



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Claiming Historical Responsibility? The Persistence of Coloniality in German Feminist Foreign Policy

Karoline Färber^{1,*}  and Madita Standke-Erdmann^{2,*} 

¹Associate Professorship for International Politics and Conflict Studies, University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany and ²Department of War Studies, King's College London, London, UK

Corresponding author: Madita Standke-Erdmann; Email: Madita.standke-erdmann@kcl.ac.uk

(Received 12 July 2024; revised 20 June 2025; accepted 26 June 2025)

Abstract

Recently, former colonial powers in the Global North have begun addressing their colonial pasts through their foreign policies. Some of these states pursue a feminist foreign policy (FFP). However, to date, only one FFP makes explicit mention of colonial legacies: that of Germany, adopted in 2021. How does German FFP discourse address this and what political work does this do? Contributing to critiques of coloniality in FFP, we analyze the discursive representation of Germany's colonial past in foreign policy texts since 2021. Drawing on the socio-critical concepts *theater of reconciliation* by Max Czollek and *remembrance superiority* by Mohamed Amjahid, we find that the discourse powerfully establishes gendered notions of caring, responsible, and reflexive German statehood. This organizes how Germany's engagement with its colonial past is told and which forms of engagement with former colonies are rendered intelligible. We argue that German FFP erases colonial structures that permeate German foreign policy and reproduces coloniality through discursive representations.

Keywords: feminist foreign policy; coloniality; colonialism; Germany; historical responsibility

In the last two decades, former (settler) colonial states like Germany, Canada, and France have slowly begun addressing their colonial pasts, following decades-long political pressure from descendants of formerly colonized peoples and diaspora activists. This includes the selective restitution of colonial loot, the

*Both authors contributed equally to this article.

commemoration of individuals and communities who were displaced and murdered by colonial armies, and official apologies for colonial violence by heads of state. States that address their colonial pasts often convey this process as a necessary matter of historical responsibility, and as part of their foreign policy strategies. Some of these belong to those 16 states that pursue a feminist foreign policy (FFP), promising a more just and equitable foreign policy.¹ This includes Germany, which adopted an FFP in the coalition treaty of the Social Democrat, Green, and Liberal political parties in December 2021, and dropped the feminist label again after the 2025 federal elections that strengthened center-right forces.

Germany belongs to those FFP states in the Global North² that are former (settler) colonial powers. Others, such as Luxembourg, actively participated in and benefited from the colonial system and perpetuated its ideology. However, there remains a deafening silence around colonial histories and legacies in foreign policies in general and FFPs in particular (Ansorg, Haastrup, and Wright 2021, 207) — with the notable exception of Germany. The German FFP guidelines are the first and, to date, only FFP document to mention colonial history (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 3, 56).³ Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's foreword states that German FFP "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" (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 5). The chapter on foreign cultural and social relations further explains that a feminist cultural and societal policy must reflect "post-colonial realities." This resonates with a broader German FFP discourse that references feminist principles of critical reflexivity, listening, and learning from others (Robinson 2021). In this discourse, historical responsibility emerges as pivotal to German FFP, which echoes the concept's centrality to German foreign policies following World War II, the Nazi regime, and the Shoah (Tkocz 2024). It appears that German FFP conjoins established guiding motifs of German foreign policy with novel references to feminist principles, invoking notions of an exceptionally responsible German state.

This sparked our interest in how the broader German FFP discourse addresses colonialism, how historical responsibility is positioned therein, and what political work it does. To answer these questions, the article draws on two bodies of literature: scholarship on colonialism and coloniality in (feminist) foreign policy (e.g., Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2022; Bergman Rosamond, Cheung, and De Leeuw 2023; Bouka 2021; Parashar and D'Costa 2017) as well as historical scholarship on German colonialism (Conrad 2011; Hamm 2023; Todzi 2023) and German politics of remembrance (Conrad 2019; Freimüller 2021; Gouaffo and Tsogang Fossi 2019; Harnisch 2019; Messerschmidt 2008). We bring these scholarships into dialogue through the socio-critical concepts of *theater of reconciliation* (*Versöhnungstheater*) by Max Czollek (2023) and *remembrance superiority* (*Erinnerungsüberlegenheit*) by Mohamed Amjahid (2021). Both scrutinize the role of historical responsibility in German remembrance politics as a means to portray the German state as having successfully reckoned with its past. Through a discourse-theoretical analysis (Doty 1993; 1996; Shepherd 2008) of the FFP guidelines and 32 publicly accessible foreign policy documents published by the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO) between November 2021 and May 2024, we assess the concepts' political work in German FFP in reference to its colonial histories.

Our discourse-theoretical analysis is structured around three major themes: First, how Germany's colonial past is positioned temporally and geographically in the FFP, including through the notion of a shared and volatile history with formerly colonized states. Second, the creation of German historically responsible statehood vis-à-vis, third, multiple Others situated in former German colonies. We find that German colonialism is temporally and geographically limited to the period of 1871–1919 and to states under former German colonial rule, invisibilizing German involvement in global empire and its aftermath. In addition, German colonial pasts and their legacies are addressed merely under the (feminist) cultural and societal foreign policy. This is part of a longstanding discourse that positions colonial history as a cultural question (Savoy 2022), centering on the restitution of cultural artifacts and human remains. Consequently, Germany's colonial past is invisibilized in relation to other policy areas that fall under its FFP, including security or the practice of foreign policy. We also find that explicit references to FFP remain almost completely absent in this discourse. However, notions of care, listening, and reflexivity, all highlighted as elements of a German FFP, are present alongside repeated allusions to historical responsibility. This culminates in the recreation of a specific subject position: German responsible statehood. This sense of Self powerfully organizes how Germany's engagement with its colonial past is told and which forms of engagement with former German colonies become intelligible and recognizable, particularly in and through FFP. The discourse demonstrates little reparative or social justice elements, despite a recent apology for the colonial violence committed in Tanzania (Keul 2024; Steinmeier 2023).⁴

We argue that the ways in which colonial histories are positioned in German FFP extends an already established sense of a German historically responsible Self rooted in its remembrance politics. By emphasizing feminist principles of care, listening, and critical self-reflexivity, the German state is positioned as a champion of historical responsibility with an even more caring and morally responsible tinge. However, references to these feminist principles remain performative because they emphasize a particular German quality in reckoning with the past rather than serving social justice claims by those who have suffered from German (colonial) histories of violence (Czollek 2023). This allows for a selective (re)historicization of Germany's colonial past and invisibilizes how colonial structures persist and are inherent to German foreign policy today. Instead, the discursive construction of colonialism and Germany's colonial history substantiates the notion of responsible statehood and remembrance superiority as part of a theater of reconciliation that maintains coloniality as an organizing power structure of German (feminist) foreign policy.

This article offers one of the first historically grounded discussions of colonialism and coloniality in German FFP. We contribute to FFP scholarship, specifically the emerging body of work on German FFP (Cheung and Scheyer 2024; Färber in Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023; Hauschild and Stamm 2024; Standke-Erdmann 2023; Stengel and Wibben 2024; Zilla 2024), by connecting it with historical scholarship and socio-critical concepts. Bringing together two largely disjointed bodies of scholarship fosters productive, historically grounded analyses of the dimensions of power underwriting German FFP and the past, present,

and futures of reckoning with colonial histories. We also offer a critique of German FFP itself, and of the limitations of how German colonial history is addressed. As white cis-female scholars with German citizenship, we are indebted to activist-scholars who have highlighted the hypocrisy in German FFP (e.g., Dirik 2023; Habte 2022; Mukalazi and Habte 2024) and to those initiatives who have and continue to hold the German government and public actors accountable for their interpretation of a German politics of remembrance, including anti- and decolonial, (post-)migrant, and Jewish activists and artists. Without a reckoning with colonial histories, FFP cannot be feminist.

The article proceeds as follows: First, we review the literature on FFP in relation to colonialism and coloniality. We then outline how the notion of historical responsibility emerged as an integral part of German politics of remembrance and foreign policy, introduce the concepts *theater of reconciliation* and *remembrance superiority*, and situate the discourse on German colonial histories within. We further explain our material and our methodological framework before turning to our analysis. We conclude by discussing limitations and possible future research avenues.

(Feminist) Foreign Policy, Colonialism, and Coloniality

We understand (feminist) foreign policy as a socially produced discourse (Doty 1993; 1996) that is inherently gendered, racialized, sexualized, and embedded in other power relations, including coloniality (Achilleos-Sarll 2018; Quijano 2000). By coloniality, we mean “a specific matrix of power, in which political, economic, cultural, racial, gender, and epistemic hierarchies that were established or emerged as part of the colonial administration remain ingrained in current power relations (and subjectivities)” (Azarmandi 2018, 72). Within this matrix of power, certain stories and subjectivities become (in)visible whereas others emerge as dominant. Coloniality is interrelated with but different from colonialism: “colonialism operates in specific locations and is bounded in time” (Bouka 2021, 126), whereas coloniality is ingrained in racialized, gendered, classed, and other intersecting power relations of the past and present. It thus constitutes a remnant of the past, while simultaneously transforming and adapting to new formations of power that undergird state formations and practices (Alexander and Mohanty 1997).

Colonialism and particularly coloniality have increasingly been addressed in FFP scholarship. While FFPs often do not reference states’ colonial pasts and presents and how coloniality persists today (Ansorg, Haastrup, and Wright 2021, 207), scholars highlight that FFPs themselves may reproduce colonial logics. For one, FFPs are regularly practiced and understood as a “Western”⁵ policy export, rooted in ideas of Global North progressiveness and protection of Black and Brown women elsewhere (Parashar and D’Costa 2017; Tetali 2023; for a counter-discourse on FFP as originating from anti-colonial thought, see Rathore 2021; 2024; Thomson and Färber in Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023). Hence, FFP may reproduce a racialized and gendered “masculine protector logic” (Duriesmith 2018). Its focus on people and places elsewhere not only invisibilizes grievances

of groups within states and state violence (Habte 2022); it also maintains gendered and racialized hierarchies through the creation of a cosmopolitan “Other” that is distinct to, and on the outside of, FFP states (Robinson 2021). This makes possible state-sanctioned practices that claim care, listening, or self-reflexivity toward those “Others” but that reassert colonial power relations as they serve to uphold FFP states’ hegemony. In this sense, FFP may be understood as a re-articulation of colonial power (Bergman Rosamond, Cheung, and De Leeuw 2023; Nylund, Håkansson, and Bjarnegård 2023).

Scholars also interrogate the use of colonial concepts such as race and gender in and by FFPs, and argue that these help categorize and govern people and places elsewhere rather than transform foreign policy (Rivera Chávez 2022; Roshani and Diaby 2022). As FFPs have increasingly taken up radical African/Black feminist concepts such as intersectionality and decolonization, translating these into state policies has regularly involved their depoliticization (Aylward and Brown 2020; Mason 2019; Morton, Muchiri, and Swiss 2020; Mukalazi and Habte 2024). FFPs, then, do not necessarily challenge colonial structures inherent in the current world order but rather uphold those as they create a norm for states to adhere to (see African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies 2023).

FFPs are informed by the global rise of discursively embedded pro-gender equality norms (Aggestam and True 2020; Haastrup 2020; Lee-Koo 2020; Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad 2020). As these norms are often enacted not in concrete but “shared abstract understandings” (Townes 2013, 185), they matter less on their own terms than with regards to what they signify: “that the states who deploy them are ‘good’” (Thomson 2022, 4). In this context, adopting a feminist label has become a powerful signifier of progress, modernity, and a commitment to the international liberal order (Thomson 2022). Appealing to these transnational signifiers also allows for an alignment with those states marked as “like-minded” — that is, other FFP states — and strengthens their subject position as international gender equality champions (see also Achilleos-Sarll 2023). Other states are positioned as having to “catch up” (Tetali 2023). Hence, there is a risk that FFP may become a new “standard of civilization” (Rivera Chávez 2022) as it allows for states to compete and rank each other based on their performance of feminism and gender equality (Zhukova 2023; see, e.g., Papagiotti 2023). This, too, maintains colonial logics and relations.

While colonialism and coloniality with regards to German (feminist) foreign policy are, to date, under-researched, emerging contributions highlight similar trends and critiques. Despite references to Germany’s colonial past in FFP texts, scholars argue that the German FFP does not adequately address colonial continuities. The policy forgoes an intersectional approach or radical feminist ethics of care in favor of the inclusion of buzzwords (Hauschild and Stamm 2024). Although relatively progressive, these buzzwords do not translate into transformative foreign policy practices but are, to a large extent, depoliticized to fit with a (neo)liberal feminist agenda (Sauer 2023). Despite its FFP, Germany continues to be engaged in extractivist mining of mineral resources in South America (Mukalazi and Habte 2024), the recruitment of migrant care workers from the Global South (Cheung and Scheyer 2024), violent border regimes and control of migration (Roshani and Diaby 2022; Standke-Erdmann 2023), and

associated human rights violations. These practices reproduce colonial power relations as they assert national statehood and, with it, gendered and racialized hierarchies — not only abroad but also “at home.” For, spaces of knowledge production on (feminist) foreign policy uphold colonial relations as they afford some (mostly white) knowers legitimacy, while others remain mere recipients of FFP (Färber in Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023; see also Färber 2025b). Such reproduction of coloniality is intertwined with the fact that German FFP remains heavily influenced by white feminism, particularly the moral superiority of white womanhood (Zakaria 2023). White German men’s (and women’s) nationalist, economic, and security interests are centered, while “womenandchildren” elsewhere are largely understood as victims to be saved (Enloe 2014). In addition, the multilateral and state-centric settings in which German FFP operates are shaped by and reproduce colonial and patriarchal power imbalances (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Parashar et al. 2018).

Scholars, activists, and civil society critique these colonial continuities, along with suggestions on what a German FFP *should be*. This includes an approach that recognizes and rectifies German colonial history (e.g., Haastrup 2023; Standke-Erdmann 2023; Wisotzki, Scheyer, and Färber 2022). However, what is missing is a more systematic analysis of whether and how exactly German FFP addresses German colonial history and what political work the discourse does. This requires a historically grounded analysis of FFP in general, and the foundations on which specific FFPs build. With this article, we seek to contribute not only to discussions of *German* FFP but broader critiques of coloniality in FFP, and to a deconstruction of powerful, historically developed discourses that inform its conception and practice. If we do not pay attention to colonialism and coloniality in their complexity, we cannot understand how FFP and foreign policy more broadly are complicit in sustaining the colonial present. Therefore, in the next section, we turn to historical and literary scholarship that, to date, remains rather detached from the FFP literature. We highlight the historical emergence of historical responsibility in German foreign policy and its politics of remembrance to explore how Germany addresses its colonial past in and through FFP.

Historical Responsibility in German Politics of Remembrance: Theater of Reconciliation and Remembrance Superiority

The German FFP guidelines envision a policy that is morally responsible and reflective of its history (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 3, 56). While German colonialism was first mentioned in a policy text four years earlier, in the 2018 coalition agreement between Conservative and Social Democratic parties (CDU/CSU and SPD 2018, 153), the FFP guidelines speak of an explicitly *German* responsibility to address it (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 3, 56). This framing echoes the importance of historical responsibility in German foreign policy in relation to World War II and the Shoah, central to German politics of remembrance since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bajohr and O’Sullivan 2021). This section provides a brief historical overview of this politics, its domestic consequences and contestations, and the emergence of historical responsibility as a central motif to German⁶ foreign

policy post-1945. This is necessary to understand how colonial histories are negotiated and constituted in German FFP today.

Historical responsibility narratives have played a central yet ambivalent role in German foreign policy since 1945 (Wiese et al. 2021), and are linked closely to official political efforts to remember and commemorate Germany's past. Historians distinguish between three phases of a (West) German politics of remembrance that shaped today's understanding of a German historical responsibility (Freimüller 2021). The first phase (1950–70s) was primarily characterized by chancellor Konrad Adenauer's aim to anchor West Germany in the international post-1945 and Cold War arena, including a porous and incomplete "denazification" of the judiciary, intelligence, and political infrastructure that sustained a politics of forgetting (Frei 2012). Despite a brief period of societal upheaval during the 1967–8 student and union protests, as well as interventions by Shoah survivors, an omnipresent silence around the genocide committed by the Nazi regime persisted. The second phase commenced with chancellor Willy Brandt's genuflection at the Warsaw Ghetto memorial in 1970 and the broadcasting of the TV series "Holocaust." It was further shaped by President Richard von Weizsäcker's infamous 1985 speech, in which he framed March 8, 1945 as a day of *liberation* from Nazi rule (Siebeck 2015). At first glance, this framing was critical of the dominant discourse at the time that portrayed Germany as having been defeated. However, it also relieved German society of its responsibility to critically reflect on its own involvement in Nazi terror and its common responsibility toward victims and survivors (Hammerstein and Hofmann 2015).

The second and third periods overlap around the time of German reunification in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Following pressure from survivors of the Nazi regime, youth activists, and politicians, German politics of remembrance centered on national-socialist Germany, and was later extended to include injustices committed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The period was productive in historical research as well as in inaugurating memorials and museums.⁷ However, it also produced a German self-perception as aware of and having overcome its past. Today, commemoration takes place in museums, memorials, and youth exchange programs. While these efforts continue to yield rich ways of remembering within Germany and beyond, a significant and growing number of Germans wrongly believe their ancestors to have resisted Nazism and the Shoah (Freimüller 2021). In addition, repeated calls by public figures to let bygones be bygones not only indicate a progressing societal estrangement from Nazi history but also expose Germany's politics of remembrance as less successful than widely assumed (Czollek 2023).

Recently, the design and future direction of German remembrance resurfaced as a matter of heated debate. Jewish and decolonial scholars, artists, and activists as well as activists and researchers emerging from what Foroutan (2019) refers to as the 'post-migrant' era have called for a more plural, diverse, and multidirectional politics that includes the commemoration of various German histories of violence to serve their victims and survivors symbolically and materially (Ballhaus Naunynstraße 2024; decolonize berlin 2024; Rothberg 2020; Zimmerer 2023; see also Wagner 2022). This includes the commemoration of German colonial histories. Messerschmidt (2008, 42) argues that there is a need to address the German state's

failure to navigate both its “post-national-socialist and postcolonial” past post-1945. Yet, colonialism as part of German history remains largely unaddressed due to a persistent colonial amnesia and political disinterest (Zimmerer 2023), which historically translated into a foreign policy strategy guided by “major restraint” in decolonization processes in former German colonies (Haas et al. 2024, 365). Only recently have scholars begun to debunk the myth of Germany being an insignificant colonial actor and highlighted its involvement in global empire (Gouaffo and Tsogang Fossi 2019; Kirey 2023; Todzi 2023). At the same time, research on the struggle for the return of colonial loot exposes a pronounced German reluctance to engage in the comprehensive restitution of artifacts and human remains (Falschebner 2020; Hamm 2023; Savoy 2022). This has been widely criticized by activists from various social justice and diaspora initiatives worldwide (decolonize berlin 2024; Ndorokaze 2021; Steinke 2021).

Despite a growing body of scholarship on how the politics of memory shape foreign policy and international politics (e.g., Bachleitner 2019; Bentley 2015; Daase et al. 2016; Engert 2016; Feldman 2012; Harnisch 2019; Mälksoo 2023), the role of historical responsibility has not yet been studied in relation to German FFP. With our article, we seek to close this gap. To do so, we draw on two literary and socio-critical concepts that critically scrutinize the third and ongoing phase of Germany’s politics of remembrance as a *theater of reconciliation* (*Versöhnungstheater*) (Czollek 2023) and as imbued with a sense of *remembrance superiority* (*Erinnerungsüberlegenheit*) (Amjahid 2021; see also Kantsteiner 2017). The former criticizes the German government-led politics of remembrance as performative and symbolic. The latter — arguably mutually constitutive of the former — refers to a sense of Self that positions Germany as a champion in commemorating the past and German politics of remembrance as a morally laudable export product of post-1945 and unified Germany. Central to both concepts is the analysis of a sense of Self that is resistant to the inclusion of a more plural and multidirectional politics of remembrance (Rothberg 2009). They expose that German politics of remembrance serve a heteronormative and white German “dominant and mainstream society” (*Dominanz- und Mehrheitsgesellschaft*) and, opposite to what it claims, not those who suffered from German histories of violence and their demands for social justice (Czollek 2023; Messerschmidt 2008). If these histories were included into the politics of remembrance, the historiography of a successful government-led strategy to address Germany’s past would collapse.

We understand the use of these socio-critical concepts as a form of disruption to a common academic canon and an acknowledgment of the multiple contemporary challenges in reconciling German histories of violence. Taking these concepts seriously helps to understand how German foreign policy discourse positions its FFP to underscore historical responsibility claims. We further demonstrate that the theater of reconciliation and remembrance superiority play a role not only in domestic but also foreign policy realms, and how they are reproduced and extended in and by FFP.

Material and Methodology

Our analysis draws on 32 publicly accessible foreign policy texts published by the FFO between the launch of the German FFP in December 2021 and May 2024, notably the German FFP guidelines, press releases, articles, and speeches. These documents were selected manually, based on whether they made reference to colonialism (16 documents), colonial history (16 documents), and/or coloniality (no document mentioned the latter), then cross-checked for references to FFP. This allowed us to trace how German colonialism and colonial history are positioned within foreign policy and FFP discourse. Of the texts under analysis, only four documents mention both colonialism or Germany's colonial past *and* FFP (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a; Baerbock 2022a; 2023c; 2024c). Our material selection follows the FFO's systematization as to when colonialism, colonial history, and FFP is referenced. We acknowledge that this risks reproducing structural logics inherent to the institution. However, due to the novelty of references to colonial histories in a state's FFP and the simultaneous scarcity of links between these histories and the policy discourse, we decided to analyze the particular discourse that emerges from this situatedness.

To contextualize our analysis, we also consider selected policy documents beyond the FFO and documents published before 2021. These include the 2018 and 2021 coalition treaties of the Conservative and Social Democrat parties and the Social Democrat, Green, and Liberal parties as well as policy strategies like the Conference of Culture Ministers' Key Points on Handling Collection Items from Colonial Contexts. These documents were included in the analysis if other texts made reference to them or reproduced language from them.

With the exception of the Conference of Culture Ministers' Key Points and the coalition treaties, we limit our analysis to material published by the FFO. Importantly, the FFO coordinates the country's *foreign* policy and is not tasked with economic cooperation and "development"⁸ policy. The latter falls under the authority of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). While some of their activities overlap, the ministries vary in size, location, political party leadership, priorities, and structure. The ministries also have different historical trajectories. While the BMZ was founded in 1961, the FFO has been part of the German political infrastructure since 1871. From 1907 to 1919, its Imperial Colonial Office oversaw the colonization of regions in Africa, the Pacific, and Southeast Asia and coordinated German imperial politics (Haas et al., 2024; Sandler 2024). Between 1933 and 1945, the FFO coordinated the Nazi regime's politics in Europe and beyond (Conze et al. 2010). Following the end of World War II, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were created, each with their own foreign ministry. In 1989, the GDR was dissolved, its state structures partially incorporated and economically transformed into the FRG. Foreign policy matters were incorporated in the FFO, development matters in the BMZ. The siloing of foreign and development policy persists until today. Although Germany has been following a feminist development policy (FDP) since 2021, FDP and FFP show little overlap and must be understood as policies *written and implemented by individual ministries*, not government policies. While the FDP also addresses colonialism, it does so within the

remit and discourse specific to the BMZ and German development policy. A comparative analysis of FFP and FDP discourse on colonialism is beyond the scope of this article.

To analyze our material, we follow a discourse-theoretical analysis (Doty 1996; Shepherd 2008). We understand discourse as a form and expression of power and knowledge (Said 1994) that creates hegemony and regimes of truth (Foucault 1977). These regimes build around what Laclau and Mouffe (2014) call “nodal points” — superordinate markers that attach meaning to central terms or concepts to create discursive coherence. Nodal points thus contribute to a seeming discursive stability that emerges from a relatively undisputed understanding of certain terms or concepts. However, discourse is always unstable and mutually dependent on other discourses, forming an interconnected meaning-producing grid (Doty 1996). In foreign policy, discourse may produce a perceived coherence in a state’s political agenda by creating specific subject positions and hierarchies in relation to those marked as Others. It may establish a sense of communicative entity and, thus, a certain understanding of statehood. In line with this, we understand our selection of foreign policy texts as central sites that produce meaning as an intertextual and mutually constitutive entity (Kristeva 1972; Said 2003).⁹ Hence, this material corpus is indicative of the government’s discourse on Germany’s colonial past in relation to its FFP and its cultural and social foreign policy.

Our analysis consists of a double reading (Shepherd 2008, 28–9), with each reading following a coding manual. Through the first, descriptive reading we identified how texts made reference to colonialism, colonial histories, and FFP. During the second, discourse-theoretical reading we focused on the construction of discursive stability by (1) mapping out nodal points in the discursive terrain (Laclau and Mouffe 2014; Shepherd 2008, 28–9); (2) presupposition analysis to identify which background knowledge is taken for granted (Doty 1993, 306; 1996); and (3) an analysis of predication and subject positioning to interrogate how subjects are created and positioned vis-à-vis Others (Doty 1993, 306; Milliken 1999, 232–4; Shepherd 2008, 30). These readings make visible how German foreign policy discourse creates relatively stable representations of historically responsible statehood and produces regimes of truth that make reproducing coloniality possible.

Colonialism and Coloniality in German FFP

For our analysis, we focus on German foreign policy and specifically on German cultural and societal foreign policy, with the latter focus emerging from the material. This policy area includes matters of education and cultural programs for the preservation of cultural artifacts outside of Germany and the restitution of colonial loot.

Through our feminist post-structural double reading, we identify three discursive elements. These elements both constitute and reproduce important nodal points and structure the discursive representation of German colonialism and coloniality. First, German colonialism is temporarily limited to the

Wilhelmine empire (1871–1919) and is discussed only in reference to formerly colonized states that are considered important partners for Germany. Second, direct references to FFP remain largely absent from the documents. Instead, gendered notions of self-reflexivity and self-reflection, listening, and care, rooted in a broader FFP discourse, reproduce Germany as a responsible state. Third, the creation of multiple Others allows for the actual reflective work to be externalized to formerly colonized people, and for the German state to realize political, economic, and social benefits. We argue that elements of and direct references to FFP serve to constitute the German state as particularly responsible and as having championed both its historical debt to formerly colonized states and a more just foreign policy. As this remains performative, we contend that FFP perpetuates a colonial sense of remembrance superiority as part of a theater of reconciliation.

The Temporal and Geographical Positioning of Germany's Colonial Past

“This [creating partnerships with African states] is exactly why it is so important that we face our colonial history. I am explicitly referring to my fellow Germans in the audience. It is part of an active foreign policy. It is part of a foreign policy with respect for others. That we draw conclusions from the dark chapters of our history” (Baerbock 2023c).¹⁰

Like the above quote, texts continuously reference German colonialism as “dark chapter of our history” or, alternatively, as “era” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022f; Keul 2022a). Here, colonialism emerges as a phenomenon of an imperial past that occurred within an unchallenged and fixed temporal frame between 1871 to 1919 (see also Auswärtiges Amt 2023c). This (falsely) suggests that German colonialism came to an abrupt end with the end of World War I and the Treaty of Versailles with no further ramifications.

These temporal markers allow to construct a period for which Wilhelmine Germany and its colonial administration carries legal, political, and economic responsibility: a “colonial inheritance” (Baerbock 2022a). Thus, this period is treated as a closed historical chapter that remains detached from today’s Germany and any German successor state after 1919. This implies that prior to and after this period, colonialism and global empire were of no relevance to German history (Guoaffo and Tsogang Fossi 2019; Kirey 2023; Todzi 2023). It also sidelines continuities of colonialism that evolved in the Weimar Republic (1919–33), the Nazi Regime (1933–45), or the GDR (1949–90), and that persist in formerly colonized states and within Germany today (Haas et al. 2024). Current government representatives can thus claim that previous governments and the post-war German society have mishandled the remembrance of Germany’s colonial histories, which it now seeks to reckon with: “For far too long did we in Germany downplay or ignore the colonial era. As a society. As a government” (Keul 2022a).

Contrasting the past — Germany did not address its role as colonial power — with the present — the German government takes responsibility — helps underscore the current government’s ambitions. The government, and Germany, almost appear as brave: “We face up to our history of colonialism” (Baerbock

2022b). This helps situate colonialism as a past problem to be dealt with today, as the following quote ahead of the restitution of the Benin Bronzes¹¹ shows:

“Today we are taking a step that was long overdue: we are returning twenty Benin bronzes from German museums to where they belong, to their homeland. This will not heal all the wounds of the past. But together with the federal states, cities and museums, we are showing that Germany is serious about coming to terms with its dark colonial history. Including by giving the relevant countries back a part of their history [...]” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022a)

Yet, while the wounds of the past affect bilateral relations today, they are just that: of the past.

According to Baerbock (2022a), the return of the Bronzes heralds the start of a “second phase of cultural cooperation” — insinuating there was a previous phase in the first place. While restitution is celebrated as a particularly meaningful achievement of German cultural foreign policy, there remains a silence around the tedious and often racially underpinned negotiations which preceded their return. Instead, restitution of the Bronzes becomes a flagship of German cultural and social foreign policy, symbolizing a successful politics of remembrance. Yet, the over 40,000 African cultural and spiritual artifacts that remain scattered across German archives and museums (Savoy 2022) make this appear rather performative. By situating German colonialism in the past and as part of its cultural and social foreign policy, the discourse is further limited to restitution of artifacts looted within the set temporal time frame and thus makes an analysis of colonial power relations in German FFP and as part of a multidirectional politics of remembrance impossible (Azarmandi 2018; Conrad 2011; Rothberg 2009).

The above quote is also exemplary for how elements of FFP may serve to stabilize the notion of a historically responsible German state — a theme to which we return in more detail below. For now, we contend that feminist principles of empathy and care — “healing wounds of the past” — and the notion of historical responsibility and awareness as a guiding motif of German foreign policy — taking German “dark colonial history” seriously — co-stabilize each other. The temporal and geographic positioning of German colonialism thus relies on elements of FFP and notions of historical responsibility. Opposite to what the FFP guidelines suggest, addressing “historically grown power relations” (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 9) that persist remains largely invisible. Together with the fixed temporal frame, this reinstates a theater of reconciliation (Czollek 2023).

Our double reading further shows the FFP’s conceptualization of *where* colonialism occurred, what it entailed, and which actors were involved. Almost all documents under analysis position German colonialism as part of “European colonialism” (Baerbock 2024b) in abstract “colonial contexts” (Auswärtiges Amt 2024), or as a history common with the G7 (Baerbock 2022a). This suggests that colonialism was a political agenda in places far away from imperial centers, located outside of European national confines (Anievas et al. 2015). There is no discussion of colonialism and its impact as inherent to societies within European

and G7 countries. Hence, racism and other legacies of colonialism that still impact political, economic, and social realities in Europe are cast aside (Terkessidis 2019). Instead, the discourse primarily locates colonialism on the African continent, with a focus on Namibia, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Tanzania (Auswärtiges Amt 2022e). Colonialism is disjointed from its perpetrators, through references to “the legacy of colonialism as a heavy burden for the new independent African states” (Baerbock 2022a) and more subtly by direct and indirect reference to the Berlin Conference of 1884–5 (Auswärtiges Amt 2022a, Keul 2022a), which cemented African geographical and social realities. Samoa, colonized by Germany until 1914, only appears once (Auswärtiges Amt 2022g), while other regions under German colonial rule are missing completely, including the Marshall Islands or the Chinese mainland. In addition, there is no reference to German complicity in the wider workings of global empire beyond regions under official German colonial rule, including in South Asia or South America. The focus on Africa is tied to German political, economic, and social interests (Auswärtiges Amt 2022d, Baerbock 2022a). We return to this point below.

A particularly stable nodal point evolves from references to a *shared and volatile history* of colonialism between Europe and Africa in general and between Germany and Cameroon, Nigeria, and Tanzania in particular. As State Minister Keul (2022b) explains, “Europe and Africa are connected through a shared future.” And further: “Cameroon and Germany are linked by comprehensive bilateral relations but also a shared history.” With this, states such as Cameroon are framed as successors of former colonies and as their representatives. They are constructed as amicable bilateral counterparts who share a past, present and future that pave the way for cooperation “[...] between nowadays two equal partners” (Keul 2024), based on “more than 60 years of close cooperation” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022f). The language of a *shared history* emerged at the FFO’s Colonialism as Shared History Conference in 2020, which African scholars, including the keynote speaker Yvonne A. Owur, criticized adamantly. Speaking of a shared history not only euphemistically equates the German colonizer with the colonized in their experience of coming to terms with colonialism and its aftermath. As Owur (2020) highlights, it is also ignorant of the “[...] existential wound-creating encounter with structures, systems, ways of thought that penetrate our lives to this moment.” It thus invisibilizes and violently whitewashes the immeasurable suffering and its aftermath that Germany is responsible for.

Despite this criticism, German foreign policy discourse continues to use this framing. For, this nodal point provides discursive relief to the German state, reproducing the notion of an international actor who demonstrates viable historical responsibility. Relying on the language of a “shared history” then, enables German representatives to speak of “future relations” and “true partnership” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022f). Suggested as a politics of remembrance that serves all partners equally, it becomes a matter of reaping economic and political benefits and thus reinscribes coloniality into the relations between the formerly colonized and the colonizer (Bendix 2018; Quijano 2000). We return to this point again below. For now, those performative claims complement the

hypocrisy with which Germany has attempted to implement its FFP (Mukalazi and Habte 2024): a theater of reconciliation (Czollek 2023).

The Creation of Responsible Statehood

Ahead of her journey to Cameroon in 2022, State Minister Katja Keul announced: “It is important to me to make progress in coming to terms with Germany’s colonial past in Cameroon. The death sentence against King Rudolf Douala Manga Bell in 1914 is a clear example of colonial injustice.¹² My message during the trip will be: *Germany stands by this responsibility*” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022e, emphasis added). In 2022, while signing a political declaration on the return of the Benin bronzes to Nigeria, Foreign Minister Baerbock (2022b) similarly declared: “This is the beginning of correcting the injustice that has been done. More such agreements will follow. That is why this is also a historic moment for us. Because *we are facing up to our history of colonialism*” (emphasis added). Both these quotes retell certain aspects of German colonialism so that practices associated with FFP — care and listening — may emerge as an answer to it. In doing so, they illustrate the creation of German responsible statehood. This is a very stable nodal point and notion of Self, reproduced in virtually all texts under analysis, and rooted in both a discourse of exceptionalism and an established discursive claim that Germany champions its historical responsibility for the Nazi terrors and the Shoah (Czollek 2023).

As explored above, German (foreign) policy discourse has long since positioned Germany as a state that is exceptional in dealing with its past. Although the emphasis on “never again” emerged in the late 1980s, it is falsely framed as a guiding motif of German foreign policy that has existed since 1945 (Auswärtiges Amt 2022b; 2023b; Baerbock 2023c; Keul 2022a). “Never again” arises out of the special historical and moral responsibility (*besondere Verantwortung*) as former genocidal state (Auswärtiges Amt 2022b; Baerbock 2023a; 2023c; SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and FDP 2021) — a notion that is so widely shared that it is one of the undisputed “truths,” or nodal points, within and beyond the German foreign policy discourse. By addressing its past, Germany appears to take responsibility, face up to history, and deal with the consequences.

This has led to the creation of a specific German exceptionalism and moral superiority (Amjahid 2021), upheld by the discursive claim that Germany has moved far away from the crimes committed during the Nazi regime. Texts under analysis subtly re-instantiate this claim. Although speakers acknowledge the violence committed by previous German governments, including during colonialism (e.g., Baerbock 2023a; 2024b), repeated claims that Germany lives up to its responsibility (e.g., Auswärtiges Amt 2022e; Baerbock 2022b), that it has even completed a “shift in consciousness” (Baerbock 2024a), maintain a sense of exceptionalism. Interestingly, in our analytical reading, exceptionally responsible statehood does not emerge from addressing the GDR’s political systems of injustice — only from taking responsibility for the Shoah and, recently, German colonial history.

This sense of exceptionally responsible statehood is very stable, despite it being powerfully challenged by the lived realities of those not easily embodying

imaginings of the white German nation and those resisting German systems of political violence. Consider, as discussed above, the inconsistent process of denazification in the 1940s and 1950s. Or else, the significantly increased levels of right-wing extremist, antisemitic, and racist violence between the 1980s and 2000s, resulting in the murder of at least 262 refugees and migrants, people of Jewish and Muslim faith, Black folks and people of color, disabled folks, anti-fascist activists, homeless people, and others. Ten were killed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU),¹³ a terror cell whose right-wing extremist motivation was disregarded by the state until 2011. More recently, the antisemitic and racist attacks in Halle (2019) and Hanau (2020) have challenged the “truth” of responsible statehood,¹⁴ as has the failure of the German state to respond to those. These attacks and the broader systems of violence that inspire them do not play a role for the German FFP, nor are they recognized in FFP texts or talk (Habte 2022). Although they show the cracks in the discursive creation of exceptionally responsible statehood, they do not destabilize the discourse itself.

Within this discourse, as discussed above, the emphasis on addressing Germany’s *colonial* past through foreign policy is relatively recent. The 2018 coalition agreement between the Conservatives and Social Democrats is the first to mention colonial history and to situate it in relation to foreign cultural and social policy: “We want to strengthen cultural cooperation with Africa and promote greater cultural exchange, in particular by a reappraisal of colonialism [*Aufarbeitung*] and establishing museums and cultural institutions in Africa” (CDU/CSU and SPD 2018). The 2021 LGBTI Inclusion Strategy for Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation is one of the first *foreign* policy documents to mention colonial history, stating that it is to be considered as an “essential” aspect alongside local history, life stories, and traditions of LGBTI folks as well as missionary history (Bundesregierung 2021, 5). Yet, our double reading shows that the foreign policy discourse continues to perceive reconciliation of any history of violence through the German politics of commemorating the Shoah, which remains singular (Kultusministerkonferenz 2019; see also Auswärtiges Amt 2019).¹⁵ This static, inflexible understanding of Germany’s historical responsibility and remembrance means that any commemoration of violent histories must first be *extended* beyond the Shoah, to include colonialism.

This also appears as necessary because Germany’s colonial legacy is not widely known in German society, as shown above. The argument that colonialism did not play a role in German history, or that Germany was not as “bad” as France or the British Empire, persists (Zimmerer 2023). This nodal point is visible in how texts repeatedly highlight that Germany must “face the truth” about its past: “It is important to me that my country faces the truth about our past in Tanzania. Today I am here to speak about that truth. German colonial rule in Tanzania was inhumane and cruel,” explains State Minister Keul (2024) during a commemoration ceremony, before discussing evidence for this violence at length. For, it cannot be presupposed that the acceptance of Germany’s violent colonial past is taken for granted: “For far too long, we have ignored or forgotten about colonial crimes. As a society. As a government. And as the Federal Foreign Office. Although more and more experts and institutions are dealing intensively with colonialism, the broader public is still quite unaware of this part of Germany’s

history” (Keul 2024). Similar to Sweden, there is a “collective memory of colonial innocence” (Bergman Rosamond, Cheung, and Leeuw 2023, 12). Even though German colonial amnesia seems to crumble slowly, the manner in which political awareness is raised reinforces an already existent remembrance superiority.

FFP provides a vehicle to address German colonial history, though its inclusion in the German foreign policy discourse started earlier, as noted above. However, the construction of German responsible statehood within the discourse remains the same. As Baerbock explains in response to a question about the composition of the G7, “For me, the G7 is not a circle of power that is better than others, but as the strongest democracies and economic nations, we have a special responsibility. Historically, because we have caused suffering worldwide with colonialism [...]” (Kramer-Santel and Fier 2022). Germany has an exceptional responsibility given its status as former colonial power (Auswärtiges Amt 2023b; 2023c; SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and FDP 2021) and largest European economy (Baerbock 2023c), and is willing to face up to this responsibility (e.g., Auswärtiges Amt 2022e; Baerbock 2022b). Such emphasis tells us that first, addressing the German colonial past is not yet the norm in German foreign policy discourse. Emphasizing responsibility for colonialism is an attempt at normalizing its inclusion in the discourse and practice of German foreign policy. This relies on, second, terms already established within the discourse. Framing Germany’s colonial past in relation to responsible statehood means framing it in terms already intelligible and recognizable. This makes extending responsible statehood beyond the Shoah possible and decenters “dealing with” the Shoah as the main source of such statehood. Notably, key foreign policy texts such as the German FFP guidelines do not mention the Shoah, World War II, or the Nazi regime (Zilla 2024, 6).

FFP is positioned as allowing the German government to realize its claim to historical responsibility through gendered notions of listening to, caring about, and taking seriously the needs and experiences of those formerly colonized, as well as through self-reflexivity or self-reflection. Our descriptive reading shows that these notions emerge from the broader FFP discourse rather than the FFP guidelines (alone). As Baerbock (2024b) explains during a restitution ceremony in Australia, “For me, this international obligation [to the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage] is closely linked to another: namely, to deal openly and reflectively with one’s own past. And to be prepared to listen – to those who suffered the loss of their cultural heritage during European colonization” (see also Baerbock 2022c; 2022d; 2024c; Keul 2022a). Here, responsible statehood is extended to include self-reflexivity, listening, and care, constituting Germany as a caring and listening partner. This is reproduced in the broader German FFP discourse, which, as we discuss below, relies on the creation of Others toward which these practices may be extended. Consequently, Germany emerges as a particular responsible, even feminist, actor, which renders its benevolence performative. This is similar to how other FFP states have constructed their Selves around notions of feminist care (Bergman Rosamond, Cheung, and Leeuw 2023), but distinct in its emphasis on historical responsibility.

The construction of German responsible statehood presupposes and thus reproduces the already mentioned distinction between past and present. This

helps celebrate the current government's ambitions and stabilizes the subject position of exceptionally German responsible statehood. Germany emerges as distinct to its past colonial Self, depicted as a backward Other, now transformed into its feminist, responsible present Self.

Producing Multiple Others

Attempts to produce discursive closure around the German Self, and specifically exceptionally responsible statehood, rely on the representation and thus production of Others. There are multiple Others articulated in policy texts who occupy varying “degrees of difference and Otherness” (Hansen 2006, 45). Three subject positions appear as particularly visible: that of African governments (equal partners and critics of German foreign policy); African non-governmental actors, specifically representatives of formerly colonized people (groups to be included by the state); and scholars located in former German colonies (researchers of German colonial history that help Germany better understand its past). All these subjects are located in the global majority world, specifically Africa, and are part of an ongoing production of representations of the “Global South” (Doty 1996).

Throughout the discourse, there is a strong emphasis on *partnership* with African governments — a notion that invokes colonial legacies through its negation of colonial power relations. As Baerbock announced while signing the already mentioned political declaration, “It is no coincidence that we have reached this historic agreement with Nigeria, a strategic partner for us in Africa. [...] The Benin bronzes remind us that we must face up to our past together with our African partners. And they show us that if we take responsibility, we can create a better future: a future based on trust and constructive partnership” (Baerbock 2022b; see also Auswärtiges Amt 2022d; Baerbock 2024c). Cameroon similarly appears as a partner with whom colonial history may be worked through (Auswärtiges Amt 2022e; Baerbock 2024c), as do Namibia (Auswärtiges Amt 2022b; Baerbock 2024c), Tanzania (Auswärtiges Amt 2022f; 2023d; Keul 2024), Kenya (Baerbock 2024c), and select African states lauded for their democratizing efforts such as Ghana (Auswärtiges Amt 2022c). The African continent as a whole and the African Union are also positioned as important partners for knowledge exchange (Keul 2022b; Baerbock 2023b), including on the representation of women in public offices (Baerbock 2022a). Within the German foreign policy discourse, addressing Germany's colonial past is understood to be a precondition for a “true” partnership.

These partners are also positioned as (legitimate) critics of German foreign policy and specifically German colonialism. As Baerbock (2023c) explains to heads of German missions abroad, “I am convinced that if we want to strengthen our partnerships in Africa, Latin America and Asia, we must be prepared to listen and to question ourselves, but also to allow ourselves to be questioned. It's not always pleasant to be told: ‘How should we support you with your view of Ukraine? What about you? Where were you back then when we needed you? Where was West Germany when we were fighting against apartheid in South Africa?’” (see also Baerbock 2023a). This not only distances the current German government from its

predecessor via the emphasis on West Germany. It also underlines that facing criticism from former colonies is necessary to get their support in dealing with current crises and conflicts (Baerbock 2022c). Criticism is both legitimated and firmly positioned in relation to past, not present, wrongdoing.

At the same time, there is a (performative) sense of benevolence. Across speeches, government representatives display avowals to self-reflexivity and criticality, claiming that “we were silent for too long” (Keul 2022a) or “we want to listen and critically self-reflect” (Baerbock 2022a). These invoke the image of a benevolent counterpart who has learned their lesson, and as a patient listener who pays attention to its partners. For, the return of cultural artifacts is not only underscored in the form of spoken and written word. As photos within the documents show, high-level representatives of the German government — Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Federal Commissioner for Cultural and the Media Claudia Roth — perform the return of artifacts to their partners in a particularly amicable manner (Auswärtiges Amt 2022d; 2024). Yet, these practices must be understood as constituting a theater of reconciliation, partially because they occur under hierarchical diplomatic protocols as the subject construction of non-governmental actors illustrates.

Notably, non-governmental actors hardly appear in the discourse. If they do, they appear through references to representatives of formerly colonized people, particularly those that experienced genocidal violence such as the OvaHerero, Nama, and San. Unlike government actors, they are not understood as equal partners. This is particularly clear in the debate around the 2021 German-Namibian Joint Declaration on reconciliation and the colonial past (*Versöhnungsabkommen*), which was heavily criticized by representatives of OvaHerero, Nama, and San peoples for its exclusions. Requested renegotiations were denied by the German government. As the FFO’s speaker clarified during a press conference in 2022, “The Federal Government’s negotiating partner is and remains the Namibian government.” And further: “The Federal Government has an interest in ensuring the voices of the Nama and Herero (sic!), the voices of the descendants of the victims, are included in this negotiation process. This has been the case so far. However, only the Namibian government can be a negotiating partner on an equal footing” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022b). This privileges state-state relations and inflexible diplomatic protocols as restitution efforts are made conditional on state structures that resemble the German democratic system.

It also reaffirms the power relations between the German state and foreign policy receivers: if formerly colonized people appear as relevant for addressing Germany’s colonial past, they must first be included by Germany as a condition of their agency. They and their demands, experiences, and needs are not taken seriously as legitimate knowers and agents (decolonize berlin 2024; Ndorokaze 2021; this is similar to other foreign policy contexts, see, e.g., Färber in Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023; Weerawardhana 2018). Although their stories are told to legitimize German feminist foreign policy and invoke historical responsibility — think back to King Rudolf Manga Bell (Keul 2022a) — this remains part of a theater of reconciliation (Czollek 2023). Germany appears as the active foreign policy agent in addressing its colonial past, not in response to social justice claims or as an act of empathetic listening, but as a natural extension of responsible statehood.

How are these subject positions taken up in German FFP discourse? The German FFP guidelines are particularly instructive here. In the section on cultural and societal relations, they read: “A self-critical look at one’s own history is part and parcel of feminist societal diplomacy. This includes an approach that reflects post-colonial realities. We fund scholarships for academics from the former German colonial regions to research German colonial history and its impact” (Auswärtiges Amt 2023a, 56). This creates another subject position and Other: that of the scholar located in former German colonies, helping Germany to better understand its past. The creation of scholarships is not a new idea: it was first suggested by State Minister Michelle Müntefering in 2020, during the FFO-sponsored conference on Colonialism as Shared History (Müntefering 2020). While Müntefering originally included both German scholars and scholars from former colonies, the former have disappeared in German FFP discourse. Although we cannot trace when and how this cut was made, it is in line with the external orientation of German FFP that focuses on people and places elsewhere (Habte 2022). This externalizes actual reflexive work and stabilizes racial-colonial hierarchies and divisions of labor in knowledge production systems, including academia (Sauer 2023; see also Gani and Marshall 2022). Social justice claims of formerly colonized people do not appear in the texts under analysis, nor do diaspora communities located in Germany and their demands for German (feminist) foreign policy. Instead, we find a state-centric notion of reflexivity and responsibility that maintains the subject creation of the German state as exceptionally responsible, without addressing its implications in colonial power that are visible across “foreign” and “domestic” realms. In this context, claims to care, listening, and self-reflexivity as part of the German FFP become performative.

Overall, historical responsibility is mobilized to harness political and economic gains vis-à-vis “partners,” mainly through restitution practices. While this is important to hold Germany accountable for its historical responsibility, restitutions are negotiated under the premise of instrumental benefits that simultaneously promise economic gains or other states’ support in dealing with current crises and conflicts (e.g., Baerbock 2022c; 2024a). In the case of Nigeria, reconciliation and historical responsibility narratives are followed by references to the country’s economic position, its large number of peacekeeping troops, and German efforts to “stabilize” the region, which drive German interests to “cooperate” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022d). At the same time, and as Germany is constructed as caring and listening, Germany’s credibility as a (feminist) foreign policy leader is enhanced (on credibility, see Färber 2025a). This exceeds mobilizing memory politics in diplomacy as a means to foreign policy gain (Bachleitner 2019). As Baerbock (2024c) claims, “A house that is aware of its own history is a house, a Foreign Office, that becomes stronger as a result. Externally, as a player that benefits from global partnerships built on trust. Internally, as an employer that is modern and attractive because it accepts critical debates.” In other words, addressing colonialism has instrumental benefits for Germany, and FFP helps achieve those.

Tying historical responsibility narratives to German political and economic interests does not transform foreign policy in a sense that is conducive to an FFP. Instead, it reproduces relations and structures of soft power, which Hamm (2023) describes as a means to secure a former colonial actor’s realm of influence. The

centering of German sensibilities reinscribes coloniality into the relations between the formerly colonized and the colonizer. It is rather unsurprising that an analysis of the power differentials inscribed into these “historically grown relations” (Auswärtiges Amt 2022f) remains absent. For, the discourse evokes German remembrance superiority (Amjahid 2021), which translates from domestic memory politics into its foreign policy. Addressing Germany’s colonial past through its FFP becomes a form of hypocrisy (Mukalazi and Habte 2024) and remains a theater of reconciliation (Czollek 2023).

Conclusion

In this article, we have asked how the German FFP discourse addresses colonialism, how the notion of historical responsibility is positioned therein, and what political work this does. Through a discourse-theoretical analysis, we brought the socio-critical concepts *theater of reconciliation* (Czollek 2023) and *remembrance superiority* (Amjahid 2021) in conversation with FFP and historical scholarship. We find that German colonialism is addressed in a limited temporal and geographic scope, which allows officials to establish the notion of shared and volatile histories between colonizer and colonized. This framing erases and whitewashes histories of violence and racism that continue to permeate international politics and foreign policy (Anievas et al. 2015).

The positioning of colonial histories in German FFP discourse expands on an established sense of Germany as a historically responsible state. By emphasizing feminist principles of care, listening, and critical self-reflexivity, this Self is reproduced, extended, and thus strengthened: the German state is an already established champion of historical responsibility and remembrance, but now it includes feminist principles that make it even more responsible and morally superior. This serves political and economic objectives rather than social justice claims: a performance of historical responsibility. As such, it allows for a (re) historicization of Germany’s colonial past and glosses over how colonial structures persist and are inherent to German foreign policy today. Overall, German FFP reinforces an established foreign policy discourse that relies on motifs of historical responsibility and that remains resistant to a multidirectional politics of remembrance (Rothberg 2009). This reproduces an ongoing theater of reconciliation and remembrance superiority, both of which affect reconciliation processes between the current German state and descendants of German colonial violence.

Our analysis cannot account for an overall assessment of Germany’s contemporary foreign policy nor can it trace differences and similarities in German foreign policies prior to the announcement of an FFP. When are FFP and historical responsibility mobilized, and when do they remain silent? A more comprehensive assessment of historically grown structures and framings that underscore (German) FFP is needed, as are further studies on the intersections of coloniality, race, and gender to trace the colonial origins and presents of FFP and (German) foreign policy in general. This includes analyses of the failure of German foreign policy toward Afghanistan (Bundestag 2024), its inconsistent

foreign policy toward Syria, Turkey, and Kurdistan as well as Palestine and Israel, which currently faces “several international judicial proceedings for international law violations and genocide in Gaza” (Engelcke and Pfeifer 2024).

We hope that this article may serve as a point of departure for further analyses of coloniality in German and other states’ FFPs. We specifically encourage more historically grounded research on FFP and coloniality, to deconstruct fixed historical and geographical confines that enable a specific historiography of (German) colonialism and involvement in global empire. As we demonstrate in this article, such analysis can help explain which forms of engagement with colonial pasts and legacies are rendered intelligible, and how foreign policy and FFP in particular may uphold and strengthen colonial hierarchies, including through the creation of Selves and Others. This type of analysis further complicates questions as to whether states and foreign policies within a capitalist world system can truly be feminist (Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Parashar et al. 2018), or whether addressing colonial pasts through FFP may rather serve political, economic, and social interests. Based on our findings, we echo Dirik’s (2023) claim that (German) FFP does not challenge but stabilize positions of power within said international system.

This article emerges at a time when activists, artists, scholars, and their allies have been heavily critical of the political and economic motivations that guide how (settler) colonial states such as Germany deal with their histories of violence. Espousing the selective engagement with legacies of colonialism in foreign policies and FFPs and how they are predominantly driven by national interests and not by historical responsibility toward the formerly colonized remains crucial.

Acknowledgments. We are grateful to the Gendering International Relations Working Group for putting together the panel “Feminist Foreign Policy: Labelling, Narratives and Performativity” and to Laura Sjöberg for her helpful comments at BISA’s annual conference in Birmingham in 2024. We would like to express our gratitude to Toni Haastrup, Jennifer Thomson, and Columba Achilleos-Sarll as well as the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

Funding. This research was supported in part by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Notes

1. Sweden (2014–22), Canada (2017), France (2018), Luxembourg (2019–23), Mexico (2020), Libya (2021), Liberia (2021), Spain (2021), Germany (2021–5), Chile (2021), the Netherlands (2022–3/4), Colombia (2023), Argentina (2023), Mongolia (2023), Scotland (2023), Slovenia (2023).
2. The terms Global North and Global South entail an “entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained” (Dados and Connell 2012, 13).
3. The 2023 Scottish position paper on a feminist approach to international relations commits to an anti-colonial vision: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2023/11/taking-feminist-approach-international-relations/documents/taking-feminist-approach-international-relations/taking-feminist-approach-international-relations/govscot%3Adocument/taking-feminist-approach-international-relations.pdf>.
4. Tanzania, then Tanganyika, was part of “German East Africa” from 1885 to 1918. Between 1905 and 1907, several ethnic and religious groups resisted the colonizers during the Maji Maji Rebellion. German colonial powers responded with genocidal tactics, killing as many as 300,000 people.

5. We acknowledge the Euro- and Western-centric discursive productions of East and West (Hall 2018). Here, this categorization highlights the discrepancies in the self-understanding of certain FFP states as Western and their proclaimed distinction to Others.
6. We focus on the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and exclude the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as this is beyond the scope of this article (see Wentker 2007).
7. The GDR already installed memorials in the late 1950s and 1960s, which inspired similar memorials in the FRG.
8. The term “development” suggests that societies progress toward economic, political, and societal objectives in a linear fashion. This conception is rooted in Euro-/Western-centric, civilizationist, and racist logics that presuppose European and Western dominance. Maintaining such dominance is one of the reasons why European and North American states pursue “development policies.”
9. The texts also establish intervisuality through the reproduction of photographs and/or other visual materials. An intervisual analysis is beyond the scope of this article.
10. All translations from German to English by the authors.
11. The British looted the Kingdom of Benin’s cultural artifacts in 1897. Artifacts were bought by a German diplomat. More than 1,100 bronzes are yet to be returned.
12. King Rudolf Douala Manga Bell was a Duala king and leader in the resistance to German colonial authorities in today’s Cameroon. He was reported and hanged for treason in 1914.
13. Their names are Enver Şimşek, Abdurrahim Özüdoğru, Süleyman Taşköprü, Habil Kılıç, Mehmet Turgut, İsmail Yaşar, Theodoros Boulgarides, Mehmet Kubaşık, Halit Yozgat, und Michèle Kiesewetter.
14. In Halle, an attacker unsuccessfully attempted to enter the synagogue during Yom Kippur, killed Jana Lange and Kevin Schwarze, and injured two others. In Hanau, a far-right extremist injured five and killed nine people: Gökhan Gültekin, Ferhat Unvar, Mercedes Kierpacz, Said Nesar Hashemi, Sedat Gürbüz, Fatih Saraçoğlu, Hamza Kurtović, Kaloyan Velkov, and Vili Viorel Păun.
15. For a discussion of singularity, see Wagner (2022).

References

- Achilleos-Sarll, Columba. 2018. “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis).” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 19 (1): 34–49.
- Achilleos-Sarll, Columba. 2023. “The (Dis-)Appearance of Race in the United Kingdom’s Institution-alization and Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.” *International Studies Quarterly* 67 (1): sqad006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad006>
- Achilleos-Sarll, Columba, Jennifer Thomson, Toni Haastrup, Karoline Färber, Carol Cohn, and Paul Kirby. 2022. “The Past, Present, and Future(s) of Feminist Foreign Policy.” *International Studies Review* 25 (1): viac068. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac068>
- African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies. 2023. “Statement of Intent on Feminist Informed Policies Abroad and at Home.” *African Arguments*. July 21. <https://africanarguments.org/2023/07/statement-of-intent-on-feminist-informed-policies-abroad-and-at-home/>.
- Aggestam, Karin, and Jacqui True. 2020. “Gendering Foreign Policy: A Comparative Framework for Analysis.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (2): 143–62.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. 1997. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge.
- Amjahid, Mohamed. 2021. *Der weiße Fleck: Eine Anleitung zu antirassistischem Denken*. München: Piper.
- Anievas, Alexander, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds. 2015. *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ansorg, Nadine, Toni Haastrup, and Katharine A.M. Wright. 2021. “Foreign Policy and Diplomacy. Feminist Interventions.” In *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, eds. Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, and Elise Féron, 202–11. New York: Routledge.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2019. Ressortgemeinsame Strategie zur Unterstützung von „Vergangenheitsarbeit und Versöhnung (Transitional Justice)“ im Kontext von Krisenprävention, Konfliktbewältigung

- und Friedensförderung. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2247406/818f4a11299421d6d6b7780b39681dc9/190917-vergangenheitsarbeit-und-versoehnung-data.pdf>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022a. Außenministerin Baerbock vor ihrer Abreise nach Nigeria. Berlin. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2569882?pk_campaign=newsletter_Pressemitteilung_2022_12_18&pk_kwd=link_Außenministerin+Baerbock+vor+ihrer+Abreise+nach+Nigeria.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022b. Erklärungen des Auswärtigen Amtes in der Regierungspressekonferenz vom 26.01.2022. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/regierungspressekonferenz/2508616>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022c. "G7-Afrika-Konferenz in Berlin: Demokratien gemeinsam widerstandsfähiger machen." [Article], last modified September 26, 2022. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/regelbasierte-internationale-ordnung/g7-g20/g7/g7-afrika-konferenz/2554332>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022d. Geraubte Geschichte, selbstbestimmte Gegenwart: Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock reist nach Nigeria. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/laender/nigeria-node/baerbock-nigeria-benin-bronzen/2569610>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022e. Staatsministerin Keul vor ihrer Reise nach Kamerun und Kenia. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2560888>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022f. Staatsministerin Keul vor ihrer Reise nach Tansania und Südsudan. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/keul-suedsudan-tansania/2522190?pk_campaign=newsletter_Pressemitteilung_2022_04_08&pk_kwd=link_Staatsministerin+Keul+vor+ihrer+Reise+nach+Tansania+und+Südsudan.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2022g. "Ein Freund im Südpazifik: 50 Jahre diplomatische Beziehungen mit Samoa." [Article], last modified May 17, 2022. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/laender/samoa-node/50-jahre-diplo-beziehungen/2531640>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2023a. Feministische Außenpolitik gestalten: Leitlinien des Auswärtigen Amtes. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2585008/d444590d5a7741acc6e37a142959170e/ll-ffp-data.pdf>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2023b. Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Umfrage zu menschlichen Überresten aus kolonialen Kontexten in Museums- und Universitätsmuseen in Deutschland. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2638916>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2023c. Staatsministerin Katja Keul vor ihrer Reise nach Paris. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2629720>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2023d. Erklärungen des Auswärtigen Amtes in der Regierungspressekonferenz vom 20.03.2023. Berlin. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/regierungspressekonferenz/2588772>.
- Auswärtiges Amt. 2024. "Australien, Neuseeland, Fidschi: Außenministerin Baerbock reist in die Schlüsselregion Indopazifik." [Article], last modified May 1, 2024. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/asien/reise-australien-neuseeland-fidschi/2655284>.
- Aylward, Erin, and Stephen Brown. 2020. "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Canada's 'Feminist' International Assistance." *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 75 (3): 313–28.
- Azarmandi, Mahdis. 2018. "The Racial Silence within Peace Studies." *Peace Review* 30 (1): 69–77.
- Bachleitner, Kathrin. 2019. "Diplomacy with Memory: How the Past Is Employed for Future Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15 (4): 492–508.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2022a. Eröffnungsrede von Außenministerin Baerbock auf der Konferenz „Stärkung der Demokratie – Auf dem Weg zu widerstandsfähigen Institutionen und Gesellschaften in den G7 und in Afrika“. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2554456?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2022_09_26&pk_kwd=link_Eröffnungsrede+von+Außenministerin+Baerbock+auf+der+Konferenz+„Stärkung+der+Demokratie+–+Auf+dem+Weg+zu+widerstandsfähigen+Institutionen+und+Gesellschaften+in+den+G7+und+in+Afrika“.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2022b. Grußwort von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock zur Unterzeichnung einer politischen Erklärung zur Rückgabe der Benin-Bronzen an Nigeria. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/baerbock-benin-bronzen-nigeria/2540454>.

- Baerbock, Annalena. 2022c. In schwierigen Zeiten den transatlantischen Moment nutzen – unsere gemeinsame Verantwortung in einem neuen globalen Umfeld. Rede von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock an der New School, New York. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/baerbock-den-transatlantischen-moment-nutzen/2545656>.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2022d. Rede von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock anlässlich der Übergabe der Benin-Bronzen. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/baerbock-uebergabe-benin-bronzen-an-nigeria/2570312?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2022_12_20&pk_kwd=link_Rede+von+Außenministerin+Annalena+Baerbock%C2%A0anlässlich+der+Übergabe+der+Benin-Bronzen.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2023a. “50 Jahre Deutschland in den Vereinten Nationen – Namensbeitrag von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock.” [Article]. Auswärtiges Amt, last modified September 16, 2023. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/namensbeitrag-von-aussenministerin-baerbock-zu-50-jahren-deutschland-in-den-vereinten-nationen/2616144>.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2023b. Grußwort von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock bei den Feierlichkeiten zum Afrikatag 2023 ausgerichtet von der Gruppe der in Berlin akkreditierten afrikanischen Botschafterinnen und Botschafter in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Auswärtigen Amt. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2599710>.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2023c. Rede von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock zur Eröffnung der Konferenz der Leiterinnen und Leiter deutscher Auslandsvertretungen. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2615096?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2023_09_04&pk_kwd=link_Rede+von+Außenministerin+Annalena+Baerbock+zur+Eröffnung+der+Konferenz+der+Leiterinnen+und+Leiter+deutscher+Auslandsvertretungen.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2024a. Rede von Außenministerin Baerbock zum Gedenken an den 30. Jahrestag des Völkermords an den Tutsi in Ruanda im Bundestag. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2652222?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2024_04_12&pk_kwd=link_Rede+von+Außenministerin+Baerbock+zum+Gedenken+an+den+30.+Jahrestag+des+Völkermords+an+den+Tutsi+in+Ruanda+im+Bundestag.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2024b. Grußwort von Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock anlässlich der Zeremonie zur Rückgabe von vier Kulturgütern an das Volk der Kaurna. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2655918?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2024_05_03&pk_kwd=link_Grußwort+von+Außenministerin+Annalena+Baerbock+anlässlich+der+Zeremonie+zur+Rückgabe+von+vier+Kulturgütern+an+das+Volk+der+Kaurna%C2%A0.
- Baerbock, Annalena. 2024c. Rede von Außenministerin Baerbock anlässlich der Vorstellung des Buches „Das Auswärtige Amt und die Kolonien“. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/rede-kolonialismus/2660398?pk_campaign=newsletter_Rede_2024_06_05&pk_kwd=link_Rede+von+Außenministerin+Baerbock+anlässlich+der+Vorstellung+des+Buches+„Das+Auswärtige+Amt+und+die+Kolonien“.
- Bajohr, Frank, and Rachel O’Sullivan. 2021. “Holocaust, Kolonialismus und NS-Imperialismus: Forschung im Schatten einer polemischen Debatte.” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 70 (1): 191–202.
- Ballhaus Naunynstraße. 2024. “About. Profile”, <https://ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/about/>
- Bendix, Daniel. 2018. *Global Development and Colonial Power: German Development Policy at Home and Abroad*. London/New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Bentley, Tom. 2015. *Empires of Remorse: Narrative, Postcolonialism and Apologies for Colonial Atrocity*. London: Routledge.
- Bergman Rosamond, Annika, Jessica Cheung, and Georgia De Leeuw. 2023. “Caring Feminist States? Paternalistic Feminist Foreign Policies and the Silencing of Indigenous Justice Claims in Sweden and Canada.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 26 (3): 609–632.
- Bouka, Yolande. 2021. “Make Foreign Policies as If Black and Brown Lives Mattered.” In *Feminist Solutions for Ending War*, eds. Megan Hazel MacKenzie and Nicole Wegner, 121–137. London: Pluto Press.
- Bundesregierung. 2021. LSBTI-Inklusionskonzept der Bundesregierung für die Auswärtige Politik und die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2444682/1f19e1ba21d80879c81f77baa6824062/210226-inklusionskonzept-pdf-data.pdf>.

- Bundestag. 2024. 1st Committee of Inquiry (Afghanistan). <https://www.bundestag.de/en/committees/bodies/inquiry/1inquiry>.
- CDU/CSU, and SPD. 2018. Deutschlands Zukunft gestalten. Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD. <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/194886/696f36f795961df200fb27fb6803d83e/koalitionsvertrag-data.pdf>.
- Cheung, Jessica, and Victoria Scheyer. 2024. "Feminist Foreign Policy and Global (Health) Care Work Migration: Addressing the Invisibility of Colonial Gaps in Feminist Policy Making." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* (online first). <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2024.2316403>
- Chowdhry, Geeta, and Sheila Nair. 2002. *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations Reading Race, Gender and Class*. London: Routledge.
- Conrad, Sebastian. 2011. *German Colonialism: A Short History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conrad, Sebastian. 2019. "Rückkehr des Verdrängten? Die Erinnerung an den Kolonialismus in Deutschland 1919–2019." *APuZ - Aus Politik Und Zeitgeschichte* 69 (40–42/2019): 28–33. https://www.bpb.de/system/files/dokument_pdf/APuZ_2019-40-42_online_0.pdf.
- Conze, Eckart, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, and Moshe Zimmermann. 2010. *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik*. München: Karl Blessing Verlag.
- Czollek, Max. 2023. *Versöhnungstheater*. München: Hanser.
- Daase, Christopher, Stefan Engert, Michel-André Horelt, Judith Renner, and Renate Strassner, eds. 2016. *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations: The Importance of Being Sorry*. London: Routledge.
- Dados, Nour, and Raewyn Connell. 2012. "The Global South." *Contexts* 11 (1): 12–3.
- decolonize berlin. 2024. "Decolonize Berlin." <https://decolonize-berlin.de/de/>.
- Dirik, Hêlin. 2023. "Unmögliche Allianz." *Analyse und Kritik*, April 18, 2023. <https://www.akweb.de/ausgaben/692/feministische-aussenpolitik-konzept-und-praxis-deutscher-imperialismus/>.
- Doty, Roxanne Lynn. 1993. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 297–320.
- Doty, Roxanne Lynn. 1996. *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Duriesmith, David. 2018. "Manly States and Feminist Foreign Policy." In *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*, eds. Swati Parashar, J. Ann Tickner, and Jacque True, 51–68. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Engert, Stefan. 2016. "Germany–Namibia: The Belated Apology." In *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations: The Importance of Being Sorry*, eds. Christopher Daase, Stefan Engert, Michel-André Horelt, Judith Renner, and Renate Strassner, 127–45. London: Routledge.
- Enloe, Cynthia H. 2014. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Second edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Engelcke, Dörthe, and Pfeifer, Hanna. 2024. "How Germany Bends International Law to Continue Selling Arms to Israel". *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/germany-israel-bends-international-law-continue-selling-arms>.
- Falschbner, Pia. 2020. "Macht und Erinnerung. Post-koloniale Perspektiven auf die Erinnerungskultur des Kolonialismus." *Wissenschaft und Frieden* 2020/3: 35–8.
- Färber, Karoline. 2025a. "Diversifying the Federal Foreign Office: The German Foreign Policy Discourse on Credibility." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 21 (2): <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraf013>
- Färber, Karoline. 2025b. "Women in 20th Century German Diplomacy: A History of Firsts." In *Gender and Diplomacy: Critical Junctures, Innovations and Future Research Directions*, eds. Elise Stephenson and Khushi Singh Rathore, 75–104. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Feldman, Lily Gardner. 2012. *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Foroutan, Naika. 2019. *Die Postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. "The Political Function of the Intellectual." *Radical Philosophy* 17 (13): 126–33.
- Frei, Norbert. 2012. *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*. München: C. H. Beck.

- Freimüller, Tobias. 2021. "Aufarbeitung, Erinnerung, Gedenken: Die NS-Vergangenheit und die deutsche Gesellschaft." In *Die Zukunft der Erinnerung: Perspektiven des Gedenkens an die Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah*, eds. Christian Wiese, Stefan Vogt, Doron Kiesel, and Gury Schneider-Ludorff, 33–54. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Gani, Jasmine K., and Jenna Marshall. 2022. "The Impact of Colonialism on Policy and Knowledge Production in International Relations." *International Affairs* 98 (1): 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab226>
- Gouaffo, Albert, and Richard Tsogang Fossi. 2019. "Spuren und Erinnerungen hundert Jahre nach der deutschen Kolonialzeit." *APuZ - Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 69 (40–42/2019): 34–9.
- Haas, Carlos, Lars Lehmann, Brigitte Reinwald, and David Simo. 2024. *Das Auswärtige Amt und die Kolonien: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Erbe*. München: C.H.Beck.
- Haastrup, Toni. 2020. "Gendering South Africa's Foreign Policy: Toward a Feminist Approach?" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (2): 199–216.
- Haastrup, Toni. 2023. "Making Feminist Foreign Policy Work for Africa." Economy. Berlin: APRI - Africa Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.59184/sa.021>
- Habte, Fennet. 2022. "Realizing a Feminist Foreign Policy Means Taking Internal (In)Security Seriously." *49Security/GPPi* (blog). December 20, 2022. <https://gppi.net/2022/12/20/realizing-a-feminist-foreign-policy-means-taking-internal-insecurity-seriously>.
- Hall, Stuart. 2018. "Essential Essays, Volume 2." In *Identity and Diaspora*, eds. David Morley, 141–84. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hamm, Aurora. 2023. "German and French Colonial Restitution - 'New Relational Ethics' or Using the Legacy of Empire?" *Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology* September 2023 (6): 84–102.
- Hammerstein, Katrin, and Birgit Hofmann. 2015. "'Wir [...] müssen die Vergangenheit annehmen' – Richard von Weizsäcker Rede zum Kriegsende 1985." Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung. *Deutschland Archiv*. December 18, 2015. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/217619/wir-muessen-die-vergangenheit-annehmen/>.
- Hansen, Lene. 2006. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. London: Routledge.
- Harnisch, Sebastian. 2019. "Erinnerungskultur und Außenpolitik. Wie deutsche Geschichte(n) die internationale Politik prägen." Beitrag für das Internationale Symposium: Die Konstruktion und Entwicklung der deutschen Erinnerungskultur nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Renmin Universität, Peking, November 14–16. https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/md/politik/harnisch/person/publikationen/harnisch_renmin_2019_erinnerungskultur.pdf.
- Hauschild, Anna, and Leonie Stamm. 2024. "From Feminist Questions towards Feminist Processes: Strengthening Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 7 (2): 296–300.
- Kansteiner, Wulf. 2017. Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies. In *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, eds. B. Törnquist-Plewa and T. Sindbæk Andersen, 305–44. Leiden: Brill.
- Keul, Katja. 2022a. Rede von Staatsministerin Katja Keul zur Rehabilitierung von Rudolf Manga Bell in Kamerun. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2561120>.
- Keul, Katja. 2022b. Rede von Staatsministerin Katja Keul zur Verleihung des Ehrenpreises der Deutschen Afrika-Stiftung (DAS) an S.E. Martin Kimani. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/ehrenpreis-deutsche-afrika-stiftung-kimani/2569280>.
- Keul, Katja. 2024. Speech by Minister of State Katja Keul at a ceremony to commemorate Mangi Meli in Moshi, Tanzania. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/mangi-meli/2647600>.
- Kirey, Reginald Elias. 2023. *Collective Memories of German Colonialism in Tanzania Mainland/East Africa*. Boston: De Gruyter.
- Kramer-Santel, Claudia, and Andreas Fier. 2022. "Symbolischer Ort in schwieriger Zeit." *Westfälische Nachrichten*, 2. November 2022. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2561116>.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1972. "Bachtin, das Wort, der Dialog und der Roman." In *Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*, eds. Jens Ihwe, 345–75. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag.
- Kultusministerkonferenz. 2019. Erste Eckpunkte zum Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten der Staatsministerin des Bundes für Kultur und Medien, der Staatsministerin im

- Auswärtigen Amt für internationale Kulturpolitik, der Kulturministerinnen und Kulturminister der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände. Berlin. https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-03-25_Erste-Eckpunkte-Sammlungsgut-koloniale-Kontexte_final.pdf.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 2014. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Lee-Koo, Katrina. 2020. "Pro-Gender Foreign Policy by Stealth: Navigating Global and Domestic Politics in Australian Foreign Policy Making." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (2): 236–49.
- Mälksoo, Maria, ed. 2023. *Handbook on the Politics of Memory*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Mason, Corinne L. 2019. "Buzzwords and fuzzwords: flattening intersectionality in Canadian aid." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 25 (2): 203–19.
- Messerschmidt, Astrid. 2008. "Postkoloniale Erinnerungsprozesse in einer Postnationalsozialistischen Gesellschaft – vom Umgang mit Rassismus und Antisemitismus." *PERIPHERIE - Politik, Ökonomie, Kultur* 28 (109/110): 42–60.
- Milliken, Jennifer. 1999. "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods." *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (2): 225–54.
- Morton, Sam E., Judyannet Muchiri, and Liam Swiss. 2020. "Which Feminism(s)? For Whom? Intersectionality in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy." *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 75 (3): 329–48.
- Müntefering, Michelle. 2020. Speech by Minister of State Michelle Müntefering at the Digital conference entitled Colonialism as Shared History: Past, Present Future. Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/muentefering-shared-history/2403654>.
- Mukalazi, Miriam Mona, and Fennet Habte. 2024. "Challenging Eurocentrism in European Feminist Foreign Policies." *EUideas*, March 1, 2024. <https://euideas.eui.eu/2024/03/01/challenging-eurocentrism-in-european-feminist-foreign-policies/>.
- Ndorokaze, Yaruokekuro S. 2021. "Opinion - The Agreement That Resolves Nothing... an Open Letter to German Ambassador." *NewEra Live*, June 16, 2021. <https://neweralive.na/posts/opinion-1>.
- Nylund, Mia-Lie, Sandra Håkansson, and Elin Bjarnegård. 2023. "The Transformative Potential of Feminist Foreign Policy: The Case of Sweden." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 44 (3): 257–73.
- Owor, Yvonne Adhiambo. 2020. "Derelict Shards & The Roaming of Colonial Phantom". Online keynote address given at the International Conference: Colonialism as Shared History, Past, Present, Future October 7 -9, Berlin; November 6, 2020. <https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2020/11/06/derelict-shards-the-roaming-of-colonial-phantoms/>.
- Papagiotti, Foteini. 2023. "The Feminist Foreign Policy Index. A Quantitative Evaluation of Feminist Commitments." Washington D.C.: International Center for Research on Women. <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FFP-Index.pdf>.
- Parashar, Swati, and Bina D'Costa. 2017. "Feminist Foreign Policy: The South Asia Conundrum." *Disrupted. The Feminist Foreign Policy Issue* 2017 (1): 27–31. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57cd7cd9d482e9784e4ccc34/t/5ee780af22db6704c9317390/1592230069903/Disrupted+Issue+1+-+The+Feminist+Foreign+Policy+Issue+-+PDF.pdf>.
- Parashar, Swati, J. Ann Tickner, Jacqui True, and V. Spike Peterson, eds. 2018. *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2000. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15 (2): 215–32.
- Rathore, Khushi Singh. 2021. "Excavating Hidden Histories: Indian Women in the Early History of the United Nations." In *Women and the UN: A New History of Women's International Human Rights*, eds. Rebecca Adami and Daniel Plesch, 39–54. London: Routledge.
- Rathore, Khushi Singh. 2024. "Early Women Envoys of India: Looking for Blueprints of Feminist Foreign Policy." In *Feminist Policymaking in Turbulent Times: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Hannah Partis-Jennings and Clara Eroukmanoff. London: Routledge.
- Rivera Chávez, María Paulina. 2022. "Feminist Foreign Policy: Coloniality in New Clothes?" *Feminist Perspectives*, August 11, 2022. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/feminist-foreign-policy-coloniality-in-new-clothes>.

- Robinson, Fiona. 2021. "Feminist Foreign Policy as Ethical Foreign Policy? A Care Ethics Perspective." *Journal of International Political Theory* 17 (1): 20–37.
- Roshani, Dshamilja, and Fatim Selina Diaby. 2022. "Feministische Außenpolitik und Staatlichkeit. Eine dekolonial-feministische Analyse Feministischer Außenpolitik im Kontext europäischer Migrationspolitik." In *Postkoloniale Staatsverständnisse*, eds. Martin Oppelt, Christina Pauls, and Nicki K. Weber, 199–218. Staatsverständnisse. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Said, Edward W. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Said, Edward W. 2003. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sandler, Willeke. 2024. A Foot in the Door: The Colonial Section of the German Foreign Office and the Settlement of Germans in Interwar Tanganyika, *Contemporary European History*, (online first). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000067>
- Sauer, Birgit. 2023. "Feministische Außenpolitik – Signum einer neoliberal-disziplinierenden Zeitenwende?" *Geschichten der Gegenwart*, September 6, 2023. <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/feministische-aussenpolitik-signum-einer-neoliberal-disziplinierenden-zeitenwende/>.
- Savoy, Bénédicte. 2022. *Africa's Struggle for Its Art: History of a Postcolonial Defeat*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shepherd, Laura J. 2008. *Gender, Violence and Security: Discourse as Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Siebeck, Cornelia. 2015. "'Einzug ins verheißene Land'. Richard von Weizsäckers Rede zum 40. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes am 8. Mai 1985." *Zeitgeschichte Digital* 12(1): 161–9.
- SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and FDP. 2021. Mehr Fortschritt wagen: Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025 zwischen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD), BÜNDNIS 90 / DIE GRÜNEN und den Freien Demokraten (FDP). https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag_2021-2025.pdf.
- Steinmeier, Frank-Walter. 2023. Besuch des Maji-Maji-Museums. Berlin: Bundespräsidialamt. <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2023/11/231101-Songea-Maji-Maji-Museum.html>.
- Stengel, Frank A., and Annick T. R. Wibben. 2024. "Think Big(ger)! Warum feministische Außenpolitik ein radikales Umdenken erfordert." *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 17(4): 403–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-024-01004-7>.
- Skjelsbæk, Inger, and Torunn Lise Tryggestad. 2020. "Pro-Gender Norms in Norwegian Peace Engagement: Balancing Experiences, Values, and Interests." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16(2): 181–98.
- Standke-Erdmann, Madita. 2023. "Feministische Außenpolitik – Eine „unmögliche Allianz? Wie steht es um die deutsche feministische Außenpolitik?" *Friedensforum. Netzwerk Friedenskooperative*, September 1, 2023. <https://www.friedenskooperative.de/friedensforum/artikel/feministische-aussenpolitik-eine-unmoegliche>.
- Steinke, Ronen. 2021. "Lebenslügen einer Kolonialmacht." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 16, 2021. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/namibia-entschaedigung-kolonialismus-mord-geld-1.5411602?reduced=true>.
- Terkessidis, Mark. 2019. *Wessen Erinnerung zählt? Koloniale Vergangenheit und Rassismus heute*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.
- Tetali, Neha. 2023. "What Can Feminist Foreign Policy Learn From Postcolonial Feminism." *The Global Observatory*, October 23, 2023. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/10/what-can-feminist-for-eign-policy-learn-from-postcolonial-feminism/>.
- Thomson, Jennifer. 2022. "Gender norms, global hierarchies and the evolution of feminist foreign policy." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 5 (2): 173–190.
- Tkocz, Maximilian. 2024. "Rhetorik, die überzeugt? „Historische Lehren" in der deutschen Debatte über den Ukrainekrieg." *PRIF Blog*, April 22, 2024. <https://blog.prif.org/2024/04/22/rhetorik-die-ueberzeugt-historische-lehren-in-der-deutschen-debatte-ueber-den-ukrainekrieg/>.
- Todzi, Kim Sebastian. 2023. *Unternehmen Weltaneignung: Der Woermann-Konzern und der deutsche Kolonialismus 1837–1916*. Hamburger Beiträge zur Geschichte der kolonialen Globalisierung, Band 2. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Towns, Ann E. 2013. *Women and States: Norms and Hierarchies in International Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Wagner, Jens-Christian. 2022. "Geschichtskultur. Historikerstreit 2.0? Zur Debatte um das Wechselverhältnis zwischen Shoah- und Kolonialismus-Erinnerung." *Reflexionen. Jahresmagazin Der Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora* 2. <https://www.stiftung-gedenkstaetten.de/reflexionen/reflexionen-2022/historikerstreit-20->.
- Weerawardhana, Chamindra. 2018. "Profoundly Decolonizing? Reflections on a Transfeminist Perspective of International Relations." *Meridians* 16 (1): 184–213.
- Wentker, Hermann. 2007. *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: Die DDR im internationalen System 1949-1989*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Wiese, Christian, Stefan Vogt, Doron Kiesel, and Gury Schneider-Ludorff, eds. 2021. *Die Zukunft der Erinnerung: Perspektiven des Gedenkens an die Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Wisotzki, Simone, Victoria Scheyer, and Karoline Färber. 2022. "Rechte, Repräsentanz, Ressourcen, Diversität: Wie könnte eine feministische Außenpolitik für Deutschland aussehen?" *PRIF Blog*, July 28, 2022. <https://blog.prif.org/2022/07/28/rechte-repraesentanz-ressourcen-diversitaet-wie-koennte-eine-feministische-aussenpolitik-fuer-deutschland-aussehen/>.
- Zakaria, Rafia. 2023. "What Makes Foreign Policy 'Feminist'?" *The Baffler*, March 28, 2023. <https://thebaffler.com/latest/against-german-feminism-zakaria>.
- Zhukova, Ekatherina. 2023. "A Struggle for Hegemonic Feminisation in Six Feminist Foreign Policies Or, How Social Hierarchies Work in World Politics." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 51 (3): 839–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298231182186>
- Zilla, Claudia. 2024. "Die Gewalt „der Anderen“. Feministische Außenpolitik nach der Zeitenwende." *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 17 (2): 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-024-00987-7>
- Zimmerer, Jürgen, ed. 2023. *Erinnerungskämpfe: Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein*. Ditzingen: Reclam.

Karoline Färber is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Erfurt: karoline.farber@uni-erfurt.de

Madita Standke-Erdmann is a Ph.D. Researcher at King's College London and an Associate Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt: madita.standke-erdmann@kcl.ac.uk

Cite this article: Färber, Karoline, and Madita Standke-Erdmann. 2025. "Claiming Historical Responsibility? The Persistence of Coloniality in German Feminist Foreign Policy." *Politics & Gender* 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100184>