

SUBVERSION DIARIES

LESSONS FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY
FROM THE MAJORITY WORLD



Gender Security Project

States world over have begun adopting or committing to adopt feminist foreign policies. A deeper interrogation of these policies reveals that many existing initiatives relating to providing “aid” to programming concerning “gender equality,” actioning the women, peace, and security agenda, and implementing strategic efforts to bring more women into positions of leadership and power, are (re)named “feminist foreign policies.”

However, women from the majority world have historically been practicing feminist foreign policy: Be that in the resistance to colonialism and systemic and structural violence, or in asserting their leadership in their communities through practices like food sovereignty and trade. Primarily action-takers, their actions and practical leadership has been documented in action rather than in writing. Their stewardship of feminist foreign policy through action has transcended colonial practices of aid-making, resource extraction, and occupation, and have strived to recognize the value of building deep connections of solidarity with the environment and with one another. Through collective action and leadership, women from the majority world have produced significant, meaningful, and lasting change in several contexts, be that in protecting and safeguarding the environment, or in reframing systems to support inclusion.

Drawn from our documentation project, Subversion Diaries, these insights drawn from the women’s movement in the majority world are a living, thriving, and evolving repository of lessons for the future of feminist foreign policy. While exploring and drawing lessons from these stories, it is important to bear in mind that they are not hagiographic accounts that place women and the women’s movement on a pedestal. The women’s movement will not be held to a higher standard than cis-het men and the full humanity of women will not be sidelined or cast aside in understanding their contributions to change. The focus on the positive impacts of change are more a function of the medium of documentation than anything else. Every reader is invited to explore the stories in greater detail.



Lessons for Feminist Foreign Policy

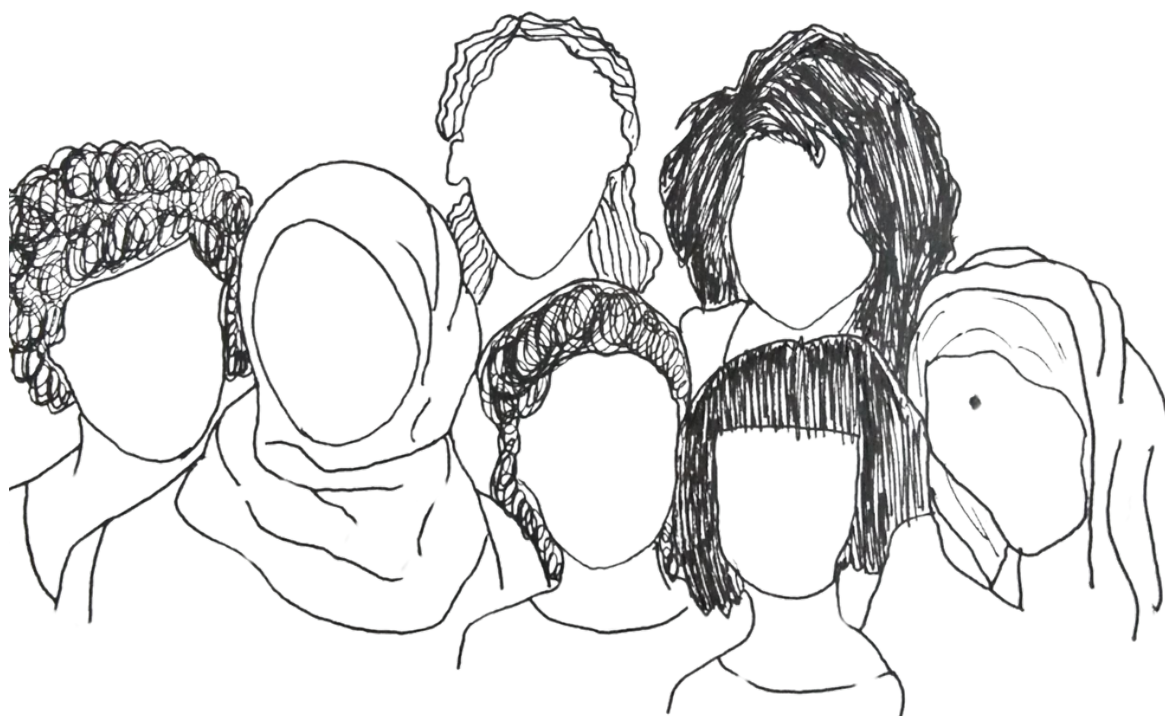
01 Collective Action for Change

Women's movements in the majority world have understood the value of collective action in practice. Recognizing that change cannot, and does not arrive on the back of a single person, and that "leadership" that isolates the individual from the collective, these movements have brought together a combined, collaborative pool of skills, practices, wisdom and knowledge to produce change. For example, The Radical Grandmothers in Thailand resisted extractive mining by bringing together their knowledge of weaving to fund their advocacy. They mobilized with women from the United States of America, supported them with their business acumen, and facilitated their access to wider markets for their woven goods.

02 Going Beyond Gender Equality

The idea of "gender equality" has often been centred in feminist foreign policies and the broader idea of women's inclusion in positions of power and leadership. However, equality can fast become a site for tokenistic representation, or even a zero-sum game. Women in the majority world have recognized the limitations of an equality-based approach, and have recognized the value of pursuing substantive equity. For example, the women of Cameroon mobilized across ethnic and linguistic lines to facilitate peace through dialogue – unlike a system that often followed the "add-woman-and-stir" approach, reducing the inclusion and participation of women to mere tokenistic engagement.



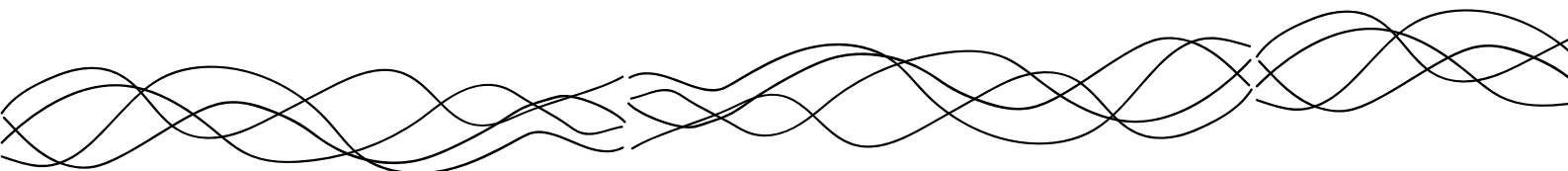


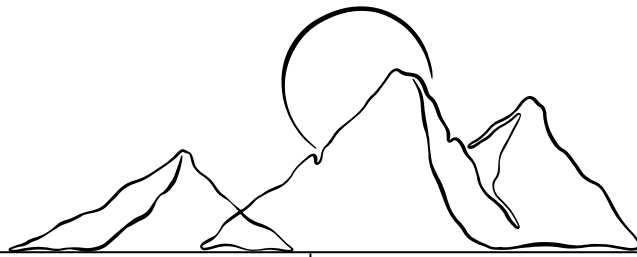
03 Dismantling systemic violence

A common approach – including within feminist foreign policies – to addressing inequality and inequity has been to add more women into positions of power and leadership. However, this does nothing more than to change the numbers. Institutions continue to remain patriarchal and discriminatory, and reduce the idea of inclusion to mere tokenization. Women from the majority world have recognized the limitations of this approach, and have embodied change. For instance, the women who founded and run Jinwar, in Syria, have centred participatory democracy and collective leadership in their commune, rather than to replicate existing structures around individual leadership.

04 Justice Before Peace

Global approaches to justice in post-conflict contexts have involved the provision of amnesty to people in positions of power and leadership. Peace achieved in these contexts is been fragmented and negative. Women's movements in the majority world have recognized the challenges inherent in these approaches and have called for and successfully achieved justice. For instance, 15 Maya Q'eqchi' women in Guatemala were the first to win a case against former military officials in 2016. This led to officials being convicted of the systematic use of rape and sexual slavery in Sepur Zarco during the Guatemalan civil war in the 1980s. In January 2022, 5 Maya Achi women secured the conviction of 5 former paramilitaries for their systematic use of sexual violence during the civil war.





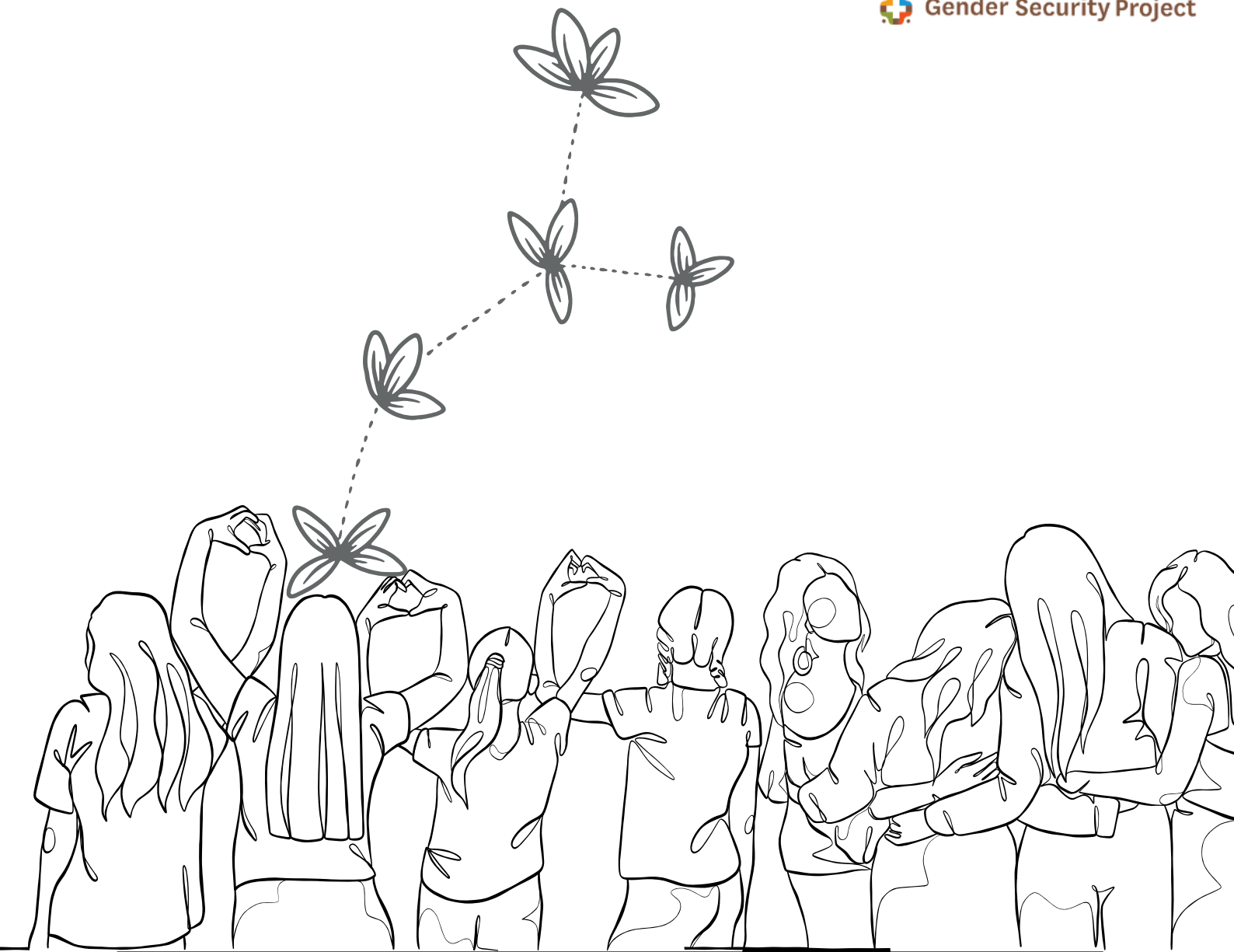
05 Centering Ancestral Knowledge

Women in the majority world have relied on ancestral and traditional knowledge streams to protect and preserve their communities and ways of living. They preserve worldviews and practices that are fundamental to their lives. These practices are centred on the value of respecting nature the environment, and its resources, rather than extracting or occupying these spaces beyond replenishment. For example, the Queensland Indigenous Women Rangers Network has been taking care of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and preventing its extinction. Their work has paved the way for the creation of new approaches to conservation through knowledge-sharing and storytelling.

06 Non-Extractive Engagement

In several women's movements and women-led movements from the majority world, resource consumption and spatial use have been treated as sites for preservation and regeneration rather than extraction and depletion. Women in the majority world have approached resources and spaces with respect for the value they bring to human existence, and recognize the value in preserving them. For example, the women Indigenous groups such as the Maasai women in Kenya, the Guajajara women in Brazil, the Siviru women in the Colombian Pacific, and the Xicana women in South Central LA all practice food sovereignty, and centre indigenous practices in agriculture.





07 Preserving Memory

History is written by the victor's hand, and the victor is often a privileged man in a position of power. Narratives of women and women's movements are seldom written and preserved, and where they are written, they are often supplementary to the central narrative of men. Women from the majority world have and continue to preserve and document historical narratives that have been elbowed out from mainstream knowledge pathways. For example, women's groups across South Korea have advocated for the rights of and justice for "comfort women" – women who were subject to sexual slavery during World War II – and have preserved their memory through statues and documentation.

08 Justice Before Peace

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the many limitations at play in the extant system. The economy took a massive beating globally. However, feminist pathways to engagement were easily able to facilitate recovery. For example, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Feminist Government of Hawaii under Khara Jabola-Carolus imagined and implemented a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan, which included: the repertoire of ideas within its fold include providing universal basic income, making special emergency funds available for marginalized groups such as undocumented women, immigrant women, domestic workers, women with disabilities, and survivors of sex-trafficking, among others, and waived co-payments for COVID-19 tests and treatment.

