

## Introduction

In the last decade, several states have made gender justice central to their foreign policies. Whether articulated as feminist foreign policy or not, this is seen to project a progressive and ethical foreign policy. Pro-gender equality norms focus on, inter alia, the protection and experiences of women as agents of foreign policy. According to Aggestam, Bergmann Rosamond, and Kronsell (2018), there are fundamental claims about the practice of foreign policy that can be ascribed to countries that purport a 'feminist foreign policy', specifically, Canada and Sweden. Yet there are other states like Australia and Norway that do not share this label also adopt these claims. Thus, claiming an emphasis on pro-gender justice norms is a claim for ethical foreign policy. This approach to foreign policy is ethical because it calls attention to the implications of inequalities and seeks to combat gendered discrimination and the lack of inclusion of women and other marginalised groups in the practice of foreign policy (Aggestam, Bergmann Rosamond and Kronsell, 2018). Existing claims to pro-gender justice/feminist foreign policy also tend to highlight the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda as fundamental to the operationalisation of foreign policy. The WPS agenda, which comprises nine United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs), is a global normative framework for attaining women's human rights mainly in conflict contexts (see Davies and True, 2019). In the cases of Canada, Norway (Tryggestad 2014), Sweden (Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016), the UK (Davies and True, 2017) and the US (Hudson and Leidl 2015), any attachment to a "feminist" or pro-gender-justice orientation in foreign policy relies substantially on the implementation of the WPS agenda (see also Aggestam and True this issue).

The framing of the WPS agenda tends to target intervention in the lives of women in fragile and conflict-affected states. Because the agenda has been

promoted as core to the expression and practices of pro-gender justice/feminist foreign policies, the object of this approach has predominantly been the so-called Global South. The Global South is an imperfect designation which exists in juxtaposition to the Global North. Nevertheless, and as Dados and Connell (2012) show, naming the relationship accounts for existing (geopolitical) power relations in international relations. Scholarly analysis of feminist or pro-gender-justice foreign policy is based on the experiences of countries in the Global North. What possibility is there, then, for countries of the Global South to contribute to the conceptualisation and practice of feminist or pro-gender foreign policy? This article draws on a single case-study analysis of South Africa, a country geographically located and seen to be a leader in the Global South that has espoused claims to an ethical foreign policy that stresses gender equality (see Cold-Ravnkilde 2019 for a discussion on development aid practices). It asks: how are pro-gender-justice norms put into practice in the context of South Africa's foreign policy?

### ***Why South Africa?***

In September 2018, South Africa's then foreign minister attended the first-ever women foreign ministers' meeting in Canada. The central theme of the meeting was to bring gender perspectives into the foreign policy domain. For South Africa, this was part of setting its agenda for its role as a member of the United Nations Security Council January 2019 – 2021. In this role it had two central goals: first, to promote the African continental mandate of silencing the guns in Africa; and second, to address the plight of women and children in conflict situations. The foreign minister at the time, in a speech to the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council after accepting its temporary seat in the Security Council, said:

Women and children are the real victims of wars and situations of political instability on our continent and across the world. We would want the Security Council to develop systems for nations to prioritise protection and supporting women and children during difficult times. SA will use its seat on the Council to address gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity wherever they occur. Our history requires of us to continue to be the defenders of human rights. This is a responsibility we must carry at all times (Sisulu, 8 June 2018 cited in Mabaya, 2019)

This illustrates that the foreign policy narrative being championed by South Africa is one that articulates the importance of ethical foreign policy through an emphasis on human rights, including women's rights and the rule of law. This was the foreign policy vision that Nelson Mandela saw for the new country at its inception (Mandela 1993).

South Africa's foreign policy aims, as I show, are very similar to those being projected and articulated by countries that have claimed feminist foreign policy or emphasise gender equality as their core foreign policy ambition. Like these countries, South Africa has committed and contributed to the development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda since its inception in 2000. The implementation of the WPS agenda is articulated as fundamental to its foreign policy practice, particularly in the rest of Africa.

At present, the emerging literature on feminist foreign policy has not looked outside the context of the Global North to scrutinise how a foreign policy that prioritise gender justice may be practised in less hierarchical South-South relations. South-South relations are the core of South Africa's enduring *Africa First* foreign policy approach, which prioritises its relationship with other African countries on an equal basis. The lack of consideration of other sites of pro-

gender or feminist foreign policy practices limit the possibilities for the comparative analysis of gender perspectives in foreign policy (see Aggestam and True this issue). Importantly, however, this analysis is also an exercise in decolonial thinking that seeks to centre and give agency to marginalised subjects in International Relations. As Mignolo (2003, 10) notes, decolonial thinking is “relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity.” Thus South Africa cannot be seen as simply a potential recipient of pro-gender equality/justice foreign policy practices but as part of the story of this type of foreign policy.

This article seeks to make an original contribution to the nascent scholarship on countries that promote pro-gender norms, emphasising gender justice<sup>1</sup> more broadly as intrinsic to their foreign policy. The similarity in South Africa's foreign policy articulation to those countries already identified as practising feminist foreign policy makes it an interesting subject of inquiry for assessing the opportunities and constraints of understanding and initiating pro-gender-justice/feminist foreign policy outside of the Global North.

### **Mapping Out an Analytical Lens**

Foreign Policy has long been a basis for the study of relations between countries, and, over time, other international actors. At the heart of studies of foreign policy is concern for the orientation of political elites in a particular state towards those in other states. Korwa Adar and Rok Ajulu (2002, 1) define foreign policy as “the involvement of the state abroad.” They go on to describe this as “actions taken by a state towards the external environment as viewed from the perspectives of the state in pursuit of its national interests” (Adar and

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<sup>1</sup>[“Gender justice entails ending the inequalities between women and men that are produced and reproduced in the family, the community, the market and the state. It also requires that mainstream institutions — from justice to economic policymaking — are accountable for tackling the injustice and discrimination that keep too many women poor and excluded” \(UNIFEM 2010, 3\)](#)

Ajulu 2002, 1). Landsberg and Masters (2017, 3), speaking specifically to the South African context, argue that foreign-policy actors are influenced by domestic dynamics as much as by external ones. It is in the relationship between this domestic environment and external practices of the state that much of the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature has contributed to our understanding of foreign policy. This analysis builds on prior investigations into the role of South Africa's democratic identity in the construction of the country's foreign policy priorities, which was significantly influenced by the dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) (Bischoff 2003).

I build on this work by trying to account for some of the silences that persist in foreign-policy practices. For example, typical analyses drawing on FPA often do not address the gendered exclusion of certain types of actors, or the role of policy priorities that seek to enable women's inclusion in thinking and doing foreign policy (see Aggestam and True this issue). Feminism, however, brings these considerations around gender to the forefront of theory and methodology. Feminism is useful for highlighting the fact that men remain the predominant decision-makers in foreign policy, which was, and remains, the case for South Africa (Van Wyk 2019), with important implications for policy priorities. Indeed, as D'Aoust (2012) notes, "feminist perspectives on foreign policy have often been done at the crossroads of different subfields, like IR and comparative politics ... rather than constituted a coherent body of scholarship inside the subfield of FPA". While this contribution has limited ambitions, it nevertheless, given its subject matter, argues for an explicitly feminist approach to foreign policy analysis that acknowledges the important role of the normative orientation of specific actors, within a specific context and how they have played out in the foreign policy apparatus and practice of the state.

This analysis presented here takes into account International Feminist Theory (IFT) and Third World Feminism (TWF) in the attempt to build on the nascent literature theorising feminist foreign policy. IFT is a broad church that has adapted feminist lenses to existing International Relations theoretical approaches (see Aggestam and True this issue), and is a useful entry point for this analysis of South Africa's policy. IFT and the literature on feminist foreign policy acknowledge the foreign-policy arena, including most state practices, to be gendered. By this I mean that the foreign-policy practices and outcomes enacted by states (and other institutions) tend to reflect masculinist logics and knowledge, given that men have dominated this field.

At the same time, much of IR and feminist adaptations of it tends to ignore the contributions of non-Western/non-European perspectives on gender, both in terms of knowledge and practices. Much of what we continue to know within International Relations, foreign policy and indeed feminist foreign policy is grounded in meanings and experiences of the Global North<sup>2</sup>. Yet there is no doubt that recognisable notions of feminism continue to impact gender-equality claims in Africa broadly and South Africa specifically (see Hastrup 2013). To account for the erasures of the Global South in dominant practices and scholarship, the core of this analysis is mediated by consideration of Third World Feminism (TWF).

TWF emerged as an important critique of the Whiteness of most Global North feminisms, and their failure to account for the multiple sources of oppression that women of colour, including women in the Global South, experience. Herr (2014, 6) defines Third World feminism as:

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<sup>2</sup> [Post-colonial feminism within International Relations is an exception to this and often used interchangeably with TWF. This feminist approach however is still largely marginalised.](#)

feminist perspectives on Third World women that (1) generate more reliable analyses of and recommendations for addressing Third World women's multidimensional and complex oppression through careful examinations of their local conditions in their historical specificity; and (2) respect the agency and voices of Third World women engaged in diverse forms of local activism.

Importantly, TWF seeks to reclaim the agency that is often denied to women of colour (see Combahee River Collective 1979). Thus, by addressing the evolution of internal pro-gender-justice norms in the South African case, this analysis makes a contribution to 'seeing' the contributions of African women to global gender-justice discourses. To an extent, the practices of feminist foreign policy that want to 'fix' others confirm the continued relevance of Third World Feminism as a useful lens for analysis. Mohanty reminds us that the often "ahistorical conceptions of gender and patriarchy" dominate conceptions of feminism, including within IFT (Herr 2014, 5). Mohanty (1991, 34) further argues that these dominant feminist narratives are constitutive of "the erasure of the history and effects of contemporary imperialism." In the South African case, it is especially important to account for this history.

Third World Feminism, in this analysis, pays attention to how the local contexts of women in South Africa, including their positionality and their activism, has resonances for the international practices of gender, especially in foreign policy. Moreover, this responds to Aggestam and True's call to take seriously the role of gendered agents in identifying and interpreting norms (this issue). By undertaking an examination of South Africa's internal priorities, and its external promotion of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa, this article elaborates on the relationship between the domestic and external practices of promoting pro-gender-justice norms.

This article thus explores South Africa's foreign-policy past and present with a view to identifying the bounded environment within which pro-gender-justice norms have emerged and are enacted. It focuses on South Africa's foreign-policy history since the 1990s, just prior to Mandela's presidency, until early 2019 and the initial part of the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa (but before the 2019 national elections). There is, however, an emphasis on the period since 2000 to chart the possibility of a feminist or pro-gender-justice foreign policy, since the first UNSCR, 1325, was only adopted then.

Following the exploration of domestic socio-politics, the article analyses South Africa's foreign-policy narratives drawing on official speeches of key foreign-policy actors between 1994 and 2019, who were ideally placed to promote gender-justice norms. These speeches form the basis for a qualitative content analysis that aims to narrate South Africa's foreign policy across time and in specific context. The content analysis focused on the speeches of the Presidents and foreign ministers and these have been made available by DIRCO. Three questions are asked in the analysis of these speeches: 1). Are there any references to gender? This includes references to the word *gender*, men, women, gender equality and similar proxies; 2). In what context do these references appear? 3). Who features in and who is excluded from South Africa's narrative of foreign-policy practice? Qualitative content analysis helps to give a detailed description of how gender manifests itself in South African foreign policy by providing the context for determining meaning (see Schreier 2014).

By investigating South Africa in this way, the article is able to draw on a distinct body of knowledge often absent from mainstream (and often even critical) debates on foreign-policy practice. In addition to the analyses of primary documents, data is also taken from three narrative interviews conducted for

contextual information on South Africa's history and current pro-gender-justice priorities. I also draw on secondary sources, including academic articles and civil-society reports, which provide specific insights into events and which may provide alternatives to official narratives or corroborate research insights.

Overall, the analytical lens adopted here calls attention to the contestations that emerge as a result of the country's domestic context and its advocacy of pro-gender-justice norms internationally, while also accounting for the implications of race, sexuality and coloniality in the articulation of gender-justice norms (see Achilleos-Sarll 2018).

### **Situating 'gender' within South Africa: A Short History**

South Africa's contemporary foreign-policy position and priorities cannot be separated from the realities of its transition from the brutality of apartheid to the establishment of a modern multiracial democracy. In 1930, 20 years after the formal creation of the Union of South Africa, white women got the vote. The Afrikaner nationalism that came into power in 1948 ushered in rigid separations based on hierarchies and entrenched the hierarchies of whites over blacks, creating what Bozzoli (1983, cited in Morell et al. p. 15), called a "patchwork of patriarchies".

The implications of these conditions and the patriarchies they yielded have had implications from the apartheid era to the present day. For much of the ANC's existence in opposing the apartheid regime, women within the group were often not acknowledged as equal to their male counterparts. In 1943, 31 years after its founding, the ANC granted women voting rights (Morell et al. 2012, 15). Citing Manzini, Hassim argues that women primarily took on caring duties within the ANC in exile (Hassim 2004, 435). The Women's Division was responsible for taking care of young children and educating them. At the

same time, the women were forbidden from getting pregnant – this put sole responsibility on them. Yet women were often forced into unwanted sexual relationships, while their social lives outside the ANC were policed. Violence against women was also rampant.

At the same time, women were being integrated into the military arm of the ANC, the MK (*uMkhonto we Sizwe*). Women were viewed as viable bodies in the fight against the apartheid regime in that no distinction was made between women and men. The MK, here, adopted a gender-as-sameness model for instrumental purposes (Parisi and True, 2013). This model of gender equality is typically applied when women are included in traditionally male-dominated areas, like the military. For the MK, this meant, for example, that while there was no specific protection for women from sexual violence in the military, the MK military code of conduct considered assaults and rape and the violation of the “dignity of the opposite sex” to and on its members an offence (ANC, n.d.).

This model of ‘inclusion’ ignored the military structure, which is a highly masculinised space with a tendency to resist the presence of women’s bodies and their meaningful participation. Consequently, although over time there was disciplining around unwanted sexual activity amongst comrades, there were no specific measures to address the enduring power relationships that place men in hierarchical positions over women and the implications this has for unwanted advances. Outside of the military, women within the ANC were confined to the traditional roles of wives and mothers. Consequently, the ANC environment was not particularly empowering for women. The fight against the racist apartheid regime relegated gender justice to the background. Thus, during the struggle to end

apartheid, gender dynamics implicitly and explicitly guided both the functioning of the apartheid state and the ANC.

It is unsurprising then that the gender-equality dimension of governance was at the forefront when designing the New South Africa. According to Gouws and Halgut (2016), while negotiating the South African Constitution, women, and particularly feminist activists, insisted on the recognition of women and women's experiences as the basis for a gender-equal democratic South Africa. For example, they note that the Women's National Coalition (WNC) were mobilised to write the Charter for Effective Equality (now the Women's Charter) (Gouws and Halgut 2016). The WNC was constituted in 1991 as an umbrella body of 70 women's-rights organisations, including the ANC Women's League (ANCWL). Its task was to "research, co-ordinate, and draw up a Women's Charter based on the priorities and concerns of women from all walks of life throughout the country" (South Africa History Online 2011). The resulting charter was finalised in 1994 and accepted by President Nelson Mandela on 9 August 1994, South Africa's first National Women's Day.

The recommendations of this Charter were included in the Constitution as the basis for the governance of the new South Africa. The resulting Constitution is considered one of the most progressive in the world (see also Cold-Ravnkilde 2019). At its heart is the universality of human rights and non-discrimination. The first Chapter of the constitution is founded on the following values (South African Constitution Chapter 1, 1996):

- a. Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- b. Non-racialism and non-sexism.
- c. Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law.

Rhetorically, this Constitution echoes post-colonial feminist values that tie non-sexism and anti-racism together. The specificities of these two values are important as they are noted distinctly from human rights and equality concerns. In his maiden speech to parliament as President, however, Cyril Ramaphosa acknowledged that gendered and racialised disadvantages exist in South African society. This is despite the fact that South Africa has ratified major international commitments to gender inclusion, such as the adoption and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW). Similarly, South Africa ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), one of the most progressive and feminist legal frameworks currently existing. Moreover, in 2011, South Africa led the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to adopt Resolution 17/19, the UN's first resolution that challenged the organisation to take seriously the discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) peoples (Jordaan 2017a, b). CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol in particular should link South Africa's internal promotion of pro-gender-justice norms with what it is doing in practice. Specifically, if the domestic ostensibly impacts on the international, it is worth reflecting on the extent to which the Constitutional safeguards have worked in practice domestically.

As with any society, South Africa struggles with gender inequality. Gender inequality in this context is usually understood along a binary of women versus men, wherein women/femininities continue to be subordinated to men/masculinities. There is, however, acute awareness about the need to tackle these binary inequalities, which has given rise to the work of the Commission on Gender Equality. Since 1994, South Africa has seen a rise in girls completing formal education at secondary and tertiary levels. Yet in terms of employment rates and types of employment, inequality exists, with more men employed and a persistent gender pay gap (see International Labour Organisation, 2018).

Aside from this, South Africa is well known to have a very high incidence of gender-based violence, including femicides against women and gender non-conforming people. 2017 had the lowest record of sexual offences by the South African Police Services (SAPS) - 49,455. Suffice to say, South Africa has an ongoing gender problem domestically (Cold-Ravnkilde 2019). Posel (2004) notes that many of the debates centred on sexual violence are often reactionary, rather than a consistent commitment to a feminist policy against sexual violence. State interventions have thus not been seen to diminish these despite the discursive, and some material, investment in gender equality.

South Africa's foreign-policy trajectory nevertheless suggests a different path for foreign policy despite the conditions at home. The ANC's 1997 outline of foreign policy states:

an African Renaissance should centrally be defined by a vision and a commitment to gender equality and the eradication of women's oppression. This means that South Africa, and our movement in particular, need to play an important role in these struggles worldwide and on the continent, including specifically the revival of a Pan-African women's movement. There can be no renewal in Africa whilst gender inequality remains firmly entrenched on the continent and globally. However, a key task in this regard is the development of perspectives and approaches to international relations that centrally involve ideas of gender equality and women's emancipation (ANC 1997).

It is fair to argue that the apartheid state was characterised by its militarised heterosexual masculinity enacted as opposite to the feminised liberation movement (see also Conway 2008). In the ANC, explicit feminist concerns about the distribution of power and the impact of gendered hierarchies were acknowledged but subordinated to discourses about class and race. Arguably, the implications of the gendered conditions of society and the (lack of) response has had implications for the organisation of contemporary South Africa.

Today, South Africa is still governed and dominated by the ANC, and consequently, commitments to the party drive leaders' priorities and practices. For this reason, and in order to understand the contemporary foreign policy of South Africa, it is essential to focus on the administrations of South Africa's four presidents, including their foreign ministers.

### **Gendering South Africa's Foreign Policy: From Institutionalisation to Practice**

Under Nelson Mandela, and with the support of local feminist and women's groups, it appeared that South Africa sought to formally institutionalise gender equality through an emphasis on women's rights. For example, the South African constitution created the Commission for Gender Equality, an explicitly feminist project (Seidman 2001, 226) which aims at a "society free from gender oppression and inequality" and to "advance, promote and protect gender equality in South Africa through undertaking research, public education, policy development, legislative initiatives, effective monitoring and litigation" (CGE Website, accessed April 2019). In addition to this type of formal inscription, with the ANCWL unbanned, its membership lobbied for a 30% quota in women's representation in parliament. This was initially met with resistance. However, it was eventually inserted into an amended ANC constitution in 1997 to include women as a third of its parliamentarians. As of April 2019, South Africa's parliament includes 166 women, who comprise 41% of parliamentarians (SADC Gender Protocol 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

Since the 1990s, as part of the transition to democracy and new international relations, the ANC has rhetorically emphasised the importance of gender equality (Hassim, 2004). Nelson Mandela himself emphasised the need for women's emancipation from all oppressions for its own sake, and as

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<sup>3</sup> [According to the results of the 8 May 2019 South African elections, the proportion of women in parliament has risen to 45.25% \(South African Government, 2019\)](#)

fundamental to the success of the ANC's stewardship of the new South Africa. Democratisation provided a potential feminist opening to interrogate the status quo of the anti-apartheid struggle. It is worth revisiting Nelson Mandela's own foreign policy ideas, presented in an essay for Foreign Affairs, in which he outlined a South African foreign policy that relies on these core principles. He wrote:

The pillars upon which our foreign policy will reset are the following beliefs:

[...] human rights are central to international relations and an understanding that they extend beyond the political, embracing the economic, social and the environmental; [...] that considerations of justice and respect for international law should guide the relations between nations; [...] that concerns or interests of the continent of Africa should be reflected in our foreign-policy choices (Mandela 1993).

In this narrative there are no obvious proxies for gender equality specifically. However, the text is evidence of what was to come in the South African constitution, which centres human rights (including the rights of gender and sexual minorities), gender equality, and therefore the possibility of gender justice, especially when taken together with Mandela's previous and subsequent pronouncements. Furthermore, in outlining this foreign-policy vision, Mandela underscored diversity as "a central goal of [South Africa's] foreign policy" (Mandela 1993).

Under Mbeki, the changes made were specifically about addressing the absence of women in policymaking by including more women in Cabinet. Initially, women made up only 8 of 29 positions (McGreal 1999). By 2005, however, they made up 45% of the cabinet (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2005), including deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and foreign minister Dlamini Nkosasana-Zuma, two of the most powerful roles in Cabinet.

Five years after Mandela's government had attempted to set the tone for ethical foreign policy practice, Thabo Mbeki sought to build on this through the reconciliation of the ANC's pan-Africanist ideal, which re-oriented the focus of South Africa's foreign policy to Africa, with the ethics promoted by Mandela (see Magadla and Cornell 2019). Pan-Africanism is defined here as "an insurrectionary discourse that emerged in direct opposition to European capitalism, manifest in the worst forms of human exploitation, and occupation" (Abbas and Mama 2015, 3-4). At the heart of this strategy was the desire to propel South Africa into an economic powerhouse on the continent (Former South Africa Intelligence Officer 2018). This is perhaps illustrated best in one of Mbeki's first major foreign-policy speeches at the Africa-EU Summit in 2000, titled 'Integrating Africa into the World Economy', and in which South Africa was portrayed as having a major role. The content of this particular speech, however, made no mention of "gender", "gender equality" or "women's rights" (see Mbeki, 2000) specifically, and broader analysis of the text does not yield proxies for pro-gender-justice concerns, although there is consistent emphasis on human rights, suggesting an ongoing commitment to Mandela's vision of an ethical foreign policy.

Content analysis of foreign-policy speeches made during his time in office, drawing on the publicly available online speech archive of DIRCO, illustrates Mbeki's situating of gender-justice commitments in the *Africa First* context, which links gender equality (as equality between men and women) to anti-racism. In his first address to Parliament as President, Thabo Mbeki committed to a gender audit to drive forward the Plan of Action on Gender adopted under Nelson Mandela (Mbeki 1999). Many of the speeches focusing on an internal ANC/South Africa/Africa audience underscored the importance of gender equality. However, when assessing speeches that targeted non-African audiences, the focus was on the promotion of South Africa as a power

where gender equality rarely featured, although human rights was often deployed as a goal of South Africa's international relations.

The broader context and ambition of President Mbeki cannot be ignored, especially with regards to *Africa First*. *Africa First* mattered inasmuch as South Africa was leading the Africa narrative. Thus, much energy was also committed to the geo-political (re)ordering in the context of the rise of the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). South Africa, under Mbeki, aspired to be a regional hegemon, championing human rights abroad, and ultimately, Africa's main interlocutor for and within Africa.

Under Jacob Zuma there were some continuities, although gender equality/gender justice was not seen as a priority objective of foreign policy. As under the Mbeki administration, the Minister responsible for DIRCO was a woman, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane. Moreover, there were more women in cabinet and representation in parliament remained more or less constant. However, study of Zuma's foreign-policy addresses to South African/African audiences during his term as President shows that women's rights and gender equality rarely appeared as an administration priority. Rather, they are referenced in the contexts of Mandela's and Oliver Tambo's prior commitments to women's empowerment and echo existing acknowledgement of women's vulnerability in conflict. Throughout that presidency, while Zuma did not withdraw from existing commitments, he did not particularly put resources into these either. In his opportunities to outline South Africa's foreign-policy intent, he did not elaborate on initiatives when compared to previous administrations. The speeches of Maite Nkoana-Mashabane follow the same trajectory as Zuma's. Magadla and Cornell (2019) confirm this lack of prioritisation of gender issues, arguing that the Zuma administration under the foreign policy guidance of Nkoana-Mashabane was

dominated by pragmatic concerns dictated by neoliberalism, the war on terror and the global financial crisis (36).

From Mandela to Zuma, it is clear that representation always mattered. Attention was consistently paid to including women within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (predecessor to DIRCO). As Masters (2017) has argued, South African leaders gave attention to visible representation, particularly in the decision-making bodies that represent foreign policy. This has remained consistent since 1994. The just-departed head of DIRCO, Lindiwe Sisulu, and her successor, Naledi Pandor, are women both serving in the administration of President Cyril Ramaphosa. Indeed, compared with pre-1994 South Africa, women were represented at high levels within the foreign-policy apparatus of South Africa (see Apeni 2012) and the importance of their representation in South Africa's dealings with the rest of the world continues to be an emphasis in South Africa's external projection of itself, despite the divergences in the practices of different ANC administrations. Masters (2017) and Joordan (2017), however, have argued that practicing gender justice as foreign policy has not always matched the rhetoric of representation. Moreover, the focus on representation has also served to reproduce gendered binaries, specifically that gender equality/justice was about women's visibility.

Beyond the seeming institutionalisation of certain feminist ideals within the foreign-policy apparatus and discourse that is prioritised in the nascent feminist foreign-policy field, to what extent does this play out in the *practice* of foreign policy? Moreover, if "ethical foreign policy provides states with an opportunity to take the attention away from domestic political shortcomings" (Aggestam et al 2018, 26), South Africa can be expected to build on its foreign-policy institutions to deploy feminist foreign policy even when its record domestically remains problematic.

## **Practising Ethical Foreign Policy and the Implementation of the WPS Agenda: Towards a feminist foreign policy?**

Like Sweden, Canada and Norway, South Africa has consistently shown support for the nine United Nations Security Council Resolutions that constitute the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda over its almost 20-year history. Like those countries that already claim feminist foreign policy, the focus of implementation has been the global South, specifically Africa, as part of its *Africa First* foreign policy. Indeed, the explicit regional outlook, it has been argued, is part of South Africa's tendency towards pluralistic international order and especially inclusivity (Bischoff, 2003). South Africa's behaviour externally aims to avoid the machismo of realist foreign policy. Its resistance to the typical power politics in addition to a gender equality discourse, albeit problematic, does provide an entry point for pro-gender-justice foreign policy, and the sort of ethics of care advocated by feminist/pro-gender-justice foreign policy proponents (see Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond; Aggestam et al. 2018).

A way in which to gauge the extent of South Africa's foreign-policy practices is by assessing its implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This focus necessarily limits the scope of whom gender justice is for. As Hagen highlights, sexual orientation and gender identity are ignored within the broader WPS architecture (Hagen, 2016). Yet South Africa, which has a mixed record of supporting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) concerns at the international level, is certain about its support for the WPS agenda. This was reiterated in Sisulu's speech to the South African Institute of International Affairs, where she stated that "South Africa vociferously advocates for all parties at the negotiating table at any negotiating forum to ensure the participation of women" (Sisulu, 2019).

In international security practice, accepting the WPS agenda may now be considered low-hanging fruit in terms of bringing together gender and security. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom defines the WPS agenda as having the potential to help people escape cycles of conflict, while also creating inclusive and more democratic peacemaking and enabling a turn from gender inequality to gender justice. "Women's agency, voice, and capacities are critical to local dialogues, better policies and more equitable peace deals" (WILPF 2018). Given the foreign-policy role that South Africa sees for itself in helping to resolve conflicts on the continent, it is an ideal entry point for feminist-informed pro-gender-justice practices. South Africa, in contrast to some of the feminist foreign-policy countries, has no action plan for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Yet "South Africa has continuously been on the frontline in supporting this [WPS] agenda and related UN resolutions and frameworks that seek to provide equal opportunities for both genders in peace and security" (ACCORD 2015). Indeed, South Africa co-sponsored the second UNSCR 1820, the second resolution in the WPS agenda (Hendricks, 2017, 4).

There are two strands of the WPS agenda that have been pushed both as part of the *Africa First* approach and of executing an ethical foreign policy more broadly. The first strand is the promotion of the increased participation of women in the global governance of peace and security. This can be seen as an extension of the internal South African process since 1994 to include more women in leadership and decision-making. This is also consistent with how gender equality is framed within South Africa's development aid sphere (Cold-Ravnskilde 2019, 221). South Africa has sent two of its top diplomats to significant positions, which adds to the number of women in global governance structures and specifically promotes gender justice reforms through the implementation of the WPS agenda on the African continent. First there is Nkozasana Dlamini-

Zuma, a prominent member of the ANC who served as both Home Affairs minister and Foreign Affairs minister, as well as the Chairperson of the African Union. According to Magadla and Cornell, Dlamini-Zuma “made advances as a foreign minister by placing emphasis on African emancipation and gender equality” (2019, 39). This focus continued in her role as Chairperson of the AU, merging the ambitions of Mandela’s ethical foreign policy with Mbeki’s Africa First policy, while ensuring that the focus of the Chairpersonship was the promotion of women’s rights and raising awareness about the negative impact of gender inequality.

In her role as Chairperson, Dlamini-Zuma created the AU’s Office for the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security, the top job on the continent to coordinate the regional implementation of the WPS agenda. In assessing Dlamini-Zuma’s role then, the importance of a South African feminist norm-entrepreneur was evidently necessary for pushing forward the agenda on women’s rights from the domestic foreign-policy context to the continental one. In effect, this has allowed South Africa to be at the helm of shaping the regional agenda on WPS. On her election one feminist activist noted: “This is a victory not only for African women, but for Africans as a whole” (Femnet, 2015). Similarly, Phumzile Mlambo-Mgcuka, as the Executive Director of UNWomen, has led on the implementation of the WPS agenda at the global level. She is also the former deputy president of South Africa – the highest political rank any woman has ever held in South Africa’s history.

In its role as Africa’s interlocutor, South Africa has had a lot of opportunities to push for the core of the WPS agenda and indeed to practise it. Over the periods from Mbeki to the present and since the first UNSCR 1325, South Africa has aimed to foster peace and diplomacy on the continent. This is manifested in the participation of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in

various peace-support operations in, for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Sudan, Nepal, and Uganda (Van Nieuwkerk 2012, 46). However, while South Africa's security sector has good representation of women (Hendricks, 2015b), there is no indication that these missions paid any particular attention to specifically leveraging the WPS agenda; certainly, no SOGI issues were acknowledged in the context of these missions.

Rhetorically all the required elements are there. In the Revised White Paper on South African participation in international peace missions (2012), for instance, the following commitment is made:

[...] mainstreaming of gender in peace missions and in the promotion of gender equality. South Africa believes in the principle of equal rights, full and effective representation and participation of women and men in decision-making processes and programmes for conflict prevention, peace-making, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and development.

Here, the WPS agenda is not invoked at all. Yet there is a clear awareness that representation and rights for women is intrinsic to the practice of an ethical foreign policy by South Africa. This Revised White Paper replaced South Africa's White Paper on Peace Missions (1998), which included no references to gender or women despite the existence of the constitution, Mandela's foreign policy aspirations and the Chapter Nine institutions. In this sense, it could be argued that although the WPS was not invoked, the logics that are constitutive within UNSCR 1325, and WPS after it, had an impact on the framing of South Africa's foreign policy, particularly its role in conflicts on the African continent. Thus while concrete artefacts of WPS, such as a NAP, might be missing, there is meaning attached to the WPS agenda in South Africa's foreign policy.

The second strand is linked to the implications of including more women and advocating for women's rights in conflict contexts. When examining South

Africa's role in two long-term conflicts – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the second Congo War (1998-2003) and Burundi (1993–2005) - gender concerns, focused on the promotion of women's rights, are invoked in some aspects of conflict settlement, although not consistently.

In the DRC, Congolese women actively campaigned for representation at the negotiating table, using UNSCR 1325 as backing for their claims. This created an opening for South Africa. They were supported by South Africa, who hosted the mediation talks between the conflict parties. As Hengari (2016, 2) argues, the DRC “stands out as an example of South Africa's emerging bandwidth in peace diplomacy.” The immersion of official government and ANC interventions, especially through dialogue and mediation, should have allowed South Africa some leverage in promoting representation, a gender-justice norm that has been discursively and practically established within its foreign-policy apparatus. South Africa, however, was unable to press for any guarantees for women's inclusion as active agents in the mediation and dialogue process. Rather, South Africa has consistently supported civil-society organisations, including gender-justice groups (Nyuykonge and Zondi 2017).

In Burundi, Nelson Mandela had helped to broker the peace that eventually led to the Arusha Accords in 2000 (see Bentley and Southall 2005). During his time as mediator, South Africa facilitated a meeting of representatives of women's groups supported by other African women's organisations. Part of this process helped to secure a 30% quota for women in the ensuing Burundi Constitution, leveraging CEDAW among other international commitments (Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, 2018). South Africa has continued to play a role in the peace process in Burundi, with Jacob Zuma taking over ceasefire negotiations from Mandela in 2002. Zuma engaged the African Union in this process, much more actively underscoring the regional approach;

but under him there were no specific interventions to leverage the WPS agenda. While representation is formalised and hailed as a success in Burundi, facilitated by South African women's substantive participation, protection against sexual violence was not on the mediation agenda. Nevertheless, the pro-gender-justice norm that acknowledged gender can be seen as established in South Africa's foreign-policy practice. South Africa led the final agreement, which "called for an end to ethnic exclusion and gender discrimination" (Hendricks 2015b 17).

As the WPS agenda becomes more institutionalised globally, South Africa has sought to make meaning of the framework by moving beyond descriptive representation to championing women's participation, one of the pillars of the WPS agenda. Leveraging its existing strengths in the area of mediation in African conflicts, the Directorate for Mediation Support, Policy, Research and Analysis Unit (Department of Mediation), based within DIRCO, aims to push the pro-gender-justice norm of women's participation. This is done primarily through the training of women mediators in other countries and as support to the African Union's capabilities. For example, DIRCO runs the Women Capacity-Building Programme on Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Negotiation, which brings together women from all over the continent to train them for mediation and also provide a space for learning<sup>4</sup>. Since 2015, DIRCO has hosted the Gertrude Shope's Annual Dialogue Forum, which was created to bring women together on issues relating to African peace-building and development. South Africa has also trained women mediators on behalf of the African Union (AU) as part of the continental organisation's own bid to fulfil its WPS commitments (Hendricks 2017)<sup>5</sup>. In this particular instance, it is a main

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<sup>4</sup> Groenewald, Andre Head of Unit, Mediation Department of International Cooperation. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Pretoria, South Africa. July 23 2018

<sup>5</sup> Former South African Intelligence Office, Interview with author. Personal interview. London UK, August 10 2018

contributor to the AU's Fem-Wise, a network of African women mediators. It is this South African example, initially trialled in the Southern African sub-regional context, that has been modelled all over the world in the form of regional Women Mediator Networks, including the Nordic Women's Mediator Network to which both Sweden and Norway, countries with strong pro-gender justice credentials contribute. Overall, and in the context of the WPS agenda, 'doing' participation fits in well with the narrative that South Africa seeks to project, nationally, regionally and globally<sup>6</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

South Africa presents a fascinating case through which one can interrogate the bridge between the projection of pro-gender-justice norms and feminist approaches in foreign policy. Like those countries that have already declared a feminist foreign policy, South Africa has a strong and progressive domestic framework from which such a commitment could originate. Moreover, it is not without ideas on how to advance women's representation and the promotion of women's participation, as evidenced by its roles on the continent. In this sense, South Africa rhetorically embraces the ideal of a gender-sensitive and inclusive foreign-policy agenda.

The interpretation, evolution and execution of this rhetoric, however, has been impacted by the extent to which foreign-policy leaders can be norm-entrepreneurs to push forward a feminist agenda in foreign policy. Based on the analysis of former Presidents and foreign ministers, the article has shown that Mandela, Mbeki, Dlamini Zuma and Mlambo-Ngcuka are norm-entrepreneurs as they have sought to leverage their roles to emphasise the integral nature of gender equality in all aspects of the new

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<sup>6</sup> [Civil Society activist and co-author, South Africa's Draft Women, Peace and Security, National Action Plan, Interview with author. Via Skype. August 12 2019](#)

South Africa (Davies and True, 2017, p. 207 see also Aggestam and True, this issue), and especially to promote this continent-wide. In strictly foreign-policy terms, the Zuma presidency did not undo the work of its predecessors. However, it chiefly maintained the status quo, even while the foreign minister supported initiatives that have since flourished owing to the institutionalisation of representation as a gender norm within South Africa's foreign-policy apparatus.

Beyond this, if the priorities of the foreign minister under South Africa's fourth President Cyril Ramaphosa (as set out before the national elections in May 2019) are any indication, South Africa appears to be making overtures towards what may be termed feminist foreign policy if the understanding proffered in the dominant literature is accepted. Yet, despite seeming alignment with the aims of feminist foreign policy, I would argue that these South African foreign-policy practices reveal some of the challenges to a transformational foreign policy that have not been dealt with in the extant literature.

First, in response to the third analytical question of who is included/excluded, it is evident that gender equality or gender justice is understood through a sex binary of men and women. The functioning of gender as it may apply to LGBTQ+ people is not articulated in policy practices. Cold-Ravnkilde (2019) argues that this is in part driven by pragmatism. South Africa's African partners, who are the target of its *Africa First* foreign policy, it is argued, are not receptive to the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights. Consequently, in a spirit of peaceful engagement, South Africa steers clear.

Second, if, as FPA proponents claim, the domestic and the international is essential to determining foreign-policy identity, South Africa's position as a gender-just foreign-policy actor is not yet fully developed. Pursuing the ends of feminism in foreign policy, to be ethical also requires internal consistency, which South Africa has not been able to attain. Indeed, this is a critique that can be levied at the broader literature, which has yet to systematically engage with the extent to which the international commitments to translate feminist foreign policy are realised at home. One exception has been the work

by Jezierska and Towns (2018) in Sweden, where, they argue, the projection of pro-gender norms abroad is a tactic to silence critique at home.

Whereas the immediate post-apartheid period signalled opportunities for intersectional feminist understandings of gender equality, including women's rights, what has emerged is a relatively narrow and instrumental understanding of how gender is promoted within the foreign-policy field. In the country, while gender inequality is acknowledged, societal resistance remains that is prohibitive to attaining a more equal society. South Africa remains very patriarchal and domestic conditions stand in contrast to the gender justice promoted externally. It is unsurprising then that South Africa has not called on domestic feminist resources in narrating its new foreign-policy direction. As Desmond Lesejane of Sonke Gender Justice notes, foreign-policy-making has not allowed feminist interventions (Lesejane, 2015). Lesejane argues that the draft White Paper on South Africa's foreign policy underscored the erasure of the feminist gains lost over time since 1994. Further, he argues:

The draft white paper, by design or by default, almost excludes the impact of gender constructs in its analysis and articulation. Almost nothing is said about gender and how gender constructs impact on policy imperatives... (Lesejane 2015, 30)

There is resistance to feminism as an operational framework, which has become entrenched over time in the discourses around gender justice domestically. South Africa's acknowledgement or practices of gender sensitivity in foreign policy do not interrogate the power structures that underpin the dominance of patriarchy in foreign policy, unlike a foreign policy informed by feminism and an ethics of care which seeks to be transformational. Limited pro-gender-justice achievements in foreign-policy practice allow South Africa to side-step, for instance, existing high levels of gendered violence against women internally (one of the other pillars of the WPS agenda), while focusing on the representation/participation axis of the

WPS agenda in its foreign policy. As Olonisakin highlights, while the promotion of the WPS agenda has helped the inclusion of new (women) actors, “in reality the interests and frameworks that sustain the status quo remain entrenched” (Olonisakin 2011, 26).

There is, however, a second dimension linked to this, which is the impact of exogenous factors on the practice of the pro-gender-justice norms that can contribute to a feminist foreign policy. In particular, whatever South Africa’s intent was with regard to gender norms in the DRC and Burundi, it was constrained by the nature of the conflicts and the nature of peacebuilding itself. Thus far, feminist or gender-equality claims to foreign policy tend to focus on the executing states without engagement with the conditions of implementation, so that how ‘feminist’ foreign policy works ‘on the ground’ is knowledge we do not yet have. The utility of a Third World Feminist lens is again evident. Certainly, South Africa has had the opportunity to entrench nominal feminist priorities into its *Africa First* approach, and, since 2000, to leverage WPS in this process.

At the same time, what is evident in situating South Africa in the pro-gender-justice/feminist foreign-policy terrain is that the specific nature of how South Africa came to be has had an impact on the evolution and understanding of how to go about implementing gender justice. The persistence of coloniality in the everyday cannot be discounted from the practices that impede domestic and international contexts of gender justice in South Africa’s policy priorities. Overall, then, a key contribution that this South African case makes is in highlighting the importance of the historical and domestic context for understanding the gendered external practices of states when analysing feminist foreign policy. This analysis, which centres perspectives from the Global South, contributes to how we can elaborate our understanding of pro-

gender-norms in foreign policy, including feminist foreign policy. Additionally, it shows why feminist perspectives on foreign-policy analysis must account for the impact of exogenous factors on the gender-justice outcomes of the implementing state.

While South Africa does not and cannot stand in as proxy for the whole of the Global South, it nevertheless demonstrates that pro-gender justice foreign policy norms and practices transcend the North-South divide. Given the co-constitutive nature of the study and practice of these feminist perspectives to foreign policy, the insights from outside the Global North contribute to a more holistic interrogation of the efficacy of pro-gender-justice/feminist foreign-policy practice.

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