



## INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

**AUGUST 2018**

**Marissa Conway**

**Co-Founder and UK Director for Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy**

**1. SheCanHeCan: You are the co-founder of the first Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, can you tell us more about it and about your motivations for creating it?**

Marissa Conway: Almost two years ago, I had the idea for the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, now a membership-based research and advocacy organization, whose mission is to centre people at the heart of policy initiatives. I was in grad school at SOAS, University of London studying to get my MA in Gender Studies, and was particularly drawn to feminist politics. The more I learned about existing conversations and campaigns, I realized I wanted something that didn't exist yet: a platform to chat feminism, power, and complex foreign policy issues; a path to help the next generation of foreign policy leaders get their foot in the door; and a way to do work that I would adore without waiting for someone else to give me permission to do so. And so - perhaps a bit naively - I decided I would make it happen myself.

I started with a Twitter account in the summer of 2016 and we officially opened doors that December with our website. It's quickly gained traction, and in 2018 I brought on the formidable Kristina Lutz as a co-founder to help me grow CFFP, and she has been indispensable.

**2. There is sadly a common misconception that Feminist Foreign Policy works solely to improve the lives of women, however it is rather about the inclusion of more diverse sets of people in an effort to encompass the interests of wider, collective communities instead of a select few. Therefore, in what ways do you think nations would benefit from adopting a Feminist Foreign Policy?**

Absolutely, and this is something I've been careful not to reinforce too much in our work. We take care not to make feminism = gender, or women for that matter. There's a quote from Flavia Dzodan: "My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit." I don't see any point in trying to do feminist work if it's not from an intersectional approach. This means firstly understanding that feminism is much more about power than just gender: understanding who has power and who doesn't, and why. Those typically in power, in my experience, are white old men, and gender, race, class, ability, etc., are either entirely left out of the conversation or actively used as



reasons to subjugate people. Secondly, it means asking how do we address this unequal distribution of power? One of the simplest ways to do so is through greater diversity in foreign policy leadership. I see this field as one of the most elite and privileged fields to work in, and if there's even a handful of people with a variety of life experiences, identities, and opinions, surely that will help to develop more well thought out policies which better reflect the wishes of the communities they impact. So while feminist foreign policy will look different in different contexts, across the board I feel confident that it will help us all better understand the consequences of policy, and think outside the confines of patriarchal structures.

**3. From a conversational standpoint, you advocate the use of feminism as a tool to analyse politics and power. For our readers who perhaps haven't been introduced to this way of thinking before, can you explain more about what that means?**

When applied to policy, feminist theory asks several important questions: What is the historical background and context that this policy is grounded in?; How did those in power get there?; How does this affect the everyday lived experience of those on the receiving end of this policy?; Who is writing the policy drafts and what is their background and experience?; What sort of language is used or excluded? Rather than provide answers, feminist theory tends to interrupt what is taken at face value and push for further questioning. It reveals what's going on behind the scenes and under the surface, and the inherent bias that may be present in any particular policy.

**4. Sweden is pursuing a Feminist Foreign Policy. Can you tell us any specific achievements or milestones achieved by Sweden as a consequence of such a policy? Are other countries working towards achieving a Feminist Foreign Policy?**

Much of [what Sweden has achieved](#) with their feminist foreign policy, outside of their work around women's and girls' rights, has been simply to normalize the idea that feminist values have a place in foreign policy to begin with. Though they're only one country, they have begun to tilt the scale in favor of prioritizing equality-minded practices and objectives in their foreign policy.

Other than Sweden, about year ago Canada announced their feminist international assistance aid policy, which is a phenomenal step toward developing an overall feminist foreign policy. The Labour Party in the UK recently announced a feminist development policy as well. So we're seeing the development of feminist foreign policy within specific initiatives that fall under the foreign policy umbrella, into, hopefully, a future commitment to a feminist approach for all state foreign policy.



## 5. Finally, what does the future hold for the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy and can our readers get involved?

We've managed to do some incredible things over the past year and half - start up an event series about gender, IR, and think tanks with Chatham House and BASIC, lecture at Oxford, host a breakfast with Margot Wallstrom, interview Cynthia Enloe, and launch our biannual publication, *Disrupted*. But we're still limited - we're a volunteer run organisation, and ultimately that means fitting in this work around other paid work or studies. Myself and Kristina are working very hard so that one day we will have a team who is paid for their labour. It's a bit of a bind, as this project would be impossible to start without the use of free labour (we can have another conversation about maintaining feminist values while setting up an organisation in a capitalist society!). Our end goal is to see a feminist foreign policy applied in local contexts across the world: in organizations, individual political parties, and ultimately, adopted as official state policy.

We welcome anyone who wants to get more involved with CFFP. First, you can join our [Membership Program](#) and support CFFP from £2-£7 per month. All the money from our membership goes to our basic overhead costs so we can continue to do this work. Second, you can sign up for our [Ambassador Program](#) which helps signal boost our advocacy work. Third, you can keep an eye on our "[Join the Team](#)" page for any volunteer opportunities. We don't accept unsolicited CVs, but we do put out calls for volunteer roles fairly often throughout the year.

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*Originally from Silicon Valley in California, Marissa moved to London in 2015 to pursue her MA in Gender Studies from SOAS, University of London. She also holds a BA in Political Science and a BA in Music from Chapman University in Orange County, California. She currently works as a photographer and branding consultant and publishes on feminist foreign policy and related topics. In the past she has worked with the Action on Smoking and Health, international clean water charity Living Water, and California-based anti-trafficking initiatives.*

*Her areas of interest and research include: feminist foreign policy, nuclear disarmament, US foreign policy, UK immigration, masculinity, and feminist IR theory.*