

Seeing through Alterity/Otherness. A Conceptual Approximation from a Postcolonial to a Decolonial Feminist Foreign Policy

Mirar desde la alteridad. Una aproximación conceptual a una política exterior feminista desde la poscolonialidad y hacia la decolonialidad

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Abstract:

In this article, we explain the main contributions of feminist theories and approaches to International Relations and Foreign Policy. Moreover, by analysing the feminist foreign policies of Sweden and Canada, we propose a conceptual framework to understand the objectives and scope of the Mexican feminist foreign policy (MFFP). Lastly, through the contributions of postcolonial and decolonial studies, we argue that the epistemic position of the MFFP could be situated in decoloniality, which would represent an opportunity to exchange ideas, from interculturality, with historically marginalised societies and build policies that disrupt the patriarchy.

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Resumen:

En este artículo explicamos los principales aportes de las teorías y enfoques feministas a las relaciones internacionales y la política exterior. Después, analizando las políticas exteriores feministas de Suecia y Canadá, proponemos un marco conceptual para comprender los objetivos y alcances de la política exterior feminista (PEF) mexicana. Por último, mediante los aportes de los estudios poscoloniales y decoloniales, argumentamos que la posición epistémica de la PEF podría situarse en la decolonialidad, lo que representaría una oportunidad para intercambiar ideas, desde la interculturalidad, con sociedades históricamente invisibles y construir políticas que trastruen la estructura patriarcal.

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Key Words:

Feminist foreign policy, decolonial, postcolonial, international relations, foreign policy, native people.

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Palabras clave:

Política exterior feminista, decolonial, poscolonial, relaciones internacionales, política exterior, pueblos originarios.

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What is a feminist foreign policy? Is it possible to design a project of radical emancipation from within the structure of the State? Are the existing feminist foreign policies actually feminist? Feminism is a long-standing academic and political project. It is neither a unified nor a homogeneous proposal, as it stems from a variety of issues and a specific vision of the world. However, despite the differences that persist among feminisms, they have one common element: they oppose gender-based forms of inequality, while calling for policies that take into account the constraints imposed by gender.¹ In other words, they recognise a structure of oppression—based on power relations and inequalities, and sustained by social norms and conventions—seeking ways to deconstruct, dismantle and (re)construct them.

The theoretical proposals of the various feminisms have shown that the discipline of international relations, as well as the study of foreign policy, have their origins in a patriarchal, racialised and colonial structure,

¹ Feminist trends understand *gender* as a series of variables that are socially and culturally constructed—such as power, rationality, autonomy—and that are associated with masculine stereotypes, which are accepted and considered hierarchically superior to feminine stereotypes. Definitions of masculinity and femininity are relations; that is, they depend on each other (that which is masculine is that which is not feminine). Gender is the basis of power relations. See J. Ann Tickner, “You Just Don’t Understand: Troubled Engagements between Feminists and IR Theorists,” in *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4, December, 1997, p. 614.

based on a heteronormative and Western worldview. For this reason, they have made important empirical, analytical and normative contributions.

In this article, the objective is to present the contributions to conceptualise what a feminist foreign policy is. Taking into account that Mexico became the first country in the global South² to adopt this type of policy, we propose an analysis from two perspectives, postcolonial and decolonial, in order to contextualize the potential of the proposal according to the realities and needs of the Mexican territory. To this end, we suggest deepening understanding of the perspective of native peoples and their knowledge, as one of many possibilities to enable understanding of the histories, needs and knowledge of those who live here, through a horizontal dialogue that will be explained later from the critical interculturality, in order to argue that, although remote, there is the possibility of proposing a radical reform from within the State.

Feminism(s) & international relations

Feminist theories in international relations critique the values and dynamics on which states and global societies are structured. Since their emergence in the late 1980s, these approaches have contributed to understanding international politics from a different perspective. Feminist theories do not start from the state, but analyse people as social and historical agents while emphasising that theories are not “gender-neutral”, but “gender-blind”.³ Their argument is that institutions (state, army, among others) and the economic (capitalist), political and social structure (Western, patriarchal and heteronormative) cannot be understood without taking into account gendered power relations, which are marked by exclusions and inequalities, and by the day-to-day realities and experiences of women and other marginalised groups in specific contexts.

² The reference to the global South is used to show Mexico’s colonial past. At no point is it used as a hierarchical binary concept that considers the global South as the inferior category to the global North.

³ J. A. Tickner, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

In general terms, the various feminisms—liberal, Marxist, radical, postcolonial, post-structural, queer, among others—have made important empirical, analytical and normative contributions. First, they have questioned the marginalisation and exclusion of women in the discipline of international relations and in decision-making positions. By asking where women are, Cynthia Enloe demonstrates that women have always been part of political life, they have just been made invisible.⁴ This is problematic, for if women are outside the domains of power, their experiences and contributions seem irrelevant. Therefore, her aim has been to demonstrate women’s contributions to international politics, as well as the differentiated effects of certain phenomena and processes.⁵ The central argument is that by recognising the fundamental role that women play in diplomacy, the economy, culture and society, policies can be designed to address the structural inequalities that persist due to reasons of gender.

On analytical contributions, feminist theories introduce gender as a category of study to understand power relations. They aim to show how the origins of the discipline of international relations and the way we understand the world (*e.g.*, realism, neorealism, liberalism, empiricism, peace studies, among other theoretical currents) are masculine and heteronormative. The central argument is that this way of theorising does not allow for a full understanding of power dynamics in the international system, and they propose a meta-theoretical critique of the discipline. Feminisms reveal that the central concepts—sovereignty, universalism, rationality, war, international order—are associated with the masculine and that the state, society and the individual are based on an image of the “rational man” that has excluded women and the feminine. It is important to clarify that the proposal is not to start from new concepts, but to (re)think them from

⁴ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

⁵ Some empirical analyses seek to understand the effects of climate change on some women, the effects of armed conflicts on women, their role in peace processes, the role women have played in diplomacy, how development policies have an impact on women and marginalised groups, and many other issues. They also look at transnational feminist networks, non-governmental organisations and other women’s groups working on global issues such as human trafficking, sex workers and migration, among others.

a logic beyond binarism (masculine/feminine, war/peace, national/international, order/disorder) allowing us to truly explain the system in which we live and stop excluding certain people because of gender.

Finally, feminisms seek to understand the world in order to change it. Their normative project is to modify the world order, in which men and women—and non-binary people, in the case of queer feminism—have equal opportunities. The ideal is to transform global social hierarchies to achieve the emancipation and inclusion of all people. Feminist foreign policies propose to create fairer and more inclusive societies.

Feminism(s) and foreign policy

Although feminist foreign policies are recent (the first emerged in 2014, in Sweden), feminist theories and gender studies have played an important role in foreign policy analysis for more than two decades.⁶

Foreign policy studies how states, through individuals and institutions—such as ministries of foreign affairs—interact with other actors to defend their interests. Its relevance lies in the fact that it looks within the state, rather than as unified entities living together in an anarchic international system. However, these approaches do not consider that decision-makers are usually men or masculinised individuals, and that decisions and “national interest” are based on a patriarchal structure that makes the feminine invisible. In general terms, foreign policy has been understood as “the external deployment of instrumental reason on behalf of an unproblematic internal identity”.⁷

As with international relations, feminist theories have contributed to highlighting the masculine and sexualised bases of foreign policy, because despite taking into account different levels of analysis—such as society

⁶ Studies have proliferated since the adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on October 31, 2000. See Columba Achilleos-Sarll, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)”, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, January, 2018, p. 35.

⁷ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 43.

and individuals—and the specific contexts in which processes are carried out and decisions are made, they leave aside gender-based power relations. Feminisms expose how traditional analyses—and even critical approaches—⁸ neglect the sexualised and gendered dimensions that permeate foreign policy practices and discourses.⁹

This is relevant because the way the world is understood influences the type of decisions that are made. For example, it determines masculine responses, such as the militarisation of borders to address issues surrounding migration. It also accentuates the binary and hierarchical division between categories such as north/south, protector/victim, strong/weak, which justifies certain actions. During the Bush administration’s “war on terror” in 2001, one of the arguments for sending troops to Afghanistan was “women’s liberation”.¹⁰

A fundamental element, which Columba Achilleos-Sarll points out in her work, is that conventional and unconventional analyses of foreign policy also fail to consider the colonial experience in various countries. The “rational, masculine man” who makes decisions is also white and Western. Therefore, foreign policy, in addition to being sexualised, is racialised. This issue is of great relevance when analysing Mexico’s feminist foreign policy, as it includes elements of postcolonial approaches that will be reviewed later.

Conceptualising feminist foreign policy

Having presented the proposals and the relevance of feminist approaches to the analysis of international politics and foreign policy, our purpose is to conceptualise what a feminist foreign policy is and to discuss its potential for radical transformation.

⁸ Although critical theories have made important contributions to the analysis of foreign policy by considering the intersubjective construction of identities, as well as the importance of discursive constructions, they have also failed to problematise the absence of gender in their analyses.

⁹ C. Achilleos-Sarll, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁰ See Kim Berry, “The Symbolic Use of Afghan Women in the War on Terror”, in *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2003, pp. 137-160.

Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement assert that *feminist foreign policy*

is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a manner that prioritizes gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male-dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements.¹¹

The definition is based on a detailed study of the policies of Sweden, Canada and France, and seeks to find common elements among them. Its relevance is due to the emphasis placed on the need to dismantle the structure of oppression and to attend to the groups traditionally violated by patriarchy. However, it is important to note that there is no agreed definition.

Although Sweden and Canada use the concept of *feminist foreign policy*, they interpret it very differently.¹² Sweden sees it as a tool to “ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives,” and as an end in itself.¹³ Canada interprets it as a policy to “eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world.”¹⁴

¹¹ Lyric Thompson & Rachel Clement, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*, Washington D. C., International Center for Research on Women, 2019, p. 7, in https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ICRW_DefiningFeministForeignPolicy_Brief_Revised_v5_WebReady.pdf (date of access: July 22, 2021).

¹² Based on Jennifer Thomson’s analysis, and for reasons of scope, we will only refer to the cases of Sweden and Canada. See J. Tomson, “What’s Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden’s and Canada’s Foreign Policy Agendas”, in *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 21, no. 4, November, 2020, pp. 424-437.

¹³ Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2015–2018*, Stockholm, Regeringskanslie, 2018, p. 3, in <https://www.government.se/495f60/contentassets/66afd4cf15ee472ba40e3d43393c843a/handlingsplan-feministisk-utrikespolitik-2018-eng.pdf> (date of access: July 22, 2021).

¹⁴ Canada Global Affairs, *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy*, Ottawa, Canada Global Affairs, 2017, p. ii, in <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf> (date of access: July 22, 2021).

While the Swedish policy states that the problem is gender inequality, the Canadian policy states that the problem is poverty. The former focuses its actions on promoting international frameworks in favour of gender equality and implementing its multilateral commitments, and the latter promotes economic development measures and maintains important partnerships with the private sector.¹⁵

Despite the differences, one similarity between the two is that they start from a liberal framework, as they are aimed at increasing women's participation and representation within a neoliberal economic system. Swedish foreign policy has three pillars: rights, representation and resources. In addition, it focuses on three areas: national and foreign security policies, development cooperation, and trade and promotion policies.¹⁶ Canada's has six objectives: gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human dignity, growth that works for all, climate action, inclusive governance, and peace and security. Its efforts focus on international development cooperation and poverty reduction.¹⁷

A detailed analysis of each foreign policy is beyond the scope of this article. However, this brief explanation allows us to argue that both Sweden and Canada have designed public policies that seek to broaden categories and open spaces for women's economic and political representation in order to solve the problems identified. However, they do not disrupt the patriarchal power structure of the state nor do they criticise the dynamics of international politics. Moreover, instead of referring to the broader concept of gender, they focus on girls and women. This implies that they neglect people with diverse gender identities and sexual preferences, who are also victims of the violence caused by systems of oppression and exclusion.

Taking up the aforementioned contributions of feminist approaches, and referring to the initial question about the possibility of designing a project of radical emancipation from the structure of the State, we believe that Mexico's feminist foreign policy (FFP) has the potential to dismantle the structures of oppression, not because of the actions it has carried out so

¹⁵ J. Thomson, *art. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ L. Thompson & R. Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Idem.*

far, but because of the way in which it makes its approaches and defines its purpose.

The FFP is the “set of principles that seek, from foreign policy, to guide government actions to reduce and eliminate structural differences, gaps and gender inequalities in order to build a more just and prosperous society”.¹⁸ Among its objectives is to mainstream the approach to human rights, the gender perspective and intersectionality.

On this basis, our argument is that policies can be designed from postcolonial and decolonial approaches that allow us to identify opportunities to transform the structure that has created and maintained systems of exclusion, by listening to different voices and visions that go beyond the current order. It is a matter of (re)thinking the way of doing politics from the State, approaching the ontologies and epistemologies of those groups historically made invisible, not to arbitrarily assimilate them to the State logic, but to generate an intercultural and horizontal dialogue from which proposals and policies emanate, responding to the reality of the groups in question and their needs, as well as from a logic of pluriversity.¹⁹

From postcolonial to decolonial

In order to understand the existence of epistemic proposals such as those that will be taken up below, and their relation to everything we have already mentioned, it is necessary to provide elements that make some differences visible between the postcolonial and decolonial approaches. Although what will be recovered here by no means exhausts the discussion, we believe it is useful to take up again some characteristics of these lines of thought in order to trace the epistemological route followed from

¹⁸ Subsecretaría para Asuntos Multilaterales y Derechos Humanos-SRE, *La Política Exterior Feminista del Gobierno de México*, Mexico, SRE, 2020, p. [4], in https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/576095/Presentacio_n_PEF_baja.pdf (date of access: July 22, 2021).

¹⁹ Breny Mendoza explains *pluriversity* as the coexistence of multiple ways of seeing the world. See El Colegio de la Frontera Norte-El Colef, “Del pensamiento poscolonial al pensamiento descolonial|Conferencia,” in YouTube, March 10, 2017, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sndh-RsuL7A> (date of access: July 8, 2021).

Latin America and build an argument that clarifies the place and potential of the Mexican FFP.

The postcolonial approach

The postcolonial perspective operates within a space of reflection opened by the notion of colonialism (a process of domination of one society over another legitimised through political and military structures) and also by the inherent characteristics of decolonisation processes. It is an approach from the perception of the coloniser, but also from the colonised societies.²⁰

The roots of postcolonial studies—which began in 1947 with the Indian independence movement—are linked to the presence in European and U.S. universities of people who had immigrated or were descendants of families who had lived in colonised countries. Their reflections (inspired by an intellectual line that includes European thinkers)²¹ developed a series of questions about the political, cultural, economic and moral primacy of Western civilisation as practices inherent to colonialism, which, moreover, have been expanded and justified by the discourses produced in academia, literature and science.²²

²⁰ Reference is made above all to the experience of subjugation in Asia and Africa between the 18th and 20th centuries, a product of British imperialism, and the entry of other European powers such as France and Germany. See Eduardo Restrepo & Axel Rojas, *Inflexión decolonial: fuentes, conceptos y cuestionamientos*, Popayán/Bogotá, Universidad del Cauca/Universidad Javeriana, 2010, pp. 15 & 23-24, in <https://biblio.flacoandes.edu.ec/libros/digital/43099.pdf> (date of access: July 9, 2021).

²¹ Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are some examples of theorists who inspired analysis from the perspective of post-colonialism, due to their questioning of the essentialist character of Western thought and its imposition on other cultures, with analytical proposals such as the close relationship between knowledge and power and the deconstruction of language, respectively. See Martha Isabel Gómez Vélez *et al.*, “Estudios decoloniales y poscoloniales. Posturas acerca de la modernidad/colonialidad y el eurocentrismo”, in *Ratio Juris*, vol. 12, no. 24, January-June, 2017, p. 43.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

According to Marta Isabel Gómez Vélez *et al.*, these studies are a critique of modernity²³ and its implications in the cultural conformation of the conception of the world and its configuration, because colonialism is based on a logic of power and subordination of “some” people over “others”, leading to the construction of the “other” from the vision of those who hold privileged positions based on knowledge.

This current is the result of the processes of decolonisation in the second half of the last century in the former Third World, which is subject to discussion:

- The issue of the representation, both epistemic and political, of subaltern subjects.
- The problem of modern social sciences in their Eurocentric and colonial roots.
- The agency of the subjects in history, their absence or obscurement as acts of the colonial process itself.
- The configuration of the new nation-states, formerly colonies.²⁴

Postcolonial thought was well received in Latin America, and it was as a result of the reflections on its concepts on this side of the world that the need arose to design approaches based on their own experiences in order to construct terms that would echo the multiple realities expe-

²³ Although the concept of *modernity* has various meanings, M. I. Gómez Vélez *et al.* take up arguments that, in this context, explain it as a myth that justified the “moral requirement” to educate and civilise, legitimising European thought as superior to other ways of understanding the world in practically every sense, and generating devastating consequences for the colonised peoples, stripping them of their humanity, rendering their knowledge invisible and forcing them, for example, to participate in the epistemic and economic spheres from a position of power that is always inferior.

²⁴ The works of the Palestinian Edward Said, (*Orientalism*), and the Indian Ranajit Guha (*The Voices of History and Other Subaltern Studies*), Homi K. Bhabha (*The Place of Culture*) and Gayatri Spivak (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Towards a History of the Evanescent Present*) are considered pioneering. Damián Gálvez González & Verónica López Nájera, “Estudios poscoloniales: genealogías latinoamericanas. Introducción”, in *Pleyade. Revista de humanidades y ciencias sociales*, no. 21, January-June, 2018, p. 18, in <https://scielo.conicyt.cl/pdf/pleyade/n21/0719-3696-Pleyade-21-17.pdf> (date of access: July 8, 2021).

rienced in the region. From these analyses and distancing arises decoloniality, taken up again below.

The decolonial perspective

The decolonial approach operates within the space of reflection opened by coloniality, which enables the reproduction of relations of domination through the naturalisation of territorial, racial, cultural and epistemic hierarchies.²⁵ It is an analysis from the perspective of colonised societies, which takes as its starting point the experience of domination in Latin America and the Caribbean by Spain and Portugal between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. It alludes to intellectual trajectories specific to Latin America,²⁶ and is inserted in the academic discussion project known as modernity/coloniality, which invites the questioning of European modernity and its effects on the colonial subject at a global level.²⁷

In Latin America—as in other regions of the world—decolonisation has its own starting point and peculiarities. One concept that contributed to this problematisation was that of the *coloniality of power*, a term attributed to the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, which explains how multiple heterogeneous processes are incorporated into a system of domination, establishing a structure within which power relations are identified in a global context that unites three spheres of exploitation—labour, race and gender—and which form part of the colonial matrix of power. The colonial experience goes beyond a specific time period and is present in every area of social existence, reproducing and reinforcing power relations, and defining desirable and undesirable identities and forms of knowledge.²⁸

²⁵ According to E. Restrepo and A. Rojas, the process of colonisation and colonialism ended, but coloniality remained in force as a scheme of thought and a framework for action that legitimised the differences between societies, subjects and knowledge.

²⁶ E. Restrepo & A. Rojas, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 & 24.

²⁷ Melody Fonseca & Ari Jerrems, “Pensamiento decolonial: ¿una “nueva” apuesta en las Relaciones Internacionales?”, in *Relaciones Internacionales*, no. 19, February, 2012, p. 103, in <https://revistas.uam.es/relacionesinternacionales/article/view/5116/5569> (date of access: July 14, 2021).

²⁸ M. Fonseca & A. Jerrems, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

It is at this point where the distinction between postcoloniality and decoloniality takes place, since the latter “goes beyond decolonisation and raises ‘other’ alternatives that seek to subvert hegemonic power, to make visible the effects that colonisation and coloniality have brought about in power, in knowledge and in being”.²⁹ Decolonial approaches question modernity as the totalising basis on which Western thought was built, which historically destroyed or secluded many other forms of knowledge, condemning them to be perceived as superstitions or heresies. They argue that the construction of a “non-civilised, non-religious other in need of progress” facilitated the establishment of models and practices in our region that persist to this day, but that hardly responded to our contexts, ranging from the construction of modern states to Western influence in international relations, while also including more recent initiatives, such as the notion of feminist foreign policy.

Modernity and *coloniality* are two terms that are mutually constituted, but from a hierarchy between them and from a binary logic arguing that if a society is modern, there is another at the same time that is not, which justifies modernity as a civilising project in the name of which territories, human groups, knowledge and practices are intervened, and which, being different, are understood as non-modern.³⁰

It is for this reason that the concept of *coloniality* has opened up the reconstruction and restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subaltern languages and knowledge, which could not have been thought of in this way from a postcolonial perspective.³¹ The decolonial turn that occurred

²⁹ M. I. Gómez Vélez *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³⁰ Reflections from the perspective of decoloniality have made it possible to argue that modernity did not emerge in the 17th and 18th centuries with processes such as the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, but that it should be thought of much further back, in the 15th and 16th centuries, associated with the constitution of the modern world system. E. Restrepo & A. Rojas *op. cit.*, p. 17-18.

³¹ See Walter D. Mignolo, *Desobediencia epistémica: retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la decolonialidad*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Signo, 2010, pp. 13-14, in <https://antropologiadeoutraforma.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/mignolo-walter-desobediencia-epistemic3a9mica-buenos-aires-ediciones-del-signo-2010.pdf> (date of access: July 6, 2021).

in Latin American thought constituted a project of *epistemic detachment*³² in the social and academic sphere, for while postcolonial criticism was a project of transformation that operated in the European and American academy, decolonial criticism had as its starting point the urgent need to decolonise knowledge, without which it would be difficult to think from a conception different from the Western one.³³

However, having taken up some elements of the theoretical path that Latin American thought has taken is not a fruitless effort, as it contextualises the approach from which the notion of feminist foreign policy is introduced. This conceptual distancing that separates the Mexican proposal from the Canadian and Swedish initiatives makes it possible to argue that, although Mexico's FFP has included construction concepts emanating from the Western context, it also has postcolonial tinges that have allowed it to question the masculine and universalist character of the modern state. A further step towards the ideal of constructing radical politics from within the state logic itself would be to start from decolonial approaches that allow us to rethink the colonial characteristics of the figure of the modern Latin American state.

Our proposal is to build this policy with approaches that are committed to the recovery of historically obscured knowledge and that seek to look not from the modern and individual logic, but from their own contexts and, in many cases, from the notion of collectivity.

Building from critical interculturality

Women, the LGBTI community and indigenous peoples are just some of the many social groups whose contexts remain invisible to the State and, consequently, to the practice of foreign policy. Inclusion and development policies (emanating from multilateral institutions and adopted by governments since the 1990s) have not really been efforts to question

³² W. Mignolo understands detachment as a reflection and recovery of other ways of constructing knowledge.

³³ W. Mignolo, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

the structure of domination that condemns these social groups to inequalities, but rather guidelines that—without addressing these structural causes—assimilate identity diversities into their structure, neutralising them, emptying them of their meanings³⁴ and even taking away their voice and capacity for agency, a product of the continuity of the phenomenon of coloniality.³⁵

The theoretical and conceptual review in this article shows that we are still facing a profoundly Eurocentric model of interaction, both in International Relations and in the configuration of the State, as well as in the formulation of multilateral policies. This has had an impact on the realities of countries that have adopted development as their path to transformation, as the financing and programs aimed at institutionalising their demands have usually provided a superficial response to the issue.

The establishment of a dialogue based on critical interculturalism could be a solution. Catherine Walsh defines it as a construction from historically disadvantaged societies, unlike multiculturalism, which suggests a reverse process. Intercultural dialogue, which is constructed hand in hand with decoloniality, suggests taking a step back to constantly point out and question the political, economic and social causes that fail to allow horizontal interaction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic societies, instead of simply pointing out that dialogue between groups and cultural thoughts can just happen.³⁶

The starting point is to recognise that coloniality is in force in the Latin American imagination and, with this in mind, to criticise these structures and back the transformation of institutions and social relations to create totally different conditions, bringing to the analysis, in addition to the economic, political and social variables, the spheres of knowledge and being.

³⁴ Catherine Walsh, “Interculturalidad crítica y pedagogía de-colonial: apuestas (des)del in-surgir, re-existir y re-vivir”, in *Entre palabras*, no. 3-4, 2009, pp. 129-156.

³⁵ Where the articulation of race, gender and sex remain as continuations of the colonial matrix of power.

³⁶ C. Walsh, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-141.

During the current six-year presidential term, the Government of Mexico presented the National Program for Indigenous Peoples 2018-2024,³⁷ an initiative that, like the FFP, seeks to change its interaction with groups in vulnerable situations.

This first approach led to a constitutional reform that in 2019 recognised indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities as subjects of rights. The process is still ongoing, as of June 2021 the federal government has held dialogues with the different indigenous and Afro-descendant regions of the country, in which it sought to learn first-hand about their needs and gather their demands in order to promote a much broader constitutional reform, which aims to modify 15 articles of the Federal Constitution. The objective is to create a new relationship of respect and coordination with these communities, moving away from the notion of *guardianship* or *supplanting of will*³⁸ that permeated previous initiatives. The initiative is expected to be submitted to the Congress of the Union in September 2021.

This is a positive approach from an intercultural point of view, as it sought to hold exchanges as horizontally as possible with the communities that presented their contexts and their needs. However, the very nature of the concept of critical interculturality demands constant and acute observation of any initiative of this kind, due to the ease with which they can retake colonial traits in their consolidation and implementation, thus, as both projects are relatively recent, giving continuity to their actions and evaluating in the long term whether their initiatives are in line with the realities of Mexico will be necessary.

In the meantime, this text is a suggestion of problematisation to build, consolidate and implement these efforts. It is not a recipe, nor does it contain all the answers. It is a theoretical approach to the construction of a recent policy, in order to provide context for its formulation and expose a possible way forward, using the concepts observed here.

³⁷ Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI), “Programa Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas 2018-2024”, in <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/423227/Programa-Nacional-de-los-Pueblos-Indigenas-2018-2024.pdf> (date of access: July 22, 2021).

³⁸ INPI, “Propuesta de Reforma Constitucional sobre Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas y Afromexicanos. Resultado del proceso de diálogo y consulta”, in <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/651157/INPI-Reforma-Constitucional-Resultado-del-Proceso.pdf> (date of access: July 19, 2021).

Final thoughts

As the first country in the global South to adopt a feminist foreign policy, Mexico has a fundamental opportunity to introduce actions and practices that reconfigure the established order in the state logic and in the sphere of coloniality, which still permeates the actions of Latin American countries with a colonial past.

Canadian and Swedish feminist foreign policies served as a precedent for Mexico to launch its own initiative. However, the context of those countries differs diametrically from ours, and therefore, the epistemic position from which the project is built must also be different.

The presence of the various feminisms in postcolonial studies—commonly accepted in academia—has made it possible to introduce the analyses and contributions that these currents of thought have made to international relations, without which the discipline itself would not have begun to rethink concepts that it does not usually question and which were mentioned in the first part of the article. It is these analyses that have facilitated the creation of concepts such as intersectionality.

Therefore, postcolonial thought is understood here as an anchor that allowed questioning the colonial experience in Latin America, opening the path to that *epistemic detachment* that would give rise to decoloniality, from which it is possible to look at the feminist movements occurring in this region and, if I dare say so, in Mexico.

Thinking about ourselves from our own context, analysing how the intersections of race, class and gender have affected us is an opportunity—in this case—to formulate a feminist foreign policy that is truly relevant to our reality.