

**E-PAPER**

**Reflections on feminist cultural diplomacy**

**BY DR INES KAPPERT**

A publication of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, February 2022

# Reflections on feminist cultural diplomacy

By Dr Ines Kappert

A feminist foreign policy also requires **feminist cultural diplomacy**.

The German Federal Foreign Office invited me to share feminist reflections on a forthcoming policy reorientation.

I thus propose the following approach:

- Normative requirements
- Lessons learned
- Guiding questions

## Contents

I. Feminist foreign policy	3
II. Feminist cultural diplomacy	4
2.1 Decolonialisation and feminism	5
III. Challenges: how to structurally prevent feminist cultural diplomacy from being gutted politically	7
3.1 Lessons learned	7
3.2 Guiding questions	8

## I. Feminist foreign policy

Feminist foreign policy recognises gender equality as a key prerequisite for peace. As a result, it advocates dismantling patriarchal structures, i.e. overcoming relations founded on violence. An *intersectional* approach is required to overcome structural violence based on gender, origin, race, sexual orientation, disability and other categories of discrimination. Only in this way can the central objective of feminist foreign policy be achieved, one which has *human security* and a human rights-based policy framework at its core.

Feminist foreign policy places itself at the service of a democratic civil society oriented towards the common good, and it aims to use all instruments of such a civil society to implement the right to peace and achieve the eradication of hunger and poverty.

Feminist foreign policy is therefore not a matter of women advocating for women – but is a human rights-based reorientation of foreign policy as a whole.

## II. Feminist cultural diplomacy

Based on the normative assumptions of feminist foreign policy, feminist cultural diplomacy recognises the special role that narratives and framings play in realising gender equality, democracy and thus peace.

It is committed to ensuring that the concept and also the term “feminism” is appropriately categorised historically, culturally and contemporarily. Only in this way can gender equality be achieved. Here, in turn, it is crucial to adopt education and knowledge transfer regarding feminist issues as a central democratic policy objective. In its progressive version, feminism doesn’t mean the supremacy of women over men – i.e. patriarchal conditions with inverted sexist hierarchies – but the overcoming of relations of violence legitimised through sexist ideology in favour of the democratic participation and self-determination of all genders. The **de-tabooing of feminism** in this sense must be a central concern of feminist cultural diplomacy.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock’s speech on feminist foreign policy at the German Bundestag also provides good starting points for removing the taboos on feminism in the democratic realm.

[https://twitter.com/phoenix\\_de/status/1481316904010723329](https://twitter.com/phoenix_de/status/1481316904010723329)

Such a removal of taboos requires the strengthening of narratives that make the defence of feminism in the democratic realm tangible while bringing its actual meaning to the fore: feminism seeks to ensure that people of all genders around the world enjoy fundamental rights; no one should be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race or origin. In other words, feminism aims to overcome structures of violence that are normalised with the help of sexualised norms and stereotypes. Equal rights for women and girls are at the heart of feminism. Yet feminism as a political perspective goes beyond the dismantling of discriminatory structures that affect women and girls and their empowerment. The perspectives of queer people – including trans, inter and non-binary people – must be given equal consideration. At the same time, feminism also aims to deconstruct patriarchal (i.e. dominant) forms of masculinity in favour of a peaceable, caring masculinity.

**The goal of feminist foreign policy and thus also of feminist cultural diplomacy is a peaceable, caring foreign policy.**

-> The narrative that the central axis of social power worldwide runs between biological men and women – and that this is why feminism strives for female domination – must be deconstructed.

-> The perspectives and realities of queer people, including trans, inter and non-binary people, must be given equal consideration. The aim is to overcome heteronormativity and the binary system as a whole.

-> Masculinities must be addressed and, if necessary, deconstructed.

- > The social ostracism of feminist endeavours as irrational, anti-democratic and even belligerent has a long tradition. Feminist cultural diplomacy takes this tactic of guilt reversal seriously and seeks to overcome it through transcultural as well as pedagogical approaches. This is because:

*“Feminism has fought no wars. It has killed no opponents. It has set up no concentration camps, starved no enemies, practiced no cruelties. Its battles have been for education, for the vote, for better working conditions, for safety in the streets, for child care, for social welfare, for rape crisis centres, women’s refuges, reforms in the law. If someone says, ‘Oh, I’m not a feminist’, I ask, ‘Why? What’s your problem?’”*

Dale Spender (Australian writer, 1943)

## 2.1 Decolonialisation and feminism

In making such a paradigm shift, it is essential to think of feminism and decolonisation together. For in non-Western countries, feminism is often labelled as an “import from the West” and rejected on these grounds. Many feminists in the global South have provided accounts of this practice. Feminist cultural diplomacy takes these barriers seriously. Only through decolonising our own Western narrative can we establish credibility, which is a vital prerequisite for initiating progressive change.

-> In order to implement gender equality, a feminist foreign cultural and educational policy specifically requires the decolonisation of foreign policy, while generally taking a decolonial perspective. To date, efforts towards decolonisation and gender equality have all too often run parallel to each other. Therefore, more needs to be done to actively link up these efforts. There should accordingly be an emphasis on making feminists and intersectional feminist debates and struggles, especially those from the global South, more visible internationally, as well as a focus on presenting and discussing their cultural and artistic works/analyses/strategies in relevant international forums. Here, it is of great importance to translate what feminists are saying in marginalised languages and dialects into common international languages.

-> Feminism and its fight for democratisation is not only being carried out in Sweden and Canada, but also in countries such as India, Hong Kong, Venezuela and Sudan. A good example is the Gender Security Project, based in Chennai, India, which addresses cultural politics and feminism, women, peace and security (WPS) issues, as well as “tabooisation” as an import from the West:

<https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/feminism-and-soft-power>

-> Breaking the hegemony of Western approaches, traditions, perspectives and clichés must be the goal of feminist cultural diplomacy. In doing so, it is also important to establish links with actors in the so-called West who have long been pursuing precisely this feminist-decolonial project. In most cases, these are voices and initiatives that have been pushed to the margins of society. Feminist cultural diplomacy therefore actively seeks them out and provides adequate and appropriate resources to do this work.

-> Feminist cultural diplomacy actively seeks out actors in marginalised positions and actively distances itself from an agenda that de facto primarily empowers privileged white women.

-> Feminist cultural diplomacy actively strengthens actors – both within its own structures and at partner organisations – who are anti-sexist and disability-sensitive and who take a racism-critical perspective.

-> Feminist cultural diplomacy challenges the current concept of the elite and examines excellence initiatives and the promotion of elite schools and universities with regard to identifying participation opportunities for marginalised social groups and the present levels of such participation.

### III. Challenges: how to structurally prevent feminist cultural diplomacy from being gutted politically

How can the political gutting of feminist cultural diplomacy be structurally prevented?

The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is at the heart of feminist foreign policy.

It can be stated with regard to German foreign policy that the 3rd National Action Plan on WPS, which was adopted in 2021, has provided the first serious prospect of implementation, including monitoring and evaluation, taking place in an appropriate and politically coherent way.

The structural resistance that exists in the WPS domain also raises questions in relation to feminist cultural diplomacy. In my view, the key questions are:

-> How can the political gutting of feminist cultural diplomacy be structurally prevented?

-> What can be learned from comparable negative experiences in the field of diversity?

#### 3.1 Lessons learned

*Diversity* has been a popular buzzword for many years, not least in the cultural sector. Yet it is frequently ignored that diversity also entails the responsibility of institutions to actively combat discrimination and those who practice it. Racism, sexism and ableism are not opinions, so they are not covered by the right to free expression. The scandal at the 2021 Frankfurt Book Fair, which involved a lack of protection for Black writers, is just one of many examples. “It is desirable that non-white artists produce content that can be bought and sold”, write [Arpana Aischa Berndt](#) and [Maja Bogojević](#), “but at the same time the struggles that marginalised people face when creating art in white institutions and white cultural institutions are ignored.” Diversity thus becomes a token gesture. This must not be repeated in the field of feminist cultural diplomacy. It is therefore crucial to take into account the following lessons learned:

-> Feminist cultural diplomacy must not be narrowed down to the question of representation. Having a greater number of women does not automatically translate into greater feminist expertise.

- > The “3 Rs” – rights, resources and representation – are indispensable, but must be supplemented by an anti-discrimination policy.
- > An intersectional approach is needed to implement justice, i.e. freedom from discrimination for all persons, regardless of their gender.
- > Redistributing resources is important, but such redistribution in favour of multiplication must not occur solely in the area of “women and minorities” – otherwise competition among these groups will be further intensified. Instead it is about a paradigm shift in feminist cultural diplomacy as a whole.
- > Classism in the cultural and feminist domain must be addressed in a clear and sustained way.
- > A critical perspective on racism must be systematically integrated.
- > Race, gender, class and dis/ability must become standardised categories of analysis in all areas of feminist cultural diplomacy.
- > Marginalised feminists must be included in a deliberate and sustained way.
- > Regional particularities must be recognised and taken into account.
- > Recognising diversity is not the same as overcoming structures of violence.
- > It is crucial to structurally develop intersectional feminist knowledge and practices within the German Federal Foreign Office as well as across the German missions abroad. It is not just about having more women, but about having more women and people of colour who are feminist-oriented and well versed in feminism.
- > The acquisition of feminist knowledge must become a cross-cutting task. It is not a hobby for those who may be interested, but rather a prerequisite for implementing Article 3 of the German Basic Law.

### 3.2 Guiding questions

- > In what way do I contribute to the (de-)tabooing of feminism?
- > In what way do the projects for which I am responsible contribute to the implementation of intersectional feminist perspectives?
- > In what way do the projects/project objectives for which I am responsible strengthen the links between feminism and decolonisation?
- > In what way does my cultural and/or educational policy work address those power relations/relations founded on violence which are legitimised through sexist ideology?
- > What distinguishes intersectional feminism from traditional gender equality policies?



## Imprint

Published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Schumannstraße 8, 10117 Berlin

Place of publication: [www.gwi-boell.de](http://www.gwi-boell.de)

Date of publication: March 2022

Licence: Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

You can find other publications here:

[www.gwi-boell.de/en/publications](http://www.gwi-boell.de/en/publications)