Feminist Foreign Policy as Ethical Foreign Policy? A Care Ethics Perspective

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Paper prepared for the 2017 conference of the
Canadian Political Science Association
Workshop on 'Care Ethics and the Political'
Toronto, Ontario
June 1, 2017

DRAFT ONLY: NOT FOR CITATION

Introduction

In 2015, Sweden became the first state ever to publicly adopt a feminist foreign policy, with a stated ambition to become the "strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls." In their engaging, timely article in the journal *Ethics and International Affairs*, Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman-Rosamond argue that inherent in the idea of a feminist foreign policy is a normative reorientation that is guided by an ethically-informed framework based on broad cosmopolitan norms of global justice and peace (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016: 323). The authors draw upon the 'solidarist' branch of the English School of international theory, which takes a 'cosmopolitanism justice' approach to international ethics. This paper will offer a critique of this account of ethics as a basis for a feminist foreign policy, arguing that this 'cosmopolitan-justice' approach would serve only to reproduce existing and dominant relations of power, including gender-power relations and Western-liberal modes of domination. By contrast, a critical feminist ethic of care offers a potentially radical and transformative account of ethics as a normative basis for foreign policy -- one that reveals and troubles the binary gender norms that constitute 'the international', and which addresses moral dilemmas from a position of situated, context-dependent, relational agency. I argue that a feminist foreign policy can be a critical, ethical alternative to *realpolitik* (including 'hyper-masculine nationalism'), but not if it defines itself as a return to the neo-liberal, interventionist governmentalities of so-called 'liberal internationalism'.

Part one of this paper will set out Sweden's feminist foreign policy – its leadership, its key principles, and the reaction it has garnered on the world stage and in the media. It will also address the discursive positioning of 'feminist' public and foreign policy as 'ethical', and the implications of this for both feminism and ethics. The second part of the paper will address the notion of 'ethical foreign policy'. Despite its widespread dismissal by foreign policy realists as 'idealistic', 'ethical foreign policy' has been an enduring idea in both academic literature and policy discourse for decades. I argue that the dominant understandings of 'ethical foreign policy' – those employed by Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond in their article -- reproduce the binary and adversarial logics of 'realism' vs. 'idealism', 'universal' vs. 'particular', 'inside' vs. 'outside' (Walker, 1992). In equating 'the ethical' with the cosmopolitan 'outside', so-called 'ethical foreign policy' reifies and reproduces a world order that is upheld through a constellation of power relations, where global capitalism intertwines with patriarchy, racism and neo-colonialism. I suggest that it is this reading of 'the ethical' as 'the universal' that informs the

analysis of Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, and which, furthermore, render it incapable of engaging in feminist critique. What makes feminist ethics 'ethical' is not its positioning vis-à-vis the meta-ethical debate on 'universalism-particularism', but its ability to reveal the harms that are effected through constitutive gender binaries. Positioning the ethics of universal justice as 'feminine' or even 'feminist' is unsustainable, since 'justice' has always, already been constituted as a space of masculinity. As Charlotte Hooper has argued, masculinity is an incredibly resilient concept in terms of how it legitimizes the behavior of both male and female actors. Masculinity, she argues, appears to have 'no stable ingredients and therefore its power depends entirely on certain qualities constantly being associated with men' (Hooper 2001: 230). Thus, there is a need to approach ethics in a way that does not rely upon gendered binaries, but instead has the resources to challenge them.

Part three sets out a feminist ethic of care as the basis for an ethical feminist foreign policy. This approach is committed to revealing the harms caused by absolutist, dualistic categories of all kinds, and emphasizes *relational*, *contextual* and *revisable* moral judgement. A feminist ethic of care works with rather than against the multiplicity of moral voices in the world – including the multiplicity of *women's* moral voices -- emphasizing careful attention and attentive listening to the needs and perspectives of others. These 'others' are not fundamentally 'apart' from us – together, we are embodied and vulnerable and fundamentally dependent on one another. The view that these conditions are simply the pathologies of 'some' – the weak, the not-fully-mature, the 'feminine' – is a function of a dominant form of Western patriarchy which divides the self, and separates selves from others.

On this view, what makes feminist foreign policy 'ethical' is not its commitment to acting decisively and with epistemological certainty on already-agreed-upon rational principles of human rights and universal justice; rather, ethical foreign policy is about seeing global actors as constituted and sustained through relationships in specific times and places, and tracing how power, in its various forms, makes those relationships – in various, ever-changing contexts -- oppressive or enabling.

What is Feminist Foreign Policy?

When the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Green Party formed a coalition government after the 2014 elections, they called themselves the world's first feminist government and have since then intensified Sweden's domestic gender mainstreaming. In 2015, Sweden became the first nation-state ever to adopt, publicly and explicitly, a feminist foreign policy. According to Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, Sweden's feminist foreign policy is about systematically and holistically implementing policies that contribute to gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights of all women and girls (Wallström 2016). This is achieved through a focus on the so-called three 'Rs' – rights, representation and resources (Government of Sweden, 2016: 3).

The six focus areas for 2016 were:

1. To strengthen women and girls' human rights in humanitarian situations
2. To fight and prevent gender-based and sexual violence against women and girls in

conflict and post conflict situations
3. To promote women's participation as actors in peace processes and peace promoting measures
4. To promote women and girls' participation in the work for economic, social and environmental sustainable development
5. To strengthen women and girls' economic independence and their access to economic resources, including though productive work under decent living conditions
6. To strengthen sexual and reproductive rights for girls and young people (Wallström, 2016)

Much attention has been on the advancement of the 'women, peace and security agenda' – focusing specifically on the National Action Plans (or 'NAPs') related to Security Council Resolution 1325. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution (S/RES/1325) on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.

But feminist foreign policy goes beyond the WPS agenda. Sweden is also committed to systematic gender mainstreaming throughout their foreign policy agenda, including international development. In an official 2016 document, the Government of Sweden wrote that:

> Equality between women and men is a fundamental aim of Swedish foreign policy. Ensuring that women and girls can enjoy their fundamental human rights is both an obligation within the framework of our international commitments, and a prerequisite for reaching Sweden's broader foreign policy goals on peace, and security and sustainable development (Government of Sweden, 2016).

To that end, Sweden has, for instance, started a network which aims to help more women become international mediators, has contributed to research on norms for masculinity in the Democratic Republic of Congo and has also contributed to progress in negotiations on gender equality within the UN and the EU.

Notably, Sweden has emphasized the view that feminist foreign policy, and the WPS agenda in particular, are not only about women or 'women's issues'. Rather, the aim is to demonstrate that 'what is good for women, is good for all of us'. This holds for both economic/trade and development policies, as well as those related to peace and security. Indeed, the Swedish feminist foreign policy agenda is promoted through reference to evidence that there is a clear connection between the security of women and the security of states.

In some important respects, this move has been a success for Sweden on the world stage. The European Council on Foreign Relations rated Sweden, along with the UK, as having the second largest influence on shaping European Union foreign policy in 2015, with only Germany listed as more influential (Standish 2016). Sweden's feminist foreign policy has attracted attention and

support from many corners. Indeed, a number of countries – including the other Nordic countries and certain EU countries, such as the Netherlands -- cite gender equality as a strategic focus area for foreign policy, and have well-developed National Action Plans (NAPs) related to women, peace and security. The adoption of an explicitly feminist foreign policy is hailed by some as a bold, progressive move which highlights the importance of integrating gender into all aspects of foreign policy – from security to trade to international development.

While the emphasis in this approach to foreign policy is the inclusion and equality of women, the notion of a feminist foreign policy is discursively constructed as 'ethical'. As Wallström noted in a recent speech at the United States Institute of Peace, a feminist foreign policy seeks the same goals as any visionary foreign policy: peace, justice, human rights and human development. It simply acknowledges that we won't get there without adjusting existing policies, down to their nuts and bolts, to correct the particular (and often invisible) discrimination, exclusion and violence still inflicted on the female half of us (Wallström 2015). Thus, women and 'the feminine' are positioned as the key to the realization of ethical or 'visionary' foreign policy goals -- peace, justice, human rights and human development.

The discursive and normative positioning of feminist foreign policy as 'ethical' foreign policy is not a difficult move to make. Indeed, realpolitik and 'realist' foreign policy – state-centric and self-interested – are in large part constituted through their masculine gendering. Because of the pervasiveness of gender binaries in Western thought, any association of foreign policy with 'morality' or 'ethics' is necessarily – whether or not it is explicitly labelled 'feminist' – gendered feminine. Paradoxically, even ostensibly 'ethical' foreign policy – that elevates the importance of human rights over, for example trade, or which subordinates direct material gains to the need to 'save' strangers caught in humanitarian emergencies – is regularly constructed discursively through a protective, paternal masculinity. I posit a feminist ethic of care not as the antinomous Other to an ethic of justice; rather, it is a relational ethic that challenges socially-conditioned, gendered ways of being, thinking and speaking about our moral responsibilities to others. It offers the voice of care not as a 'feminine' alternative to masculine justice ethics, but as a different voice among many. This voice does not articulate a single way of being with and caring for others; the only things it 'knows for sure' are that it is always relational, always embedded in context, and that the moral knowledge it produces is always revisable, in the light of changing relations and contexts. As Susan Hekman argues, 'the relational self produces knowledge that is connected … it is plural rather than singular. Gilligan hears moral voices speaking from the lives of connected, situated selves, not the single truth of disembodied moral principles' (Hekman 1995: 30).

It is of note that, at a panel discussion following Margot Wallström's speech to the United States Institute of Peace, former deputy administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Donald Steinberg, said that he has found that men's eyes "glazed over" when he cited human rights or morality as reasons for preserving women's rights amid international conflicts (Rupert 2015). He explains that he has learned to explain to men 'in authority' that their peacekeeping missions were doomed to fail unless women amid the conflict were involved in its resolution. As he explains:

> "To me, the real arguments are that societies that protect women, that involve women in

> these processes, that focus on girls' education, are more stable," he said. "These are countries that do not traffic in drugs and people and weapons. They don't send refugees across borders or across oceans. They don't harbor terrorists or pirates. They don't transmit pandemic diseases. And, perhaps most importantly in this town, they don't require American military force or troops on the ground."

It appears that there is a need to 'masculinize' feminist foreign policy in order to make it more palatable to men who 'glaze over' at mention of women's rights and only 'hear' talk of national security. But even this account of a man who describes himself as an 'advocate' in this area is constructed in gender binary terms; 'good' societies 'protect' women, and thus will not require costly military intervention and will keep open opportunities for trade and investment.

The implication here, for Sweden and its supporters, is that, as an 'ethical' government, Sweden must be required to pass judgement on the unethical or barbaric acts of other states -- to condemn, criticize or rebuke any policy or regime that appears to contradict their own commitment to 'justice and human rights'. This emerged clearly in the recent 'Saudi affair'. On February 11th, Foreign Minister Wallström, speaking before the Swedish parliament, criticized Saudi Arabia's human rights record; specifically, she criticized the public flogging of the blogger Raif Badawi, and later described it as "medieval." Wallström, whose government recognized the State of Palestine in 2014, had been asked to deliver a speech at an Arab League summit in Cairo in late March, but Saudi Arabia intervened, and Wallström was disinvited. On March 9th, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador to Sweden, saying that Wallström had "unacceptably interfered" in the country's internal affairs. The United Arab Emirates followed suit a week later. Wallström was also condemned by the Gulf Cooperation Council (which consists of Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the U.A.E.), The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which includes fifty-seven countries, and the Arab League itself (Nordberg, 2015).

Complicating these matters is the fact that Sweden is one of Europe's largest per-capita arms exporters. The day after Wallström was supposed to have appeared in Cairo, on March 10th, the government announced its decision not to renew a bilateral arms agreement with Saudi Arabia. This has been described as Wallström's "feminist foreign policy" in practice; not surprisingly, the move did not sit well with some of Sweden's most powerful industrialists, who stood to lose significant income from a break in relations with Saudi Arabia (Nordberg, 2015). In an effort to reduce tensions and mitigate damage, one week later, a delegation of Swedish officials travelled to Riyadh, carrying letters from Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and King Carl XVI Gustaf, explaining that Wallström had not intended to criticize Islam and offering official regrets for any misunderstanding. The Saudi ambassador to Sweden is now reinstated. As Jenny Nordberg describes in *The New Yorker*, Wallström's political opponents came down hard on what they saw as a clumsy performance. Still, the Swedish foreign minister refused to back down, referring only to a misunderstanding, and stressing that no apology for her specific remarks had been, or would be, issued (Nordberg 2015).

While some might applaud Sweden for 'taking an ethical stand' on issues, the neglect of context and relational positioning, as well as the hubris of certainty and moral necessity, indicates some distance from what I would argue are the general methods and aims of feminist ethics. To assert the backwardness and morally-corrupt nature of Saudi Arabia is to position Sweden as a

superior, enlightened culture which 'treats' its women properly. In addition, this kind of framing contributes to the erasure of Saudi women's agency. As Victoria Heath argues, it is crucial for Sweden to understand the complicated and nuanced situation of women within the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and recognize the indigenous women's rights movements and the 'renegotiations' of gendered power relations that currently exist. Indeed, Heath points out that women's rights movements in Saudi Arabia are framed by a number of contextual factors:

- Women's rights as indicated by Islamic religious texts,
- Gender segregation and spatial allowances,
- Notions of "female nature" and femininity,
- Saudi national identity and the Saudi state,
- Disentangling cultural tradition and the Islamic religion,
- Maintaining family as the "core" of the community, and
- The importance of promoting an "indigenous" movement (not Western). (Heath, 2015).

Blindness to this context, and to the agency and diversity of women within Saudi Arabia, reveals both racist logics and a tendency toward 'culture-blaming' that depoliticizes social problems, and diverts attention away from the ways in which practices are supported and sustained by the structure of the global economy. To imagine 'culture' as an isolated realm of values and practices, separate from other kinds of social relations, is inevitably to reproduce the dichotomies of 'us' and 'them', is blind to both historical and current relations, and ultimately will hinder our ability to create a foreign policy that helps to create the conditions for long-term transformations in gender relations. Ethical stances which pit 'barbaric' cultures against enlightened Western morality are thick with neo-colonial logics and racial hierarchies that perpetuate, rather than transform, global inequalities. Rather than pitting 'culture' against 'women's' human rights', a feminist ethic of care would situate practices and traditions in a broader, relational geopolitical and geo-economic context. As Alison Jaggar argues, topics on the agenda of 'intercultural dialogue' about global justice for women (and men) in 'non-Western countries' must be questions about the basic structure of the global political economy, as well as the economic policies of those Western governments that directly and indirectly affect poor women's lives (Jaggar 2004: 71).

Wallström's mistake was not the withdrawal from the arms agreement, but rather the framing of this move within a wider critique of the 'medieval' and 'barbaric' practices of non-Western, non-liberal societies, and the typing of this to a general appeal to 'ethics' and justice. As a result, her action, while progressive, is unlikely to be transformative in the direction of long-term feminist goals. As I will argue below, a more potentially transformative approach would have been to use the arms trade agreement to highlight a series of relationships, networking the global arms trade, transnational business interests, the permissive conditions for continuing warfare around the world, and the structural causes of women's oppression around the globe. Moreover, it could be highlighted that the (minimal) losses felt by Sweden's arms manufacturing industry contribute, in small measure, to the shrinking of an industry which diverts billions of dollars annually from other forms of spending – including spending on health and education for women and girls.

In the following section I will critique the universalist ethical position set out by Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamund; in the final part of the essay, I will elaborate further on the three key ideas

of a care ethics approach to feminist foreign policy: relationality; contextualism and revisability.

Ethical Foreign Policy?

In their essay, Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamund write that '(t)he declaration of a distinct feminist foreign policy signals a departure from traditional elite-oriented foreign policy practices and discourses toward a policy framework that is guided by normative and ethical principles' (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamund 2016:327). By positioning the feminine as ethical, the masculine is thus constituted as the realm of self-interest and realpolitik. Rather than challenging received dichotomies, this approach reifies them, and offers a reductive and fixed understanding of both 'the feminine' and 'the ethical' in global politics.

Perhaps the most surprising move in the essay is the authors' use of the 'solidarist branch of the English School' to conceptualize efforts to pursue an ethically-informed feminist foreign policy. (331). According to the authors, the relevant credentials of this approach are based on its provision of a 'progressive account of global relations and for normative considerations in global politics', because it 'takes account of states' endeavors to overcome the constraints of anarchy in a fashion conducive to both international order and justice' (331). Despite its status as an 'ethical' IR theory, the authors note that the English School is 'entirely void' of feminist insights about the gendered lives and stories of women in international society (332). Their aim, then, is to insert gender into this framework, so that it can then serve as an ethical foundation on which to build a feminist foreign policy.

The English School of International Relations Theory – while still having virtually no following in the U.S. – remains an important if somewhat peripheral approach in the U.K. and parts of Europe. Like most international theories, it offers a critique of realism; against neo-realism, ES argues that there is a society of states at the international level and that the relations among states – including 'ideational' relations of an historical and or legal nature – shapes conduct of international politics. The English School is generally understood to have two 'branches' – a 'pluralist' branch, and a 'solidarist' branch. The former argues that, given the diversity in the world, a pluralist, tolerant, difference-preserving international society is the best that we can hope for (and the best model for sustaining order and achieving justice). By contrast, 'solidarists' follow Kant to argue for the possibility and desirability of a cosmopolitan global community guided by the principles and practices of international human rights, humanitarian intervention.

In their article, 'We the People': Contending Discourses of Security in Human Rights Theory and Practice', Tim Dunne and Nicholas Wheeler offer a classic statement of the ES solidarist position. The authors argue for the need to put the 'victims' of global politics at the centre of our academic inquiry through a 'Kantian synthesis', which holds that a violation of security in one part of the world ought to be a violation of security elsewhere (Dunne and Wheeler 2004:20). They refer to the 'responsibility to rescue those trapped in situations of violence, poverty and ill-health' (Dunne and Wheeler 2004: 20), but are unclear on the question of with whom this responsibility lies. The assumption, however, is that it lies with 'liberal governments', given their claim that there has not been enough pressure from below to transform the 'foreign policy agendas of *liberal governments* so that human rights can become as powerful a constituency as

commercial and political interests' (Dunne and Wheeler 2004: 21, emphasis added).

How does this approach fare as an ethical basis for a feminist foreign policy? Most glaring, of course, is the blindness of the solidarist branch of the English School to the constitutive and causal effects of gender in international politics. The fact that ES is 'entirely void of insights about the gendered lives and stories of women in international society' does not seem to bother the authors, since they seem to believe strongly 'broad cosmopolitan underpinnings of feminist foreign policy' (Aggastam and Bergman-Rosamund 2016: 332). They cite Kim Hutchings who explained, in a textbook chapter, that feminist justice ethicists seek to make the universal terms of traditional moral theory genuinely inclusive and universal' (Hutchings 2010: 68), cited in Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 331). But as Hutchings' extensive corpus of work critiquing moral rationalism (including 'feminist justice ethics') shows, rationalist international ethical and political theory works because it tells us (white liberal citizens of western states) so much of what we already know about moral agency and situations; moreover, what it *accomplishes* is to institutionalize hierarchical relations and patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the practice of ethical theorizing (Hutchings 2013: 36).

The work of a feminist ethic as a normative guide for foreign policy-making should help to reveal and challenge the way that gender works to institutionalize hierarchical relations in global politics. Importantly, such an approach allows us to stop thinking about men and masculinity as the problem, and women and 'femininity' as the solution. The problem, by contrast, is a view of the world that divides everything – ways of looking, talking, acting, responding, -- down the lines of a strict gender binary, and 'filling up' those gender roles with set script. If 'patriarchy' is what feminists are challenging, then there is a need to stop thinking about patriarchy as 'rule by men', and start thinking of it as 'those attitudes and values, moral codes and institutions, that separate men from men as well as from women and divide women into the good and the bad' (Gilligan 2011: 177).

Care Ethics, Feminism and Foreign Policy

In this final section, I want to suggest how an ethic of care might inform a feminist foreign policy I ways that allow it to challenge, rather than reinforce, gendered binaries between realism and idealism, order and justice, masculine and feminine. I suggest that there are three attributes of an ethic of care that allow it to achieve this: relationality, contextualism and revisability.

Relationality has been a key feature of the ethics of care since Carol Gilligan's first edition of *In a Different Voice.* Indeed, it is the basis of 'object relations theories', which argue that a 'self' is a symbolic construct that depends on and emerges through relationships with others. Relationality is not a static ethical concept or set of principles – like 'rights' or 'justice' – rather, it is a way of seeing the world that addresses not only ontology – the relational self – but also epistemology. Thus, knowledge is also understood relationally -- we must ask who makes the knowledge claims and from what vantage point, what material circumstances, and what degree of power (Minow 1990: 178). The relational self does not conform to the model of the Cartesian subject that is the bedrock of modernist moral theory. The fact that, in empirical observations, women displayed characteristics of the relational self is not to say that women's 'authentic'

selves are relational (and men's are Cartesian, autonomous, disembodied). Moreover, it does not imply that 'women's' (or men's) developmental experience is uniform; identities are formed through important experiences related to race, class, and geopolitical location.

As famously argued by Martha Minow, relationality is perhaps most significant in the way that it shifts our understanding of the problem of 'difference'; seeing difference relationally means a shift from a focus on the distinctions between people to a focus on the relationships within which we notice and draw distinctions (Minow 1990: 15). Thus, relational approaches, unlike, say, dominant liberal rights analysis, enquire into the institutional practices that determine a norm against which some people seem different, or deviant. To address relationships, Minow argues, is to resist abstraction and to demand context (Minow 1990: 216). Moral responsiveness to others requires a deep understanding of the relationships at play in any ethico-political situation – their history, their present, and their possible futures.

Clearly, there is a close connection between *relationality* and *context*. An ethic of care eschews universalizable moral principles that can be applied across time and space. By contrast, it demands attention to context – to the particularities of social location, historical background, structural conditions and relationships between relevant moral actors. In this sense, it is opposed to the logic of traditional moral theory, which demands abstraction from context in order to gain objectivity. But this objectivity is elusive; more than this, it acts to create a dichotomy between those who are the knowers, keepers and enforcers of moral principles, and those who are compelled – sometimes through 'foreign policy' – to enact those principles. Attention to context in the realm of foreign policy means recognizing that, despite the efforts of philosophers, international political theorists, and the army of academics and policy-makers behind an initiative like *Responsibility to Protect*, there is probably *no general solution* to the problem of humanitarian intervention. If the protracted and bloody conflict in Syria has illuminated anything, it is that political conflicts are more complex, more deeply tied to historical conditions and entwined in wider geo-political contexts – including a globalized political economy – than ever seems to be the case at the outset. Feminist foreign policy will not be transformative if it is reduced to enacting a set of moral principles, or seeking to protect, promote or empower women (often because this is, in the long run, good for 'security' or 'growth' overall). A foreign policy that works towards feminist goals is more likely to be a slow, plodding process which considers historical and contemporary relations between actors and carefully considers context in making decisions and policies.

Finally, revisability refers to the requirement of epistemological humility – the need to embrace uncertainty and recognize that there are only better or worse course of action at any given time and in any context. When 'Amy', one of Gilligan's subjects, responds to a question posed regarding an abstract moral dilemma, she says, 'Well, it depends' (Gilligan 1993: 35). As Gilligan explains, when considered in the light of Kohlberg's definition of the stages and sequence of moral development, her moral judgments appear to be a full stage lower in maturity than those of the boy. They appear to reveal an inability to think systematically about the concepts of morality or law, and a reluctance to examine the logic of received moral truths (Gilligan 1993: 30). But from the perspective of an ethic of care, Amy's reluctance to make universalized judgements stems from a heightened perception of the role of context and the nature of relationships in moral judgement.

It is this willingness to live with uncertainty that will define feminist care ethics as critical, and will allow it to be, potentially, transformative in the long term. As Kim Hutchings argues, "Critique is premised on the impossibility of a definitive answer to the conditions of its own possibility and can only content itself with the acknowledgment of the revisability of any grounds on which its specific claims are based" (Hutchings 2001: 90). The implication of this is that we must let go of the idea of feminist foreign policy as 'principled foreign policy'. Principles have an unmistakable allure; they work very well when we take what Raymond Geuss calls an 'ethics-first' approach to politics – where we attain an ideal theory of how we should act, and then, in a second step, apply that ideal theory to the action of political agents (Geuss 2008:8). But the dominance of this kind of thinking in the realm of 'ethical foreign policy' has led to a 'hyper-rationalist' (Rengger 2000: 769) approach to the suffering of the peoples of the world, where 'useful knowledge' has blinded us to contingency, context, embodiment and emotion.

Revisability in ethics does not mean that we are condemned to moral relativism. As Hekman points out, the category of 'relativism' is parasitic on its opposite, the possibility of absolute knowledge. Perspectival, connected, discursive knowledge does not obviate the possibility of truth, evidence or critical judgment. (Hekman 1995: 31). It does not mean that states cannot make judgements in their foreign (and domestic) policy about the allocation of resources towards programs and policies that aim to increase the participation and representation of women in, for example, formal peacemaking and peacebuilding processes (and away from those programs and policies – including arms deals -- that may be harmful to women). There is a requirement, however, to view each policy and program on its own terms and in its own context, and to recognize the ever-changing context of actors-in-relation across multiple, intersecting locations and scales – across racial, socio-economic and ethnic divides, and from the household to the 'global' level.

Conclusion: Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy

I have argued that feminist foreign policy can and indeed should be 'ethical' foreign policy, but not where ethics is understood as a set of fixed, absolute principles based on Western liberal notions of human rights or 'justice'. This, I have argued, is damaging for feminism in two ways: first, it reifies the gendered binaries between 'real' and 'ideal' in international politics; gendering 'the ethical' in this way means that it will always be played off the masculine, 'real' world of self-interest, and destined to be dismissed as 'soft' and 'feminine'. Second, it fails to recognize the way in which this approach to ethics is itself constituted through a patriarchal binary which associates masculinity with universality and objectivity, silencing alternatives or dismissing them as immature, particularistic, or relativist. On this binary, 'global justice' (or ethical feminist foreign policy) is enacted by a series of powerful, Western states for the benefit of racialized Others; not only is this narrative partial and inadequate, but it serves to both produce and reinforce relations of domination. As Peggy Kohn puts it, they 'harm efforts to achieve global justice by delegitimizing local forms of knowledge in poor areas and undermining the mutual respect necessary for collaboration and deliberation' (Kohn 2013: 193). A feminist ethic of care does not offer a 'feminine' ethic that stands in opposition to liberal-internationalist principles of justice; the values and practices of care – listening attentively, responding with care – are not 'feminine' and 'better' ways of being. Rather, in hearing the voice of care we are recognizing

that the voice of 'justice' was not *the* voice of ethics, but *a* voice – one that had been constituted and supported by powerful gender norms. Care ethics confronts, disturbs and challenges these norms by putting forth another way of being human – one that emerges out of relationships, pays attention to context, and is always willing to revise judgements as situations change. As Gilligan argues, as long as human qualities are divided into masculine and feminine, we will be alienated from one another and from ourselves. The aspirations we hold in common, for love and for freedom, will continue to elude us' (Gilligan 178).

Thus, grounding feminist foreign policy in an ethic of care does not preclude, nor is it incompatible with, the so-called 'three Rs' of Sweden's approach to feminist foreign policy. Working towards the achievement of rights, resources and representation of women can and should be a goal for all policy-departments – both domestic and foreign -- of all national governments. That said, naming a policy approach 'feminist' can be transformative, and therefore should not be dismissed out of hand. What I am arguing for here is special attention to the normative framing and frameworks which guide feminist policy– especially and particularly in the case of foreign policy. The making and implementing of foreign policy always already operates within a gendered frame in which masculinity serves to legitimize and uphold a wide range of behaviours and actions. Simply positioning 'feminine'/feminist foreign policy in opposition to these masculinities will fail to accomplish the radical transformation necessary to move towards a world which can no longer justify the exclusion of women from the formal processes of politics, and which begins to recognize both the oppressions faced by women – on the basis of gender but also as it intersects with class and race – as well as the value of the contributions of women to our collective livelihoods across the globe.

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