars assign to feminism. Accordingly, the researcher recognizes and celebrates the increasing focus on an intersectional approach to feminism, considering gender differences next to identity markers such as origins, sexuality, and religion.

In addition, several limitations of the research occur. First, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for conducting CDA is unclear regarding the boundaries between the different dimensions, their relations, and what is discursive and what not. Hence, the framework provided the research with less structure than preferred and challenges connecting the different ideas and patterns from the discourse with those dimensions. Nonetheless, Fairclough's approach to CDA is the most established and comprehensive, hence the choice of the current research to use his approach.

Furthermore, the small scope of the research is a significant limitation of the research. While the current research only interviewed a few practitioners from the ten FFP countries due to time-refrains and limitations regarding access, a larger number of practitioners would have provided a more comprehensive perspective, specifically when there would be representatives from every country that announced a FFP. Therefore, further research could aim to interview people from all ten countries with a FFP and ensure a different and more critical perspective by interviewing government officials but also civil society actors. Similarly, the research only examined three policy papers following Thomson's (2020) approach that a first publication highlights the original ideas and beliefs best. Further research, however, could expand the scope and analyze more government publications, ranging from policy papers and website articles to speeches and panel discussions. Last, the research had a strong focus on the conceptualization of FFP, considering the implementation only to a small extent. However, throughout the research, the researcher realized that states' words and labeling practices could not be analyzed solely without considering their actions. Therefore, future research could compare the labeling practice of FFP with states' actions to explore alignment and divergences.

Finally, as the concept of FFP spreads around the world, it is vital to continue exploring what the concept means without imposing ideas or beliefs on actors and expanding the theoretical framework underpinning this distinct form of foreign policy.

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