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Putting Feminist Foreign Policy under Scrutiny
The Female Subject and Agency Placed in Emerging Discourses

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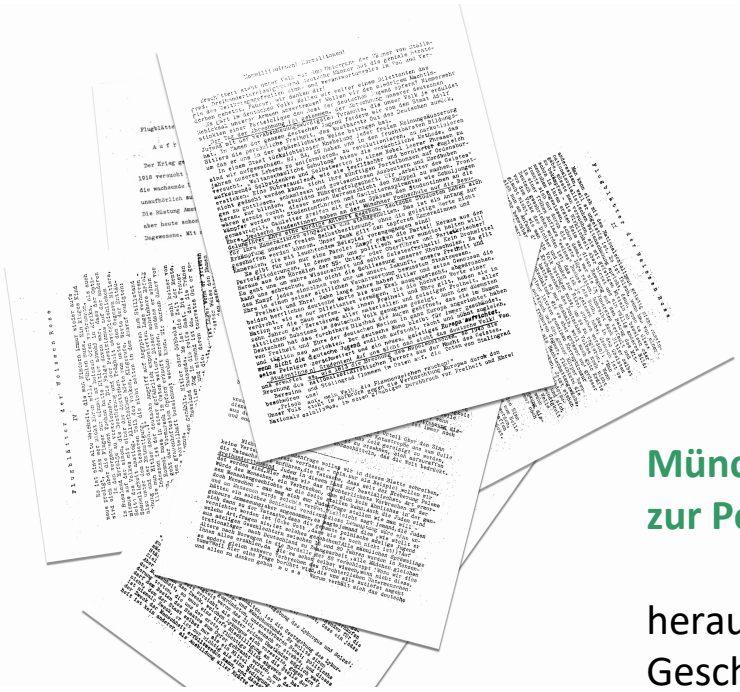

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Dr. Sebastian Schindler
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I. Introduction

> I must admit that I was surprised time and again during this process by what a “trigger word” it is, this little word “feminist” (Federal Foreign Office 2023b).

In March 2023, the first female Foreign Minister of Germany Annalena Baerbock presented the official guidelines for feminist foreign policy. Long before, the little word *feminist* gained great importance and caused even greater discussions in international politics. It triggered a wave of national efforts to rethink how foreign policy can or should be designed.

First introduced by Sweden in 2014, feminist foreign policy (FFP) has become an international trend wave with Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Libya and almost a dozen other countries implementing or planning to follow feminist agendas in their foreign policymaking. Although the conceptual drafting of and practical commitments to feminist foreign policies vary greatly in the international community, they share a common approach: centring women’s concerns and rights in the domain of foreign policy. Of course, women have always been part of the way that politics and international relations are made sense of. What distinguishes the current feminist moment is how essentially it is constituted and centred on women and their rights. National FFPs are talking and accounting for women and addressing their socio-political positions in local, national, or global contexts. A clear perception of these addressed women is therefore central for the design, implementation, and success of feminist foreign policy. To comprehend this wave of FFP, to analyse how it is put into national practice, entails a precise understanding of how these discourses make sense of women. What this uncovering process includes and ultimately reveals is how women’s agency is negotiated and imagined in foreign policy. To disclose how an emergent FFP discourse talks and thinks about women and agency, this research asks:

How does the Feminist Foreign Policy of Germany portray women and their agency?

This research is not trying to evaluate the effectiveness or usefulness of FFP as a concept. It also does not want to explain the underlying motivations of states to implement FFPs. Rather, it follows a post-positivist approach to critically analyse and deconstruct the meanings within foreign policy making.

By putting the German FFP under poststructuralist feminist scrutiny, this research wants to trace how this nascent foreign policy discourse constructs and frames female subjects and their agency. Uncovering its underlying images of women and their agency attempts to render the problems and potentials of an emergent moment in foreign policy.

After engaging with the current scholarly discussion about feminist foreign policy and explaining how this research is contributing to this academic field, the poststructuralist feminist framework of this research will unfold. Engaging with a poststructural approach to foreign policy will display how subjects and agency are produced and positioned within discourses. An engagement with Poststructuralist feminist IR then puts the concept of discursive subjectification into a gendered context and traces how specific gendered narratives of “men” and “women” reproduce a dominant foreign policy discourse that continues to be a subject of feminist debates. Through the poststructural method of the “Discursive Practices Approach” (Doty 1993), the identity, positioning and agency of women in the German FFP will be uncovered and deconstructed. This in-depth analysis contributes to the feminist IR scholarship on gendered narratives in foreign policy discourse and offers further considerations for the problems and potentials of representing women and their agency in feminist foreign policy.

II. State of the Art - Embracing and Scrutinising Feminist Foreign Policy

Magnifying the unit to grasp the whole, understanding the subject to make sense of the world. This is the logic of my analysis and the overall aim of my research project. The theoretical and methodical lens of this research lies specifically on the *female subject* and follows the feminist curiosity to uncover the “practices – or performances – through which gender configures boundaries of subjectivity” (Shepherd 2008: 3). Engaging with the poststructuralist perspective on IR gives this curiosity a framework that sees productive power and knowledge as the underlying influences of discourses like foreign policy (see Foucault 1982; Digeser 1992). My theoretical view will narrow to trace how the subject, its agency and gender are produced and constituted by the practices of foreign policy. With this curiosity to uncover the ways that the female

subject and its agency are produced in discourse, I seek to contribute to the nascent academic interest in feminist foreign policy.

Feminist foreign policy as a political phenomenon was and still is received very differently within the feminist IR academia, especially regarding its transformative potential for women's empowerment. Profoundly displaying this ambiguity is the scholarly discussion on the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, also referred to as the "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) agenda. For the first time in the institution's history, the UN Security Council devoted an entire session to debate women's experience in (post-)conflict situations (Cohn et al. 2004: 130). Adopted in 2000, the resolution intended to advocate for international peacebuilding and post-conflict processes, to account for gendered inequalities, and to pursue gender equality (Shepherd 2011: 505).

In a written panel discussion, the influential feminist IR scholars Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings discussed the WPS agenda and agreed that the resolution has a revolutionary potential to achieve gender equality (see Cohn et al. 2004). Gibbings problematised some discursive elements of the agenda, pointing out that women are categorised as victims, peace-builders and peacemakers, which Kinsella further critiqued as qualifying women based on their 'use value' (Cohn et al. 2004: 136). While addressing this critique, Cohn ultimately praised the resolution, claiming that it "found a way to simultaneously acknowledge the very real horrors of women's experiences in war and the scandalous lack of attention to women's needs for protection, *and* made women's agency vibrantly visible" (Cohn et al. 2004: 139).

The poststructuralist feminist Laura Shepherd deemed the narratives that women were subjected to in the resolution as a more fundamental problem for the UN's transformative goals towards gender equality. Accordingly, her critique of the UNSCR 1325 is bound to the specific framings and categorizations of women through discourse: "I identify constructions of gender that assume it largely synonymous with biological sex and, further, reproduce logics of identity that characterised women as fragile, passive and in need of protection […] [through] elite political actors in the international system" (Shepherd 2011: 506). Further, she criticises the essentialist claim about women as peacemakers stating that this "liberal notion (re)produces the subject of 'women' as a homogenous group whose interests are *essentially* peaceful and socially beneficial" (Shepherd 2008: 162).

For Shepherd, the discursive representations of women along these subversive and essentializing lines limit the emergence of agency and the radical reform that the WPS agenda attempts to accomplish (Shepherd 2008: 162-64). Where Cohn argues that the UNSCR 1325 has a transformative potential *despite* these gendered narratives and assumptions about women, Shepherd proposes that female empowerment remains uncertain *because* of those very discursive representations.

My research project situates itself within this feminist ambivalence towards feminist foreign policy. The work by Laura J. Shepherd (see 2008; 2011) and her poststructuralist feminist perspective on foreign policy inspired this research project and its inquiry to deconstruct the discursive portrayal of women in feminist policy practices. The feminist discussion of the UNSCR 1325 is relevant to this research because the original WPS agenda and following UNSCRs laid the foundational and ideological blueprint for national FFPs, for instance in Sweden, Canada, France and Mexico (see Zhukova et al. 2022). Analysing how national foreign policies relate to these gendered narratives, resumes this academic debate, and contributes to the prevailing question within (poststructuralist) feminist IR academia how to overcome gendered boundaries and hierarchies in foreign policy discourse.

In theory, feminist foreign policy can be understood as a practice of international ethics which explicitly works towards the protection, equality or empowerment of women and sometimes other marginalised groups (see Aggestam et al. 2019). In practice, national FFPs vary greatly in their conceptualisation and underlying motivation: “The introduction of a FFP may be linked to strong ideological, normatively based convictions (‘this is the right thing to do’), but also to the strategic strengthening of the initiator’s self-images internationally” (Zhukova et al. 2022: 197-98).

In the nascent field of foreign policy research, the cases of Sweden and Canada have been discussed most thoroughly (see Aggestam/Bergman-Rosamond 2016; Parisi 2020; Thomson 2020). A common research objective is to examine how or if FFP guidelines have the potential to keep their feminist (see Thomson 2020) or intersectional (see Morton et al. 2020) promises. This research shares the sense of feminist scepticism towards the transformative possibility of FFP that most scholars in this research field have: “The transformative ambition of feminist foreign policy requires sensitivity to the study of new practices, actors, policies and ethical frameworks” (Aggestam et al. 2019: 26).

Here, the transformative possibility of FFP is not traced by a positivist evaluation of foreign policy but by a post-positivist deconstruction of its discourses.
A more critical, postcolonial, perspective in FFP research has elaborated how many FFPs rely on liberal feminist norms and are part of a hegemonic Western discourse (see Zhukova et al. 2022). Following this postcolonial objective are also other projects that examine how the hegemonic positions of national and international FFP reproduce gendered, sexualised and racialised hierarchies (see Pratt 2013; Achilleos-Sarll 2018). Similar to those research projects, a further poststructural feminist IR inquiry of this research is to place the narratives and logics of the examined FFP guidelines in a broader dominant foreign policy discourse. What this research does not agree with is the assumption of these postcolonial projects that gender alone cannot be a sufficient analysis category for foreign policy discourses. This research explicitly focuses on the ways that gender is represented in foreign policy.

The German FFP was introduced in 2023 and has not been discussed extensively yet (see Pierobon 2023; Aran/Brummer 2024). To analyse its guidelines from a post-positivist perspective offers great potential to understand the gendered logic of its initial design. Further, the results of this inquiry can trace how these feminist policies reproduce or develop further the discursive legacy of the UN's WPS agendas (see Shepherd 2011).
The goal of this research is not to evaluate the efficacy of the German FFP to achieve gender equality. Instead, this research will follow a post-positivist strand and a poststructuralist feminist approach to uncover the underlying discursive dynamics of this discourse. The analytical focus on the portrayal of women that this research is committed to, speaks to the research of Shepherd on gendered narratives in the UN discourse (see 2008; 2011) as it applies her poststructuralist feminist inquiry onto a national foreign policy context. Because most of the current research on national FFPs takes a broader perspective to analyse the problems and potentials of these discourses, this research attempts to showcase how valuable it can be to set a narrow focus on the specific ways that subjects, and agency are imagined. Through this narrowed approach, the greater logics that constitute how gender is negotiated and change is imagined through feminist foreign policy are uncovered.

III. Theorising the Female Subject in Foreign Policy

To trace how feminist foreign policy portrays women and agency, one must understand how discourses reproduce power and knowledge through representational and reproducing practices. A poststructuralist IR framework will display how subjects are constructed and their agency framed within foreign policy discourses. Through a poststructuralist feminist IR lens, gender is then made out as a central category through which subjects and agency are framed in foreign policy. A short account of existing gendered narratives in IR displays how a dominant foreign policy discourse creates hierarchies between male and female subjects. Poststructuralist Feminist IR sees language and discourse itself as the sites where the rigid boundaries that constrain the female subject can be overcome.

1. Representation, Foreign Policy Discourse, and Subjectivity

What, where, who, when and how is a subject in foreign policy? Asking these questions implies relativity to the subject that already detaches the possible answers from most "classical" International Relations (IR) theories. Giving answers to these questions instead requires an understanding of broader power structures that influence knowledge, discourses, and the positions of subjects.

Peter Digeser explains how there are three conventional IR understandings of power as the central factor of influence, rational actions or beliefs between actors (1992: 978-79). Challenging these liberal understandings of power, Digeser introduces a "fourth face of power", or 'power$_4$', which is defined by the question: "What kind of subject is being produced?" (1992: 980). Perhaps the biggest claim that this new face of power makes is that not actors or their actions but power itself produces meanings. This reinterpretation of power is based on Michel Foucault's conception of power as a "*productive* network which runs through the whole social body" (1980b: 119; emphasis added). The production of meaning in this fourth face of power is not based on rational choices or intelligible political strategies, as power$_4$ has a more incomprehensible nature: "power$_4$ is always present, and for the most part is exercised without intentionality, objective interests, or a repressive character" (Digeser 1992: 984). Further, this presumes the Foucauldian logic of knowledge *as* and *in* power which he understood as a reciprocal relationship:

“We are subjected to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (Foucault 1980a: 93). Meaning is not only produced by power but also necessarily precludes and determines the workings of power. In this reciprocal understanding, power$_4$ does not simply create knowledge anew but foremost reproduces its pre-existing assumptions and truths.
Digeser includes these productive logics in his definition of power$_4$ but narrows down the interdisciplinary scope of the Foucauldian definition of power onto the field of political practices. This poststructuralist understanding of power presents a radical shift to the liberal ways of ‘making sense’ of political relations:

> The genealogical character of power$_4$ shifts the object of theoretical inquiry away from describing or clarifying current political practices and toward describing the mundane, violent, or fabulous beginnings and dynamic character of those practices (Digeser 1992: 990).

The beginnings of power$_4$ in socio-political relations and institutions, the dynamics that produce and constitute meaning in political practices lie in discourses.
A discourse can be defined as a “system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense” (Doty 1993: 302). This logical system not only makes sense but creates realities as a discourse “produces interpretive possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it” (Doty 1993: 302). The impossibility of thinking beyond a given discourse is based on the all-encompassing, reciprocal relationship of knowledge and power$_4$ (see Digeser 1992). Because discourse produces meanings and truths, it reproduces specific power relations underlying knowledge. As a productive mechanism of power, discourse “provides discursive spaces, i.e., concepts, categories, metaphors […] by which meanings are created” (Doty 1993: 302). In these discursive spaces, meaning is created through acts of representation. To explain how representing meaning is not simply an instance but an active practice of discourse, Shepherd uses the example of taking a photograph which cannot be done objectively but always depends on the conscious decisions of the photographer who chooses the motif or angle of a picture (Shepherd 2008: 24). Discourses represent subjects and objects, for instance, by defining them through vocabulary that is already known and accepted within given knowledge. This understanding of power and discourse is grounded in poststructuralist theory that questions and deconstructs the taken-for-granted truths of language, structures, and knowledge (see Campbell 2013).

Poststructuralist IR sees foreign policy as a central location of discourses. More so, foreign policy is located in specific institutions, historical continuities, inherent logics and geopolitical positions which constitute what Shepherd names a “discursive terrain” (2011: 506). Foreign policy practices are construct*ed* by the boundaries of this discursive terrain and construct*ing* of specific meanings and realities: “conceptualizing foreign policy as social construction seeks to place foreign policy practices within the larger context of constructing a particular kind of international order consisting of various kinds of international identities” (Doty 1993: 304). When a specific foreign policy practice represents international orders and its subjects, these orders and identities are redefined and produced within the knowledge and boundaries of its discourse.

The production of subjects, the *subjectification*, through foreign policy discourse is a central dynamic of productive power “which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him” (Foucault 1982: 781). According to this poststructural logic, the subjects and identities represented in foreign policy are defined through discursive power. The different subjects that are part of a discourse become “intelligible only with reference to a specific set of categories, concepts, and practices” (Doty 1993: 303).
In this process, subjects are attached to their own identity and body through the definitions and categories of foreign policy discourse. The subject that is made intelligible through representative practices is not only produced but also specifically placed within a discourse: “Subjects, then, can be thought of as *positions* within particular discourses” (Doty 1993: 303; emphasis added). When foreign policy identifies, categorises, and produces multiple subjects, these subjects are put in relation to one another. When subjects are positioned unequally powerful hierarchies are produced. The subject in foreign policy is entangled within this grid of discourse and knowledge, it is reproduced by the preexisting truths and conceptions of power[4].

To fully entail subjectivity and its production through discourse, one must conceptualise agency, broadly understood as the subject’s “capacity to act” (Björkdahl/Selimovic 2015: 170). Agency however “is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their

activity […] ‘the power within’” (Kabeer 1999: 438). What ultimately separates the agent from the actor is the sociological assumption of agency as “acting independently of social structure” (Campbell 2009: 410). For a poststructural theorisation, this assumption should not be interpreted as a deterministic criterion but rather as an approximate idea of grasping agency. Shepherd identifies the perhaps defining element of a poststructural conception of agency: the “emphasis on change” (2011: 508). Agency thus entails the mere possibility of transforming beyond given boundaries. A subject with agency, an agent, emerges as an acting, somewhat autonomous subject capable of change within social structures and discursive practices.

When subjects are represented in discourse, their assumed capabilities of agency too "emerge in a particular discursive context and are both produced by and productive of practices of power” (Shepherd 2011: 514). Within this poststructural understanding of agency, as produced by discourse, it is nonetheless still possible to see agency as an integral part of subjectivity: “(W)hile agency may be constrained and marginalised, there is no such thing as ‘absent agency’” (Björkdahl/Selimovic 2015: 172). Agency can be understood as a constitutive part, or rather an inevitable possibility, of subjectivity. Discourses like foreign policy are however able to reframe and thus reconstitute this subjective agency through representational practices and the boundaries implemented by its broader discursive terrain. Deconstructing the terrains of foreign policy and its underlying knowledge ultimately traces back the workings of power[4] “where subject, agency and structure are inextricably intertwined” (Shepherd 2011: 512).

To summarise, the poststructuralist lens on power in IR can trace how foreign policy, as a practice of discourse, represents and produces specific meanings based on its own knowledge. Through the representational practice of foreign policy, subjects are identified and framed by narratives, structures, and boundaries of discourse. This process not only defines subjectivity and identity but also constitutes how a subject’s agency is conceived.

2. *Foreign Policy and the Female Subject – A Critical Inquiry*

Putting this poststructuralist concept of subjectification in foreign policy discourse under a feminist lens displays how gender is one of the central categories by which subjectivity is produced and positioned in foreign policy discourses. This theoretical linking presupposes a theoretical reformulation of the category gender. Butler understands gender not as a natural or fixed category of identity but as a socially constructed category that becomes comprehensible through constant performative practices such as discourse and language (see Butler 1990). This expands the conception of gender as not just a personal condition, being masculine or feminine for example, but also as an action, i.e., the process of gender*ing* "by which speaking subjects come into being" (Butler 1993: 7). The subject that is represented and produced in discourse is thus imagined only with regards to a specific idea of gender. Advertisements for children's clothes, for example, use the colour pink, motifs like princesses, or silhouettes of dresses to define that a piece of clothing is meant for girls. The poststructural feminist IR scholar Shepherd reformulates these two dimensions of gender as a *noun* and a verb and introduces a third conceptualization of gender as "a logic, which is produced by and productive of the ways in which we understand and perform global politics" (Shepherd 2010: 5). The logic(s) of gender are thus understood as integral parts of the underlying knowledge constituted in and through foreign policy discourses. The subject that is produced in foreign policy becomes intelligible only as a gendered subject.

Following this reconceptualization, gender becomes a defining element of the ways in which foreign policy discourse constructs, positions, and hierarchises the subject in foreign policy discourses. For poststructuralist feminists, this means that deconstructing discourse entails deconstructing gendered logic and questioning the assumptions made about gender itself. Consequently, this approach entails: "to recognise and interrogate multiple masculinities and femininities […] rather than some fixed or essential notion of what constitutes a 'man' or 'woman'" (Shepherd 2010: 13). One of the most defining yet controversial positions of poststructural feminism is this questioning of gender essentialism, i.e., the logic that connects a subject to a specific gender.

Poststructural Feminist IR tries to decipher the gendered logic in foreign policy and deconstruct how "certain *performances of gender* produce and are produced by […] political practices on a global scale" (Shepherd 2010: 12). Existing Feminist IR research has shown how the performances and logics of gender in Western foreign policy practices function through reoccurring narratives of male and female subjects which create rigid gender hierarchies. The two main dichotomies are presented here to concretise the gendered dynamic of subjectification through discourse and to contextualise the position of the female subject in the "discursive terrain" (Shepherd 2011: 506) of a dominant foreign policy discourse.

Central to foreign policy discourse is the language of conflict, violence, and wars which is both produced and productive of gender relations and thus gendered subjects (see Goldstein 2001). Feminist IR scholars have shown how liberal foreign policy discourses think of violence as masculine and peacefulness as feminine, which partly originates from long-lasting socio-cultural imagery of male warriors and female non-combatants (see Elshtain 1987). The gendered division between male and female subjects expanded in the realm of international politics and reinforced narratives of masculine dominance and feminine submission (Tickner 1992: 6-7). Women's powerless position in discourses on violence and conflict not only resembles that of a child but they are often actively connected to children in a discursive linkage that Cynthia Enloe named "womenandchildren" (1990).

Feminist scholars have traced how not only violence but also the concept of protection is linked to the idea of male dominance, of men and fathers in society and political leaders in global politics (Young 2003: 3-6). This gendered narrative is reinforced through a counter-narrative: "Central to the logic of masculinist protection is the subordinate relation of those in the protected position" (Young 2003: 4). Here again, the differentiation is drawn along gendered lines as the masculinised paternal protector is contrasted with the female subject that is framed to be 'in-need-of-protection', in the language of humanitarian discourses for instance (see Haeri/Puechguirbal 2010).

The assumption of the female need for protection arises from and reproduces the idea that women are vulnerable, non-combatant and passive subjects. Both gendered narratives in this foreign policy discourse justify a fixed hierarchy between masculinity and femininity where the dominant man has power and agency over the docile woman.

These essentialist narratives and dichotomies have established themselves as gendered logics, (Shepherd 2010: 5) through which a dominant foreign policy discourse frames global politics and its subjects.

Importantly, the feminist critique of such gender narratives is not trying to devalue the existing vulnerabilities that women face globally. Neither is it arguing against naming those troubling realities in discourses like foreign policy. Rather, it considers how rigid understandings of women as peaceful victims and men as aggressive perpetrators do not merely reflect the complex realities of national and international conflicts (see Moser/Clark 2005). Feminist IR theory emphasises that one should think beyond these existing, stereotypical logics and gendered binaries: “we must also be able to account for the presence of male victims and female agents” (Alison 2007 cited in Aggestam et al. 2019: 29). Further, poststructural feminist IR critiques and deconstructs the gendered narratives of foreign policy to expose the produced knowledge that underlies these dominant discourses: “both agency and victimhood, as aspects of subject positioning, are ascribed through practices of power which are inevitably gendered” (Shepherd 2012: 11). If the knowledge and gendered logics of foreign policy remain unquestioned, the gendered dichotomies of dominant foreign policy discourses can stay intact: “To ignore these hierarchical constructions and their relevance to power is therefore to risk perpetuating these relationships of domination and subordination” (Tickner 1992: 9). This risk of perpetuating gendered narratives is an important element of the feminist debate on women’s rights and feminism in foreign policy, as shown in the initial debate about the UNSCR 1325 and its portrayal of women as peaceful and vulnerable (see Cohn et al. 2004; Shepherd 2008).

However, as gendered logics are constructed and performative, the gendered power imbalances of discourses are never fixed but transformative through those very practices: “States [and foreign policy] can have both empowering effects, such as an increased visibility and recognition of women’s work, as well as disempowering effects, such as an increased disciplining of the subjects” (Kantola 2007: 280). Exactly because power and knowledge are productive, all power relations and meanings that are represented through discourse are potentially subject to change. The logics and boundaries that discourse construct for gender, subjects and agency can be overcome through a re-construction of language and meaning. Following this poststructuralist

argument, Butler states that “[t]he power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression” (Butler 1990: 116).

This section introduced the poststructural feminist lens of this research through which gender plays a constitutive role in the representation of subjects in foreign policy discourses. By engaging with critical feminist IR research, it was shown how foreign policy discourses continuously reproduce gendered dichotomies and hierarchies between masculinity and femininity. What emerges is a dominant discourse where women are portrayed as peaceful and vulnerable subjects whose agency is subordinated to violent and protecting masculinity. As these gendered boundaries are constructed performances and logic, poststructural feminist IR imagines a way beyond this conventional representation of women through discourses and language itself.

IV. Method & Case Selection

Based on the poststructuralist feminist framework, this research will follow a postpositivist approach to deconstructing foreign policy. A qualitative discourse analysis will uncover how women are portrayed in the German FFP guidelines. Through the methodical framework of the *Discursive Practices Approach,* (Doty 1993) one can trace how textual mechanisms ascribe specific identities, presumptions and positions to subjects. An inductive discourse analysis enables an in-depth understanding of gendered subjectification in discourse and contributes to the poststructural feminist scrutiny of gendered narratives in foreign policy. The German case offers great potential to put a nascent feminist foreign policy under scrutiny.

1. The Discursive Practices Approach

The specific means and dynamics, by which discourse creates knowledgeable reality, and meaning Doty describes as ‘discursive practices’ that are unfixed and “scattered throughout various locales” (1993: 302). This opens endless possible locations where to discover and deconstruct discursive power, i.e., not only in texts but in photography, music, spoken language or else. Nonetheless, Doty turns towards textual mechanisms, traceable elements of written discursive practices that form a “grid of intelligibility”

(1993: 306). She identifies three elements of textual discourse that produce identities, and preexisting knowledge about the subject and its agency. Taken together, these textual elements constitute the *Discursive Practices Approach* (Doty 1993).

The most superficial mechanism of textual discourse to constitute and position subjects is through linguistic description, “by attaching various labels to subjects through predication” (Doty 1993: 306). Specifically, predicates, adjectives, and adverbs are identified as the central mechanisms by which values, qualities and capabilities are given to subjects (1993: 306). For this analysis, *predication* will be expanded by nouns as they can have describing and constitutive effects on the identity of a subject similar to those of predicates. These textual elements do not only ascribe meaning to subjectivity but to its agency as well: “Attributes attached to subjects are important […] for telling us what subjects *can do*” (Doty 1993: 306; emphasis added). Predication is the most surface-level mechanism through which textual discourse represents and constitutes subjectivity and agency.

A subject is not only defined through its direct descriptions but also through underlying assumptions which influence the formation of discourse *a priori*: “When one uses language, one is implying something about the existence of subjects, objects, and their relation to one another” (Doty 1993: 306). Poststructuralism deems that discourses are inherently based on pregiven and fixed knowledge, which poststructuralists refer to as truths: “conceptions of truth and knowledge serve as a kind of template for the formation of subjects” (Digeser 1992: 987). Doty refers to *presuppositions* as the textual elements in discursive practices where this background knowledge of subjects is reproduced, where discourse “constructs a particular kind of world in which certain things are recognised as true” (Doty 1993: 306). The reproduced “truths” in presuppositions have a determining yet more unintelligible effect on the way subjects and agency are framed through discursive practices. Discovering and analysing these presuppositions requires a more contextual and interpretative approach than exploring the predications of a subject in textual discourse.

For the third element of the Discursive Practices Approach Doty moves to a relational context. In the representative language of discourse, subjects are also defined by their relations to others: “Texts also work to create a “reality” by linking particular subjects and objects to one another” (Doty 1993: 306). Doty phrases this process as *subject positioning* which formulates itself through relations of opposition, similarity, or complementarity between subjects (1993: 306). From these relations, powerful dichotomies can arise that emphasise what positions these subjects assumes “by assigning them varying degrees of agency” (Doty 1993: 308). This can be understood as the textual practice through which subjects are fixed as positions in discourse. Following this logic and to expand the conception of positioning a subject, this research will further analyse how the subject is in relation to the discourse itself and, more explicitly how the foreign policy itself relates to its subject.

Although these textual mechanisms have individual effects, Doty stresses that “all three work together and simultaneously” (1993: 307). The subject positioning can be understood as a cumulative narrative, built on both predication and presupposition, that ultimately designates the capabilities and limitations of subjective agency within and beyond discourse. Further, Doty emphasises how the Discursive Practice Approach can help to uncover intertextual similarities to other texts and discourses and even more so, place a text within a broader discourse: “We can think of texts that illustrate the same kind of logic as constituting a controlling or dominant discourse” (Doty 1993: 308).

This post-positivist approach to foreign policy analysis can interpret what knowledge a discourse produces and how its language practices arrange certain subjectivities. The Discursive Practices Approach can deconstruct in-depth how subjects are imagined and framed through the language of discourse. This poststructuralist method to textual analysis can also develop links to the logics of a broader dominant discourse.

2. The Nascent Feminist Foreign Policy of Germany

This research will follow an inductive and qualitative approach to analysing foreign policy discourse. The empirical material is limited to a single case of FFP to enable an in-depth analysis of how subjects, agency and gender are produced and constituted in

foreign policy. This analysis does not focus on the practical implementations of FFP because the postpositivist and poststructural framework of this research deems the presumptions and narratives in language as fundamental for the analysis of foreign policy. Therefore, this research limits itself to the detailed scrutiny of official policy guidelines.

While older FFPs of Canada, Sweden, or Mexico, for instance, have been subjected to some analyses and case comparisons, the German case has not been studied in detail yet. It is because the German FFP has only recently been implemented, that an examination of its design and inherent logics is particularly relevant. Deconstructing which gendered narratives are constituted *by design* can provide an important groundwork for the conflicts and potentials of this nascent FFP case.

As one of the conceptual inspirations for the German guidelines, the United Nations WPS agenda is named the "foundation of feminist foreign policy in the realms of peace and security"(Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 21). Because the feminist discussion of gendered narratives in the UNSCR 1325 is the starting point of this research, this connection bears great potential. By uncovering the portrayal of women and their agency in this related context, I can draw further conclusions about how the gendered narratives of an international feminist discourse are reproduced or dismissed in a national FFP.

The German FFP's main target is to advocate and promote women's rights, the equitable participation of women in socio-political, economic and public institutions and equal access for women to resources and the labour market (2023a: 11-12). To contextualise, the German FFP guidelines address not only women: "(f)eminist foreign policy is not foreign policy for women, but for all members of society. […] (T)herefore it stands up for everyone who is pushed to societies' margins because of their gender identity, origin, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation or for other reasons." (2023a: 3). categories constitute what the FFP understands as 'marginalised groups' which form the central group that the guidelines address besides women. The FFP also aims to follow an "intersectional approach" (9) which is here interpreted to account for the personal categories gender, identity, origin, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation (2023a: 10).

The policy document consists of an introduction by Foreign Minister Baerbock (1-5), a summary of the FFP goals and guidelines (8-18), the six guidelines for foreign policy activities (19-57), four guidelines for the foreign service itself (58-71), and further

information on FFP policy instruments and data sheets ((Federal Foreign Office 2023a)72-83). The analytical focus of this discourse analysis will lie on the introductory sections and the six guidelines for foreign policy activities (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 1-57) as this part display the logics and assumptions of the German FFP and specifically address the foreign women and their agency that the FFP is oriented towards. The second part of the German FFP (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 58-83) sets a different emphasis and is more concerned with the inner workings of the foreign office and the details for policy implementation. This deliberate limitation is supposed to sharpen my analysis and frame further discussions along poststructural feminist critiques.

V. Tracing Women and Agency in the FFP of Germany

The poststructural feminist IR framework of this research has displayed how foreign policy discourse produces and frames subjectivity, agency and gender. The feminist IR discussion of existing gendered dichotomies displayed how a dominant foreign policy discourse portrays women. The postpositivist *Discursive Practice Approach* by the poststructural scholar Doty (1993) enables this research to deconstruct textual mechanisms in the FFP of Germany that portray women and their agency.

1. The Narratives of Female Subjects

Who are the women that the German FFP addresses? To answer this question, the most surface-level step is to look at the predications, textual elements and wordings in the policy paper that describe and frame the category of women.
“As long as women are not safe, no one is safe” (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 1)[1]. This very first sentence of the introduction to the German policy paper by Annalena Baerbock, Minister of Foreign Affairs, tells a whole story about one of the framings of women in German FFP. In all foreign policy guidelines, there is a great deal of attention on crises, armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, human rights violations,

[1] In this chapter, singular words and phrases from the German FFP (Federal Foreign Office, 2023a,) will be cited solely with the according page numbers while full sentences or paragraphs will contain the full citation.

impacts of the climate crisis or economic processes. Put at the forefront of these international imbalances are female subjects. Their especially vulnerable position is firstly justified using striking adverbs. Women are portrayed as “particularly” (2, 24, 51), “especially” (27) or “more frequently” (46, 51) affected and endangered by these many international crises. What these adverbs highlight is not only the peculiarity but the inherence of these vulnerabilities to the female subject. Vulnerability during conflict is not framed as a potentially universal circumstance but as a given component of women’s subjectivity.

The vulnerable image of the female subject in the German FFP is further emphasised by passive predicates. Women are “impacted by poverty with particular severity” (50) or “affected” (24) by human rights violations, climate change and sexual or gender-based violence. In situations of conflict, these vulnerable women don’t act, they are being acted upon by their unsafe and risky environments. The passive verbs that frame vulnerable women highlight their limited agency. The produced passivity of the female subject lacks an “emphasis on change” (Shepherd 2011: 508), she is not imagined to independently overcome her hardships.

The use of striking adverbs and passive predicates thus portray the image of women as special risk factors in foreign policy and crisis. Interestingly, this vulnerable theme of predication is not maintained by aggregate adjectives or nouns connected to women. The word ‘victim’ for instance is only mentioned twice in the FFP but never explicitly gendered as female. The vulnerable *risk factor* image of women is rather based on the (ad-)verbial depictions of passivity than on nominal descriptions.

The vulnerable attributions to the female subject are however challenged by a series of role nominations that produce a contrasting image of women in the German FFP. In many instances, women are portrayed in positions of power: as “agents of change” (2), “lead negotiators” (21), “vital stakeholders” (46) or “climate activists” (49). In these active roles, they push societal progress forward, protest inequalities and strive towards peaceful democracy. Their actions are connected to morality, social intelligence, and progress - they are pictured as international superheroines:

> They negotiate with militias and create safe havens to protect their communities from attacks. They advocate for humanitarian corridors to safeguard the food supply – often long before relief organisations arrive (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 21).

These striking verbs of action intend to demonstrate the sense of power and agency that these women are ascribed to. This is further emphasised by valorising adjectives, as these women are doing “vital work” (21), being “brave” (1), “dedicated” (5) or “important” (46). Where women are ascribed an active role, they are foremost leader figures or role models in politics, economy, or society. They become active agents in a professionalised context, performing and excelling at their jobs, or volunteering and protesting for a greater cause. In a very opposite effect to the portrayal of the vulnerable female risk factor, the female change agent is highly valorised. The textual mechanisms here are foremost striking nouns and adjectives as well as active verbs that intend to express female agency. These valorising predications load such socio-political agency that the FFP guidelines ultimately express not an emphasis but an expectation of change towards these female change agents.

The two emerging roles that the language of the German FFP ascribes to women are very contrary. On the one side, there are the vulnerable and passive women who are particularly affected by global inequalities and who are deemed as risk factors during a crisis. On the other side, there are the valorised female agents who protest and negotiate peace or use their power positions for good. The predications of this second image are stronger and more prevalent throughout the text.

2. Presumed Knowledge about Women

What fundamentally connects the vulnerable and valorising portrayals of women in the German FFP are essentialist assumptions about women and gender.
A taken-for-granted assumption of the FFP text is the connection between the category “women” and a specific gender, i.e., gender essentialism. This basic assumption paves the way for further essentialising presumptions about women, more so for the image of the female agent than for the image of the vulnerable risk-factor women.
The most prevalent essentialist presupposition about women is that they are more peaceful and that their participation in negotiations inherently leads to “greater security” (9) and “increases the chances of a lasting peace” (21). Although the text claims that “feminist foreign policy is not synonymous with pacifism” (13), the assumption prevails that feminism and women’s participation lead to more peace. Additionally, the FFP guidelines assume that the female subject in positions of power

“nurtures human potential in society” (54). Implied here is another essentialist argument, that women have an inherent social or nurturing nature. This caring side of femininity is the defining characteristic of the female change agent in FFP, it renders her potential and identity. What the German FFP continuously highlights about the agent women is their great potential, and their presumed “use value” (Cohn et al. 2004: 136) for society and foreign policy. This presumes, or rather expects, that women who have gained agency make effective and positive use of their position.

One of the central goals of the FFP guidelines is increasing women’s representation and gender parity. This target entails another presupposition about agency: that female agency and women’s empowerment can be measured in percentage. In the introduction, Baerbock states:

> In 2023, it should be a matter of course for women to have an equal say in their own future. But unfortunately, this is far from being the rule. Even here in Germany. Only 35% of the members of the German Bundestag are women (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 3).

Firstly, this quote highlights the representative logic of the FFP that draws a causal link between women’s agency, the “equal say in their own future” (3), and the share of women in formal institutions. The fact that women are “under-represented in political, economic and social decision-making processes” (11) is seen as one of the three main target issues to achieve feminism in foreign policy. Greater participation of women, in politics, the economy and societal discourse, is a central evaluation standard for gender equality and the emergence of women’s agency.

This conviction is carried by the assumption that female representatives will naturally speak and sufficiently account for all women in society. Underlying this logic is feminist universalism, the idea that some women, in power positions, can speak for all women. This universalising presumption is ascribed with systemic potentials when Baerbock stresses “the fact that women as agents of change and in senior positions propel societies forward and strengthen democracy” (2). This conception of female representation supports the idealised portrayal of women as change agents who strive for societal prosperity, represent female needs and achieve peace: “Societies are more peaceful and stable when women participate fully and gender equality is promoted” (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 20).

The second, less intelligible presupposition of Baerbock's quote lies in the phrase "Even here in Germany" (3). This conveys the impression that it is somewhat surprising that Germany still has a way to go with women's emancipation domestically. Simultaneously, this firmly places the need for women's emancipation, for the emergence of female agency, in the foreign realm. More precisely in countries of the Global South, where the great majority of country-specific examples and approaches brought up in the FFP document are situated. The presupposition about the female subject is that women's struggles and lacking agency lie primarily in countries of the Global South.

Connected to this dynamic is the general assumption of the FFP that the German Foreign Ministry has a comprehensive idea of women's demands, especially concerning vulnerable female subjects. The guidelines clearly identify and name gender-specific "risks" (29) and "vulnerabilities" (30) of women that are planned to be accounted for. The needs of women during conflict are deemed to be grasped through the outsider perspective. Underlying this assumption is the approach to FFP that "fits our [German] values" (5), that is based on "firm principles and pragmatism" (13) and the self-proclaimed "feminist reflex" (14) that these guidelines are supposed to cultivate. What emerges is the presupposition that the experiences, vulnerabilities and demands of female subjects can be universalised, unified and, to some extent, known by Germany's foreign policy and its own feminist reflex. This shifts the multiple perspectives and experiences of women in situation of crises into a unified female subjectivity with a need for protection that is known and sufficiently addressed by the German FFP.

Further, the German FFP has a specific presumption about which inequalities women are subjected to. The text does acknowledge that women are affected by "structural discrimination" (30) and the FFP is "concerned with naming "entrenched power structures" (9). However, these power structures are only vaguely defined, they are not gendered or linked to terms like patriarchy for example. Similarly, the conception of both domestic and structural violence remains gender-neutral. While the victims or survivors of violence and power structures are explicitly identified and particularly often gendered as female, the possible culprits and broader underlying causes are non-gendered and thus unidentified.

Apart from these presuppositions where the German FFP assumes to sufficiently know about women's perspectives, and rightfully account for their agency, there is something else shining through. A sense of self-reflectivity, an openness to the other perspective. The Foreign Ministry sees the guidelines as a "work in progress" (20) and claims to be "open to learn from others" (3). The FFP thus presumes that there is still knowledge to be gained about feminist approaches and foreign policy that accounts for women's needs and rights. This ability to reflect opens room for conversations and exchanges beyond the firm principles and standpoints of the German FFP. This could constitute a potential loosening of discursive hierarchies between the sender and the recipient of FFP. How or if the addressed female subjects and their perspectives are entailed in this reflective progress remains ambiguous and will be discussed in the following chapters.

3. The Positioning of Female Subjects

> "Because only where women and marginalised groups are safe, is everyone safe" (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 5).

This is the last sentence of Foreign Minister Baerbock's introduction to the FFP agenda. It exemplifies how the addressed women are not only portrayed by ascribing certain characteristics and presumed assumptions to them but also how the German discourse relates them to other subjects. Through these dynamics, the female subject is ultimately placed in specific positions of power and agency within the foreign policy discourse. The two central images of female subjects that have been elaborated in the previous two sections, play a less prevalent role here.

The female subject is often put into relations of similarity with other subjects in the FFP discourse. As in the introductory quote to this section, the category women is listed with other subjects: "women and girls" (2, 24, 29, 46); "women and marginalised groups" (20, 30, 47); "women, children, older people and civilians" (27). Although the listing of multiple subjects could be understood as the drawing of lines between them, the opposite is the case. Where women are listed along other subjects, they are assimilated and linked in a common lack or goal. This becomes most apparent where women are connected to marginalised groups and to girls.

Firstly, women and marginalised groups are assumed to share “disadvantages” (30), they both bear attacks on their rights (38), they are jointly affected by “specific impacts” (46) and have “particular needs” (29). They are equated through their similar struggles and insecurities during conflict. By listing women along these other subjects, the vulnerability of the female subject, as a *risk factor* during conflict, is thus stressed. At the same time, this shifts the particularity of vulnerability from the female subject to include other subjects. Women are not the only subjects particularly affected by violence and crises; other marginalised groups share this vulnerable experience.
However, women are also linked with these marginalised subjects in their potential voices and agency. Women and marginalised groups are jointly addressed in their potential “participation” (21, 50) and the inclusion of their “perspectives” (16) in socio-political spaces. Their agency is thus assimilated; not framed as unitary but thought of as similarly lacking and through the German FFP collectively emerging.
This sense of similarity is even more striking in instances where female subjects are listed as ‘women and girls’. The discursive linking of women and girls in the FFP guidelines is the strongest as it creates a shared identity of vulnerability and voice along a gendered line. Firstly, they are assimilated through common vulnerabilities, as together they are particularly affected by gender-based crimes (24) and violence during conflict (28), female genital mutilation (42), and sexual violence and exploitation (46). In the FFP discourse, their vulnerability and experiences in these situations are equated as much as their highlighted “protection in armed conflicts” (20). Secondly, women and girls are assimilated in their voice, their common “needs” (29, 48), their lacking “rights” (11, 41) but also their potential “participation […] in peace processes” (20). Women and girls are thus emerging as a discursive unit, as *womenandgirls* (see Enloe 1990), whose vulnerabilities, needs and agency are tightly linked. In these instances, the female subject is infantilised, her vulnerable and voiceless positioning reflects those of a child as much as her needs and rights.

Comparisons or oppositions only play a minor role in the FFP, especially gendered dichotomies are not reproduced. More generally, women are rarely put into relation with men. The text does state that “men and women are still not equal worldwide” (2) and that women have higher risks during climate crisis and earn lower wages “than men” (48, 50). However, the FFP does acknowledge a shared vulnerability, that those affected by sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflicts

“also include men and boys” (24). Thus, the female subject is not actively defined by a male counterpart or gendered dichotomies. More so, men are positioned alongside women.

Lastly, what needs to be considered to trace the subject positionings of women in the German FFP is the relationship between the addressees and the sender of the discourse, between the female subjects and the German Federal Foreign Office.
The Federal Office, intelligible in the text as the subject “We”, positions itself in an ambiguous way towards the female subject.
On the one side, there is a paternalistic dynamic in the German FFP towards condemning and improving the vulnerable positions of women globally: When “we want to help prevent disadvantages for women” (30), when “(w)e actively address areas where we see that the rights of women […] are not consistently implemented” (38), or when “(w)e will dedicate particular space to women’s and girl’s needs for protection” (48). In these instances, the Foreign Office positions itself as the acting subject and speaks for the women. The emphasis to change and improve women’s livelihood globally is set on the domestic “We”. Through this clear line of responsibility, the agency of the affected female subjects is not taken into consideration. In this logic, the position of the female subject is lowered in comparison to the knowing and acting “We”, the foreign policy maker.
On the other side, the FFP emphasises the women’s perspective and involvement in some of the planned foreign policy making: “We integrate the perspectives of women and marginalised groups into our worldwide work for peace and security” (16); “We systematically include women and marginalised people in crisis prevention, stabilisation and peacebuilding measures” (29). The underlying logic of these instances is to listen to rather than speak for the addressed women. Their knowledge and experience are valued, and they are encouraged to perform agency and contribute to change: “Women are vital stakeholders in the fight against the climate crisis […]. This is why we support them” (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 46).
In these instances, the FFP actively positions itself next to the female subject, thereby loosening the discursive hierarchy between the makers and receivers of foreign policy. This equalizing dynamic is supported by a general sense of self-reflexivity present in the FFP that

“is rooted in critical self-reflection about our own history, faces up to historical responsibility, including for our colonial past, and is open to learning from others” (3). This attitude opens the possibility for women’s own perspectives, concerns, and agency to be heard, listened to, and thus raised within and through feminist foreign policy. Displaying the potential of this more reflective attitude are few yet essential sections in the German FFP which will be discussed in the final chapter of this analysis.

4. The Individual Woman – A Counter-Narrative?

> “These individuals, their stories, show what feminist foreign policy is about”
> (Federal Foreign Office 2023a: 2).

This is what Baerbock states in her introduction to the FFP after recalling personal stories of Ukrainian and Iranian women whom she met on official trips as Foreign Minister. The gendered narratives of the German FFP that have been displayed in the previous three chapters paint a different picture of what German FFP is based on: essentialised and generalised portraits of women. A sense of individuality is lacking. However, aside from the general guidelines and approaches, six practice examples go into detail about projects and activists supported by the Federal Foreign Office, five of which centre on women (23, 32, 35, 53, 57).

In these detached sections, individual women are introduced, visually depicted, and quoted. In stark contrast to the official FFP guidelines and its representative images of women, these female individuals are able to narrate and frame their own stories. These women speak about their work as counsellors (23, 32), as journalists (35,57) or their relationship as mother and daughter (53).

What combines, or generalises, these sections is the fact that all portrayed women live in countries from the Global South. Otherwise, these women tell very individual and personal stories about their social work, about personal experiences with women’s vulnerabilities and how they are shaping their local communities. The universal category of *women* is here localised and reframed as the individual *woman*. They are shown as subjects that actively work towards societal change and perform agency. The discursive practices and textual mechanisms of the FFP guidelines are receding, the position of the German FFP gives way to the women’s accounts. The female subjects are not spoken about but actively listened to.

The photos accompanying these sections are close-up portraits of the women or depict them at their work, which further contextualises their agency. These photo portraits also emphasise the personalised character of these sections. These five sections showcase how the German FFP not only assumes their position as relevant but also attempts to engage with individual female perspectives. A Yemeni counsellor states: “We are grateful to our German friends for making the voices of Yemeni women heard” (23).

Although the female subjects are positioned in the centre of these sections, the German Foreign Office still play a role as a supporter, or enabler, of women’s agency. That this enabling role of FFP is still presented in most of these sections does convey a performative notion. Nevertheless, these texts give multiple women a platform to speak, to express their individual agency. These portraits put the abstract images of female subjects in the FFP guidelines into concrete contexts and individual realities. They are the most detailed and least representative portrayals of female subjects in this foreign policy discourse.

VI. Discussion – Confined and Emergent Agency

The portrayal of women in the German FFP discourse unfolds in a two-fold manner. Firstly, and most prevalently, there are the “women”, the discursively produced and narrated subjects, that are central to the ways that the German FFP explains the crises and feminist solutions to foreign policy. These discursively produced women are imagined as vulnerable risk factors or valorised socio-political agents. They are assumed to have an essentialist and generalisable character and perspective that resembles that of other marginalised groups, especially girls.

These two narratives of women show great similarities to the ways that dominant foreign policy discourses imagine women: as peaceful and vulnerable subjects.

The poststructural feminist perspective of this research sees a fundamental problem in those essentialist assumptions, the underlying presuppositions, about women in the German FFP. Worthy of critique are however not merely the essentialist gender assumptions of the German FFP. Instead, the consequences and further logic of these essentialist assumptions might hinder the emergence of female agency that the German FFP is trying to achieve.

The common presumptions of the vulnerable and the valorised female subject are that women have a more peaceful, caring, and somewhat more vulnerable nature, or essence. The vulnerable *risk factor* image of women in the German FFP relies on a simplified and stereotypical assumption of female victimhood and passivity (Moser/Clark 2001: 3-5). This gender essentialism presents the vulnerability of women as fixed and therefore positions the female subjects of violence in a rigid position of passivity. The 'risk-factor' women are framed to inevitably rely on protection, help and intervention either from the valorised female agents or through feminist foreign policy. What is ruled out in this essentialist narrative is the possibility that these women can act, overcome, or transform their vulnerabilities. The emergence of agency of the risk factor women is unimaginable. Because the German FFP reproduces the essentialist belief that women are inherently more vulnerable, they are insisting that those vulnerable women inherently lack agency. Passivity and an inability to change are thus established as fixed and gendered components of the female subject.

The critique of gender essentialism further applies to the valorising image of *female agents*. The presuppositions of this second narrative see women as inherently more peaceful and nurturing from which their socio-political potential and agency are derived. The main critique here is again not concerning the gender essentialist assumptions themselves. Rather, the linking of these essentialist characteristics to the emergence of female agency leads to a greater problem:

> "If women(s') […] special contribution arises from their womanly instincts, it follows that their political agency will be limited to what is made possible by that representation and restricted to 'feminised' tasks" (Otto 2006 cited in Charlesworth 2008: 350).

Following this argument, the fact that the activities of the female agents are consistently discursively linked to their peaceful, nurturing, or social nature suggests that the women's agency is bound to a prescribed femininity. The female agents are ascribed agency only under the condition that they fulfil the gendered logics of the German FFP. That women as agents are more peaceful, caring and nurturing means conversely that women who are violent, selfish, or neglecting are not ascribed this sense of agency. From a poststructural feminist perspective, the essentialist presuppositions about

women in the German FFP discourse bear the danger of reconstituting gendered boundaries which limit the emergence of female agency.

Women are however not positioned against or below male subjects or dominance but rather alongside men. Rather than constructing the narrative of the vulnerable and peaceful women along the patriarchal logics of male dominance and female subversion, as in the case of liberal foreign policy, the narratives about women in the German FFP are reconfigured along essentialised and universalised principles. The gendered hierarchies and dichotomies between men and women of the dominant liberal foreign policy discourse are thereby not reproduced. This could be interpreted as an emergence of agency and emancipation of female subjectivity beyond the discursive boundaries of liberal foreign policy discourse. However, as the prior discussion elaborated, the insistence on the gender essentialist image of the peaceful or vulnerable woman reconfigures discursive boundaries that restrain the female subject.

These essentialist boundaries are not produced by the masculinist logic of the dominant foreign policy discourse but rather by a feminised logic. This feminised logic of the vulnerable and peaceful woman is very similar to the portrayal of women in the UNSCR 1325 and its following Resolutions concerning women (see Shepherd 2008; 2011). This international feminist discourse is thus emerging as the dominant foreign policy discourse that the German FFP is situated in. While the images of vulnerable/peaceful women are formulated without the gendered dichotomies and patriarchal logics they are reproducing essentialist presumptions on women. The gendered assumptions of this international feminist discourse still undermine the full emergence of female agency.

However, there is a second way that the German FFP portrays female subjects: as individual women with agency. At times, the FFP guidelines claim to actively listen to and consider women's subjective perspectives. This willingness to listen is displayed in five portraits that explicitly focus on the stories of women. These sections go against the expected representations of gendered subjects through discourse and make room for the perspectives and voices of individual identities. In these sections, the discursive practices that constitute how women are made sense of elsewhere in the FFP are receding; overshadowed by individual accounts of female agency. Importantly, the German FFP still has a position of power in these texts as the implicit enabler of these

voices. This dynamic gives these personal sections a performative model character through which the FFP can present itself.
This however might be inevitable due to the representational nature of discourse. Depicting an instance, here showing women's stories, might inherently lead to the performing of a practice, i.e. displaying the benefits of German FFP (Shepherd 2008: 24).
Nonetheless, these sections introduce a way of portraying female subjects that attempts to overcome conventional representations in discourses and to reimagine who is talking and who is listening in foreign policy. This sense of reflectivity has the potential to transform the rigid imbalance between the makers and the recipients of foreign policy making. In these few pages, the German FFP attempts to retell its gendered narratives and expand the boundaries of its discourse. Perhaps this is where the transformative potential of feminist foreign policy lies.

VII. Conclusion

The ambiguity between biding and breaking the gendered boundaries of foreign policy, between the submission and emergence of female subjects, occurs in feminist foreign policy discourse. By analysing the textual mechanisms that frame women and their agency, this research uncovered how the German FFP makes sense of female subjects in two ambiguous ways. Firstly, women are portrayed as vulnerable and peaceful subjects. From a poststructural feminist lens, the essentialist logic of peaceful/vulnerable women hinders the full emergence of female agency and reproduces the boundaries set by an international feminist discourse constituted by the United Nations' WPS agendas (see Shepherd 2011). Secondly, the German FFP embraces some individual women's perspectives who were able to narrate their own stories and independently represent their agency. This radically different, self-reflective, portrayal of women and female agency has the potential to redraw and transform the gendered boundaries of foreign policy discourse.
The analytical results and further critical inferences of this research are bound to some limitations. As the empirical material of this research was limited to a single FFP policy paper, the generalisability of my results is restricted. This analysis cannot account for the implementations of FFP.

Further research could examine if or how gendered narratives of women and agency are reproduced in the global practices of the German FFP. The restriction of my empirical material on the first part of the FFP and its six guidelines on foreign policy activities encloses my analytical results. An inquiry that could not be answered is thus, if the other FFP guidelines on the Foreign Office contradict or contribute to the claims of this research.

The narrow analytical focus on gender consequently limits the potential inferences of my research. By including other categories like race or sex in the discourse analysis, the production of subjects in the FFP could be traced in a more multi-layered and expansive way. Especially a postcolonial or intersectional feminist approach could deconstruct elements and dynamics of the German FFP that have not been analysed yet. More extensive post-positivist research but also positivist contributions are necessary to examine the inner workings, policy approaches and implementations of the German FFP. As a single-case qualitative analysis, this research could not show if these portrayals of women and agency are represented in other national FFPs. Comparative research projects could trace how the logic and narratives of the German case relate to other, more established, FFPs. Further research will be necessary to capture how national and international feminist foreign policies reconstitute dominant discourses and how this little word *feminist* may continue to challenge international relations.

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