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# Caring feminist states? Paternalistic feminist foreign policies and the silencing of Indigenous justice claims in Sweden and Canada

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## ABSTRACT



The self-identification of Sweden and Canada as exceptionally caring and ethical states committed to the goal of global gender justice has been reinforced through their adoption of feminist foreign policies (FFPs). However, despite the enthusiasm surrounding the potential of feminism as an ethical approach to foreign policy making, critics have drawn attention to the many failings of FFPs that hamper their ability to bring about transformative change. This article posits that the shortcomings of Swedish and Canadian FFPs are rooted in an unacknowledged legacy of colonial power relations. It is from within this history of violence that Swedish and Canadian practices of feminism both “at home” and “abroad” can be seen as a re-articulation of colonialism. Through two illustrative narrative readings of reconciliation efforts, the article examines state provisions of hierarchically imposed, paternalistic expressions of care that silence Indigenous “articulations of self-care.” As such, it addresses a significant gap in the literature on FFPs by highlighting the risk of self-proclaimed “caring” feminist states reproducing colonial power relations within and beyond borders.

**KEYWORDS** Feminist foreign policy; Indigenous justice; care; narratives; coloniality

**HISTORY** Received 14 August 2022; Accepted 22 June 2023

## Introduction

Sweden and Canada often self-define as “good states” (Lawler 2013), expressed through an emphasis on ethical and feminist leadership. This self-constructed image rests on narratives of care exceptionalism and

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ethical conduct in foreign policy, exemplified by their leadership in human rights, gender equality, development, and environmentalism (Bergman Rosamond 2020a; De Leeuw 2023; Habel 2012; Körber 2019). Recently, this self-assigned exceptionalism has been reinforced through the adoption of feminist foreign policies (FFPs), with Sweden pioneering the approach in 2014 and Canada opting for a feminist approach to international development assistance in 2017 (Robinson 2021). Other countries that have adopted FFPs include France (2018), Luxembourg (2018), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Libya (2021), Germany (2021), Scotland (2021), Chile (2022), the Netherlands (2022), Liberia (2022), and Colombia (2022). Since the emergence of FFPs, a wide array of scholarship has been produced that has explored their ethical framing and values (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, and Kronsell 2019; Robinson 2021) and their narration (Zhukova, Sundström, and Elgström 2022). However, absent from these studies is a critical analysis of FFPs as an ongoing exercise of colonial power relations.

This article departs from existing FFP scholarship by exploring the colonial underpinnings of state-sanctioned approaches to care for distant others. Moreover, we expand on FFP scholarship by contesting the narratives that constitute Swedish and Canadian feminist state identities and the images on which they rest. Specifically, we ask how narratives of feminist care are translated in relation to Indigenous justice claims “within borders.” We argue that such constructions of the caring feminist state are undergirded by problematic notions of global ethical responsibility. We also contend that such expressions of feminist care must be scrutinized in relation to the power structures that they risk reinforcing. Rarely, if ever, do the two countries’ official foreign policy narratives attend to their implication in sustaining colonial power relations in global politics, or to their engagement in colonial violence against Indigenous communities, past and present. Rather, by couching their individual identities within narratives of feminist care, the two states are able to extend care relations to communities within and beyond borders that are not attentive to, or reflective of, concrete justice claims. We lean here on critical scholarship that has pointed to the paternalistic and hierarchical tendencies of care and its ties to colonialism (Narayan 1995; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009). Drawing on such work, we focus on both countries’ somewhat mythical articulations of the caring feminist state (Ryner 2002), and how those self-projections intersect with a refusal to honor Indigenous justice claims. We contend that these paternalistically defined and state-identified Indigenous “care needs” (Tronto 1993) legitimize a re-articulation of colonial hierarchies under the banner of feminist care and statehood as expressed through the explicit adoption of FFPs. The inattentiveness to Indigenous justice claims, we propose, can be seen as a continuation of

empire and colonial hierarchies that hamper transformative approaches to justice.

We provide an analysis that recognizes the inattentiveness of Sweden and Canada to Indigenous justice claims, with the aim of disrupting their self-proclaimed benevolence and willingness to extend care to marginalized communities within and beyond borders. In doing so, we posit that states bear responsibility for acknowledging the transformative potential of Indigenous justice claims as a means to redress the state-sanctioned forms of colonial violence that have been, and continue to be, perpetrated against Indigenous peoples. However, for this approach to be meaningful, states and other actors must recognize the hierarchical power relations that prevail in practices and conceptualizations of care giving (Beasley and Bacchi 2007). The feminist care provisions to which Sweden and Canada lay claim, in relation to Indigenous communities within state borders (such as through truth and reconciliation efforts), are at risk of reinforcing colonial hierarchies as opposed to disrupting them. Instead, we argue that a true commitment to transformative justice must be attentive to expressions of Indigenous self-care – or what we refer to as “articulations of self-care,” reflecting Audre Lorde’s call for self-preservation (Lorde 2017 [1988]) – rather than perform paternalistic definitions of care needs.

To structure our argument, we first discuss the specific FFPs of Sweden and Canada and the general tendencies of FFPs toward paternalistic care. We then turn to a discussion of the ethics of care and its critiques, which we build on to introduce our notion of Indigenous articulations of self-care. The latter part of the article accounts for our broad narrative reading. Our analysis focuses on the truth and reconciliation processes in Sweden and the ongoing case of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) in Canada. We posit that these initiatives are not rooted in a transformative commitment to Indigenous justice claims, and, as such, reinforce colonial hierarchies by way of imposing top-down interpretations of Indigenous care needs. To illustrate this argument, we point to inconsistencies and silences contained within state and Church narratives by juxtaposing them with Indigenous articulations of self-care.

### **FFPs as a re-articulation of colonial power**

Sweden’s adoption of an FFP in 2014 was met with great fanfare (Jeziarska 2022) and was viewed by many as an opportunity to “elevate politics from a broadly consensual orientation of gender mainstreaming toward more controversial politics, and specifically toward those that explicitly seek to renegotiate and challenge power hierarchies and gendered institutions” (Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016, 323). It should be noted here that the newly elected right-wing Conservative-led government has since

abandoned Sweden's FFP. Nonetheless, Sweden has often been upheld as a normative pioneer inspiring other states, which marks it out as an important case study of feminist statehood (Zhukova, Sundström, and Elgström 2022). Canada's launch of its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) in 2017 was received as a "welcome shift" that represented an "opportunity to move toward a foreign policy dedicated to addressing gender equality and human rights in, and beyond, Canada's peace and security work" (Tiessen and Swan 2018, 188).

Captivated by the normative "transformative potential" of feminism to give rise to substantial and lasting change (Cadesky 2020; Rao and Tiessen 2020; Swan 2021), this celebratory response was short lived and has since given way to a more nuanced reading today. Critiques of FFPs have since highlighted their emergence as located within dominant liberal and neo-liberal institutional systems and practices (Parisi 2020; Thomson 2020) and as complicit in the reproduction of essentialist and colonial discourse (Nylund, Håkansson, and Bjarnegård 2023). Furthermore, they have been analyzed as exclusionary policies built on heteronormative values that privilege women and men as analytical categories (Aylward and Brown 2020; Morton, Muchiri, and Swiss 2020). As argued by critical scholars, this has resulted in the production of "hollow" (feminist) policies that are lacking in substance (Bergman Rosamond, Duncanson, and Gentry 2022; Broadhead and Howard 2019; Tiessen 2019).

At the crux of this discontent is a framing and normative understanding of FFPs as inherently ethical. This is premised on the central positioning of "gendered discrimination, inequalities and violence as well as the lack of inclusion and representation of women and other marginalised groups" as key areas of action and concern (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, and Kronsell 2019, 24). However, in the assertion of the ethical aims of FFPs, few efforts have been made to critically question their cosmopolitan objectives, which involve imposing liberal Western feminist values on non-Western geopolitical spaces and peoples (Robinson 2021). Furthermore, when this ethical articulation of FFPs is read in relation to Swedish and Canadian histories of humanitarian exceptionalism and "good international citizenship" (Pratt 2001; Shapcott 2020), feminism as a committed manifestation of gender equality advocacy becomes an additional means to expand on constructed images of the state as exceptionally "caring." It is this "other-regarding cosmopolitan care for vulnerable women and girls beyond borders" that reveals the troubling nature of FFPs as a re-articulation of colonial power relations (Bergman Rosamond 2020b, 217).

The colonial legacies that frame and undergird capitalist and paternalistic performances of care through institutionalized and state-based mechanisms such as FFPs are representative of the enduring afterlife of colonialism (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). As demonstrated through the Swedish and

Canadian FFPs, the overwhelming emphasis on developing the rights of women in the Global South speaks to the ongoing colonial relations of domination and subordination that continue to define (neo)liberal feminist modes of care. Sweden's gender equality-focused initiatives in the Global South, many of which pertain to women's economic empowerment and participation in the labor market (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2017, 2019), maintain a fixed concern with ensuring the survival of capitalism and the maintenance of traditional power structures and hierarchies. Meanwhile, Canada's FIAP, an FFP applicable only to international development, adopts a position whereby women in the Global South are viewed as "untapped" sources of growth with the potential to "increase global gross domestic product by \$12 trillion in a single decade" (Government of Canada 2021).

In line with a transnational feminist approach to understanding the *global* and the *local*, and the *foreign* and the *domestic*, we argue in favor of viewing foreign and domestic policy as "mutually constitutive" and "permeable constructs" (Nagar and Swarr 2010, 9) that exist as a result of "scattered hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 7). This is premised on the notion that "transnational linkages influence every level of social existence" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). Therefore, in critiquing the failings of FFPs, we pay attention to the intersectional "multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions" that constitute the policies' re-articulation of colonial power (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 18). Given this framing, we argue that the perpetuation of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples within seized and settled borders is indicative of the work that FFPs do to both disguise and depoliticize enduring colonial power relations both "at home" and "abroad." In light of the predilection to think of FFPs as outward-oriented expressions of states' values and interests, little attention has been paid to the ways in which FFPs represent a reflection of "internalized" colonial histories and legacies that persist today. Thus, in thinking through FFPs' relationship to care across imagined borders, we need to re-think FFPs as an effect of colonialism within which acts of (neo)liberal Western feminist care are located (Alexander and Mohanty 1997).

### Care paternalism and self-care

Despite the paternalistic tendencies of FFP care, scholars have argued that FFP has the potential to disrupt power structures when constituted in an ethics of care approach that breaks with the reproduction of "Western liberal modes of domination" (Robinson 2021, 21; see also Bergman Rosamond, Duncanson, and Gentry 2022). Others have used this approach to unpack the moral responsibilities embedded in FFP aims (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, and Kronsell 2019). While such scholarship is productive

in addressing the ethical underpinnings of the expansion of care relations through FFP, it has not gone far enough in questioning the implications of states' care aims for the re-articulation of colonial power within and beyond borders. It is important to stress here that narratives of feminist statehood are rarely rooted in a critical self-reflection on relationships to gendered power structures, and much less so on legacies of colonialism and racial injustice.

Care is often understood to refer to that which "we do to maintain, continue, and repair" the world we live in (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40), articulated through a specific "mental disposition of concern and the actual practices that we engage in as a result of these concerns" (Tronto 1998, 16). Ethics of care scholarship engages in the exploration of relationality, though it began with problematic assumptions of essentialist gender roles. In its purest form, a care ethics approach assumes that women's maternal care for children equips them well to engage in moral reasoning beyond the immediate sphere of the family (Gilligan 1993). This position has been critiqued for employing stereotypical notions of women's nurturing and caring qualities (Ruddick 2002).

Care ethics has also been subjected to much critique by postcolonial and decolonial thinkers. Here it is stressed that care ethics function "within Western-centric assumptions and registers" (Durmuş 2022, 1) and are embedded in colonial legacies that are evident not least in unequal care provision and universalist assumptions of the meaning of care. Care has been critiqued for being theorized "from the normative white body," a position that must be dislocated to disrupt racialized violence (Raghuram 2019, 629). While the practices of such care ethics are assumed to be virtuous, they are often located in hierarchical power relations that "can, and often do, become relations of domination, oppression, injustice, inequality, or paternalism" (Robinson 2011, 5). Care therefore has to be understood against the backdrop of historic and contemporary power structures rather than solely as an act of benevolence (Robinson 2011, 10). Thus, feminist state care is not an inherently ethical exercise in transnational feminism, whether such claims to care are expressed within or beyond borders. Uma Narayan (1995, 135) has shown how civilizing projects legitimized through the language of care have helped the powerful to uphold relations of domination through "paternalistic care." Fiona Robinson (2011) has noted that acknowledging privileged states' embeddedness in legacies of colonial encounters and oppression can help to challenge the gendered and racialized binary of protector/vulnerable. Others have underlined the importance of remembering one's own past and embeddedness in colonial conflict in order to ensure "care-full agency" (Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009, 10).

We align with postcolonial critiques of care in arguing that self-reflective recognition of colonial and racialized harm requires dislocating the



ethnocentric definition of Indigenous care needs, and instead attending to Indigenous articulations of self-care. The self-narratives of Sweden and Canada are in many ways located within racialized and colonial notions of care with little regard for the justice claims of the Othered, not least Indigenous peoples within borders. As such, we read state-defined Indigenous care provisions as paternalistic re-articulations of colonial legacies that silence Indigenous forms of self-care while upholding caring state identities. We are here inspired by Audre Lorde (2017 [1988]), who described self-care as a radical act of self-preservation. Elsewhere, self-care is understood as a radical form of care required to cope with and “endur[e] precarious worlds,” carving out “spaces of hope” (Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Kneese 2020, 2).

Self-care, then, is a necessary reaction to the exhaustion caused by capitalism, a means to “push back against structural disadvantages” or breakdown (Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Kneese 2020, 3). As self-preservation, self-care infers attempts toward “collective survival within a world that renders some lives more precarious than others” (Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Kneese 2020, 5). Similarly, bell hooks (2015, 24) has explored self-recovery as liberation and healing “in a white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal context.” We view articulations of self-care as efforts to renegotiate state-defined, paternalistic understandings of Indigenous care needs, to self-define (Hill Collins 2000) rather than be defined hierarchically. Thus, self-care acts as an expression of collective self-preservation that breaks with re-articulations of colonial power, thereby creating the potential for transitional justice.

## Illustrative readings

Given our positions as non-Indigenous scholars, we lack the lived experiences of being subjected to state-sanctioned paternalistic care practices, yet hope that our analysis can shed light on the harms that such practices cause to Indigenous communities in Sweden and Canada, as well as the harm that resides in unfulfilled claims to feminist care.

Our analysis of state-sanctioned care and Indigenous articulations of self-care below rests on a broad understanding of narratives as ways to make “sense of the world around us, produce meanings, articulate intentions, and legitimise actions” (Wibben 2011, 2). A narrative is “a particular configuration of a story . . . , a sequenced representation of events or experiences” (Shepherd 2021, 9). Important to our study is Laura Shepherd’s observation that narratives are “always partial and necessarily exclude much in their telling” (Shepherd 2021, 10); they silence some perspectives while articulating others. Narratives are politically and ethically charged (Shepherd 2021, 10), determining whose stories are told. This is because configurations of

power “legitimise, authorise and value certain narratives over others” (Shepherd 2021, 11), enabling the construction of national narratives that serve state interests and preferred value systems (Bergman Rosamond and Hedling 2022). For example, Sweden’s FFP was often narrated as a success story (Shepherd 2021) without self-examination of its colonial history. Thus, dominant or “grand narratives restrict which meanings are possible ... and which are not” (Wibben 2011, 43). In particular, “dominant narratives” (Andrews and Bamberg 2004) restrict and enable political action (Wibben 2011). However, as Annick Wibben (2011) notes, narratives can also disrupt taken-for-granted knowledge and articulate alternative stories.

We unpack the silencing of Indigenous justice claims in state narratives that “have been accepted as dominant over time” (Shepherd 2021, 27). We also seek to uncover ways in which privileged narratives are disrupted by storytelling from the margins – in this case, Indigenous articulations of self-care. Drawing on the work of Shepherd and Wibben, we focus on the silences of state narratives of care by cross-referencing them with Indigenous justice claims. The identification of such omissions can reveal what may be too politically sensitive for states to include in state-sanctioned care efforts (Wibben 2011). Applied to the context of FFPs, despite the dominance of well-crafted narratives of Swedish and Canadian state feminism, the untold – or, rather, unacknowledged – stories of inadequate recognition of marginalized communities’ justice claims draw the legitimacy of the states’ narratives into question.

We unpack official sources that enable the identification of dominant narratives that highlight the conciliatory care efforts of Sweden and Canada. Our main aim is to disrupt such narratives by uncovering the ways in which Indigenous communities contest them through articulations of self-care. Our readings of the two countries’ dominant narratives are built on state publications, Church reports, media statements, and mission statements related to truth and reconciliation efforts in Sweden and the Canadian government’s response to MMIWG. This empirical data was gathered from various media channels and official Church, parliament, and government websites. As regards the disruption of state-sanctioned narratives of care in Sweden, we focus on the official Sami response to the state’s reconciliatory approach, formulated most directly through the Sami parliament. For the Canadian case, we focus on the ongoing contestation surrounding Indigenous demands for justice in relation to MMIWG.

### **Caring states: two readings**

We provide two illustrative readings of hierarchically defined, state-sanctioned Indigenous care needs and highlight the shortcomings of state-sanctioned care through Indigenous articulations of self-care. From this

platform, we launch a critique of what are assumed to be the inherently ethical foundations of the FFPs of Sweden and Canada. Our analysis rests on the position that any ethical inquiry into states' FFP commitments necessitates the exploration of injustices within borders. We should note that the focus on gender, race, and coloniality varies across the illustrative readings, depending on the character of the empirical data explored. The Sami Indigenous articulations of self-care in Sweden tend to focus on race and colonial legacies rather than gender, whereas Canadian Indigenous justice claims have a visible gendered dimension.

The illustrative readings of the two contexts engage with the dominant narratives as told through state (and Church) efforts of reconciliation. We trace silences in the dominant accounts by juxtaposing them with Indigenous articulations of self-care. Indigenous communities have been actively recounting their experiences of harm and requesting justice from the Swedish and Canadian states. However, state-sanctioned efforts to care remain inconsistent with Indigenous articulations of state harm. While both countries are engaged in reconciliation, such dialogue has not triggered an incorporation of colonial violence, past and present, into their self-images as exceptionally caring states. As such, we read both states as paternalistic in their various care efforts both beyond and (the focus here) within state borders. Broadly speaking, truth and reconciliation commissions represent an opportunity to expose colonial violence in order to "provide a platform for the renegotiation of Indigenous politics" (Kuokkanen 2020, 296). However, only "by appreciating the specific nature and quality of historically objectionable political relations between Indigenous groups, and settler and colonial groups" can current structural injustices be redressed (Lu 2017, 158). In paternalistic extensions of care relations and the associated disregard for Indigenous claims for justice, acts of self-care create opportunities for transformative justice where it is otherwise denied.

### ***Sweden: a caring state?***

We begin by discussing what we define as the failure of Swedish care provisions to adequately acknowledge Indigenous articulations of self-care. Sweden's collective self-image is devoid of a self-examination of its colonization of Indigenous land (Fur 2013; Ojala and Nordin 2015). Rather, Sweden has continuously framed its activities in the North – which have included the mapping of natural resources and land, the forced relocation of Sami peoples, disturbances to traditional livelihoods, and the Christianization of "heathen" people (Ojala and Nordin 2019) – as matters of domestic policy. The discovery of silver in the 1630s accelerated this process, with the Swedish Crown viewing the North as a promise of wealth and power and a "Land of the Future" (Ojala and Nordin 2015). While Sweden's claim to

colonial innocence is part of its “good state” self-identity, Åsa Össbo and Patrik Lantto (2011) have defined its historical expropriation of natural resources in the North as a routine form of colonial expansion. Meanwhile, the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology (1922–1958) subjected Sami peoples to craniometric measurements, colonial photography, and intrusive “research” on human remains to prevent a “degeneration” of the “Nordic race” (Uppsala University 2021). The civilizing mission of the Swedish state and Church also included forced assimilation, language restrictions, and the displacement and separation of Sami children from their families. This involved placing them in nomadic residential schools where they were taught to become “proper” Sami individuals kept at safe distance from the non-Indigenous majority population (Lantto and Mörkenstam 2008).

The Swedish Church, which today no longer falls within the domain of the state, has through reconciliatory measures sought to problematize Sweden’s history of Indigenous oppression, showing at least a rhetorical willingness to disrupt self-proclaimed colonial innocence. In November 2021, former Archbishop of Sweden Antje Jackelén formally apologized and acknowledged the Church’s involvement in the state-led abuse of Sami peoples through forced conversion and the banning of Sami religion. Jackelén also acknowledged the Church’s abuse of power that resulted in Sami peoples’ loss of land, noting that “we cannot undo what has been done. But we can feel remorse for our part in Sweden’s colonial history” (Jackelén 2021). The reconciliation efforts of the Church have been conducted in dialogue with Sami peoples, which has resulted in the publication of testimonies, a scholarly anthology about Sami–Church relations (Lindmark and Sundström 2016a, 2016b), and a list of strategic reconciliation commitments.

The Swedish state has refrained from offering an apology, to which a member of a Sami association noted that “the state is a little behind” (Sveriges Radio 2021b). However, in 1998, Annika Åhnberg, a former Minister of Agriculture, apologized for the historic maltreatment of Sami peoples – though it was not followed by policy action. Rather, the apology has been interpreted as her personal position rather than an attempt to initiate an official reconciliation process. Åhnberg was harshly criticized for her apology, which was ignored in parliamentary discussions (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2019). In general, Sami rights are scarcely represented in mainstream political debates. However, the right to self-determination in the form of greater influence for the Sami parliament has recently been raised, in addition to clear consultation guidelines, revisions to Sweden’s reindeer herding regulations, the repatriation of Indigenous human remains from museums and university archives, and an increased annual Sami language fund (Sveriges Radio 2021a).

Initial requests for a truth and reconciliation review were made by the Sami parliament in 2012 (Sametinget 2022), with a commission appointed by the government in 2021 (Sveriges Radio 2021a). The Sami parliament provided

the government with a report outlining the issues that should inform the work of the commission (Sametinget 2021b) in an effort to self-define state harm. The report outlines the need for a truthful admission of guilt and a sincere apology alongside reconciliatory strategies that redress the legacies of colonial policies. It also stresses Sweden's practice of colonial intrusion in the form of state-sanctioned thefts of traditional Sami land. To break with this legacy, the report outlines a request for the return of land and Sami consent for industry expansion in Sami territory. Land is here narrated as a core foundation of Sami identity. As Ingrid Inga, Sami Chairperson of the Sami Council of the Swedish Church, noted during the Church's apology ceremony,

Sami religion and spirituality have historically been devalued and portrayed by the Church of Sweden as paganism, superstition, devilry and idolatry incompatible with the Christian faith ... The land and the nature are our home in which our identity, memories, culture, sacred places, spirituality, livelihoods and language have been shaped and sustained over millennia. (Inga 2021)

Land is narrated as more than geographical space; it is a central articulation of Sami self-care, prompting Indigenous communities to urge Sweden to sign and ratify Convention ILO169. ILO169, or the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, was formulated in 1989 and is a binding convention that recognizes a set of rights of Indigenous people for the sake of self-determination and prevention of discrimination. Among other things, it highlights the right to consultation and ownership of traditionally occupied lands. A formal endorsement of ILO169 would make it harder for Sweden to ignore Sami rights to ownership of traditionally occupied territory (Sametinget 2021a). While Sweden has expressed its support for Indigenous rights worldwide, the ratification of ILO169 has been hampered due to its perceived incompatibility with Sweden's extractive interests in the far North (Lantto and Mörkenstam 2008). Sweden has instead opted for policies that do not require a wholesale redirection of its endorsement of extractive industries. As such, the Swedish state disregards land as a valuable aspect of care and displays an inattentiveness to Sami articulations of land-related self-care. We contend that by focusing on language and culture, the Swedish government has been able to control land use in the North without disrupting its self-narrative as an ethical state. This tendency is also visible in Swedish reconciliation efforts in which mentions of land and an admission of colonial harm are omitted from state-sanctioned care responsibilities. The Sami preparatory report advocates for the return of stolen land and a recognition of colonial violence (Sametinget 2021a). However, the state extension of care lacks reference to colonialism altogether, in much the same way as the country's international self-narrative does. The preparatory report also notes that reconciliation cannot happen unless the public is made aware of Sweden's

colonial legacy (Sametinget 2021a, 15), which is indicative of the Swedish collective memory of colonial innocence.

The failure to attend to Indigenous justice claims, moreover, can be understood as a result of the friction between the Sami articulation of self-care and the paternalistic imposition of state-identified care needs. In this way, the state can maintain its narrative about exceptionally caring feminist statehood while engaging in paternalistic care practices without addressing its own implication in colonial power. Such state-sanctioned care efforts reinforce relations of domination (Robinson 2011), allowing for policies of expansive mining and intrusion on Sami land to continue in the shadow of Sweden's caring self-image. This form of paternalistic care can be observed in the government's narration of the role of the truth and reconciliation committee:

The government has a responsibility to promote knowledge about the abuse, violations and racism that the Sami have been and are subjected to, e.g., the assimilation policies that have in many cases contributed to the Sami being deprived of their language, culture and identity. (Swedish Government 2021, 2, authors' translation)

The loss of language and culture that emerged from the historically constituted colonial image of Sami backwardness should certainly be a key aspect of truth and reconciliation, a justice claim also supported by Sami representatives. However, the emphasis on culture needs to be paired with a meaningful Sami-led conversation on land rights and self-care. While the Swedish Ministry for Culture has only recently recognized Sweden's historic role in racial discrimination against the Sami (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2020), there is a tendency in such debates to channel Sami justice claims into linguistic and cultural promotion alone.

As highlighted in a recent Sami parliament report (Sametinget 2021a), a transformative justice agenda would involve, in addition to the return of land, the repatriation of human remains and artifacts that were seized by the Church and state. In 2019, 25 corpses that had been unearthed from their graves for "research" purposes in the 1950s were returned and reburied in the biggest repatriation effort in Swedish history. Sami human remains continue to occupy the shelves of state museums and archives, with Sami representatives critiquing their delayed return by the state (Lindstrand 2009). In a written statement handed over to former Minister of Culture Amanda Lind in 2019, Sami representatives noted that "colonial structures are kept alive through the state's claim to own and retain Sami human remains in state institutions" (Amnesty Sápmi 2021).

In sum, the Swedish state's provision of care, as part of the wider truth and reconciliation processes, focuses on important but politically uncontroversial issues of culture and language policy. Meanwhile, Sami articulations of self-care that pertain to Sweden's colonial guilt and implication in land theft

and extractivism are omitted from the state's self-image. Instead, state-identified care efforts take the shape of paternalistic neocolonial assumptions about the care needs of Sami communities. This state-sanctioned silencing of Indigenous justice claims prevents full reconciliation while reinforcing Sweden's self-image as a caring feminist state. Though rhetorically endorsing the need for reconciliation, such care relations are devoid of state liability for altering the continued infringement on Indigenous territory. The above discussion of state-sanctioned care and the omission of Indigenous justice claims illustrates the harmful character of paternalistic care and its neocolonial implications (Sarvasy and Longo 2004), both of which, we argue, are inconsistent with the country's self-narrative as a feminist and ethically minded state.

### ***Canada: a caring state?***

Canada's idealized self-narrative as a feminist state has centered around the country's role as a good and progressive global gender equality leader (Tiessen and Swan 2018). However, the dominant Canadian narratives of progress and tolerance (Howell 2005), past and present, are located within and against the country's violent history of settler colonialism. Despite the persistence of Indigenous articulations of self-care, the continued mobilization of paternalistic care approaches to redressing Indigenous justice claims lays bare the embedded forms of colonial violence that have impacted, and continue to impact, on the everyday lived realities of Indigenous peoples and their communities (Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada 2015). The relationship between the state's response to Indigenous justice claims and its practice of paternalistic feminist care is symptomatic of its rearticulation of colonialism. Rather than addressing the demands for justice for which Indigenous peoples have long advocated, the state – through its promotion of ethical and caring self-narratives – actively engages in the reproduction of gendered and racialized forms of colonial violence. As is analyzed further below, the state's mobilization of feminism as a mode of paternalistic care works to disguise and depoliticize Indigenous calls for justice. However, radical acts of Indigenous self-care unsettle and disrupt the colonial care relations embedded in the Canadian feminist image (Saramo 2016).

The origins of Canada's settler colonial history can be traced back to the French and British colonial expeditions that first began seizing the land of the Indigenous First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples from the late fifteenth century onwards, with permanent settlers arriving in what is now Canada in the early seventeenth century. Informed by ideas of racial hierarchy and the assumption that Indigenous peoples were in need of civilizing, French and British colonizers imposed their violent beliefs and colonial care tactics through institutionalized practices of forced Christianization and

enslavement (Francis 1998); the confiscation and seizure of land; the forced removal, assimilation, and placement of Indigenous peoples onto reservations and into residential schools; the removal and restriction of livelihoods; violations to bodily integrity; physical and sexual abuse; and the mass eradication and suppression of Indigenous cultures and heritage in what has been recognized as a “cultural genocide” (Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada 2015, 1). Despite the official cessation of these practices, the colonial logics and ideologies that produced them continue to manifest in the country’s institutions, systems, politics, economy, and culture (Coulthard 2014).

Central to the state’s contemporary self-narrative and its practices of paternalistic care are the unheard stories of the Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual (2SLGBTQIA+) people who are missing and/or have been murdered (MMIWG) within the country’s borders. The notorious “Highway of Tears” in British Columbia represents one of many incidences of gendered and racialized state violence. Since the 1980s, the bodies of Indigenous women and girls have been found along a highway connecting the cities of Prince George and Prince Rupert. Local and federal law enforcement remained unresponsive to Indigenous demands for justice, failing to solve or document any of the cases. Though there is no official statistic, it is estimated that over 30 women went missing along the highway (Carrier Sekani Family Services 2006). As demonstrated by the “Highway of Tears,” the violence perpetuated against Indigenous women and girls speaks to a broader legacy and culture of state-sanctioned violence (Barker 2009). In a statement published by the Canadian government, it was revealed that “Indigenous women and girls in Canada are disproportionately affected by all forms of violence. Though Indigenous women make up 4 percent of Canada’s female population, 16 percent of all women murdered in Canada between 1980 and 2012 were Indigenous” (Government of Canada 2016).

In response to the state’s longstanding failure to address its ongoing role in the production of gendered and racialized colonial violence, Indigenous peoples and communities have engaged in articulations of self-care aimed at making the voices of “missing sisters” heard (Native Hope nd). This is manifested through visual narration and forms of resistance such as the REDress Project (2020), which was “an aesthetic response to the more than 1,000 missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada” (Black 2020), as well as “[through] word, in song, and often outside of mainstream institutions” as a means to “affirm their lives, their lands, and their cultures” (Savarese 2017, 160). Additionally, other modes of grassroots activism such as Twitter campaigns and online political spaces of #MMIW and the organization of vigils such as “Walking with Our Sisters” have all challenged the dominant narrative of state innocence (Saramo 2016). Central to these modes of activism as self-care are notions of “absence” and “presencing,” which are



mobilized by Indigenous peoples to “draw attention to the gendered and racialized nature of violent crimes against Aboriginal women and to evoke a presence through the marking of absence” (Black 2020). It has been argued that self-care through acts of “presencing” is a method of “deeply appreciating girls’ and women’s lives because it gives credence to their ‘everyday engagements with hope, desire, humor, and possibility’ while acknowledging the ways disadvantage and structural inequality undermine Indigenous lives” (Savarese 2017, 161, citing De Finney 2016, 22). By evoking “a presence through the marking of absence” as a radical form of self-care, Indigenous women have engaged in acts of self-definition (Hill Collins 2000, 36) as a means to “challenge the frames that construct Indigenous bodies as insignificant, dispensable, and irrevocably broken” (De Finney 2016, 20).

As a result of the ongoing pushback from Indigenous communities and the public, the Canadian government launched the National Inquiry into MMIWG. The Inquiry was established under the administration of Justin Trudeau, which in 2017 had announced the introduction of its FIAP. Prior to the Inquiry’s establishment, Indigenous leaders, communities, peoples, and activists had been “calling for a national inquiry for more than five years – a move which was resisted by Trudeau’s conservative predecessor, Stephen Harper” (Murphy 2015). Promising a “total renewal” of the country’s relations with Indigenous peoples, Trudeau stated that “the victims deserve justice, their families an opportunity to heal and to be heard ... [W]e must work together to put an end to this ongoing tragedy” (Murphy 2015). The Inquiry (2016–2019) consisted of community hearings and statement-gathering events with families and survivors, as well as institutional and knowledge keeper and expert hearings.

Despite the potential of the Inquiry to be an opportunity to engage in a process of reconciliation, it was heavily criticized by victims’ families, who felt “left in the dark by those leading the inquiry” (Kassam 2017). As stated by Hilda Anderson-Pryz, a family member of a missing or murdered woman, “[w]e have lost confidence in the national inquiry ... We all agree that we cannot dishonour our loved ones and ourselves by participating in a flawed process” (Kassam 2017). In 2017, the Inquiry made headlines with the resignation of one of the five commissioners leading the investigation. Speaking of her decision to leave, Marilyn Poitras stated that most of those leading the Inquiry favored “a status quo colonial model of hearings. Because of this, I strongly feel the terms of reference that we were set out to achieve have not been met” (Kassam 2017). In 2019, the Inquiry was completed and declared that there had been a “genocide of Indigenous women and girls,” with the perpetuation of racialized and gendered violence conveyed as “rooted in colonialism and colonial ideologies, built on the presumption of superiority, and utilised to maintain power and control over the land

and the people by oppression and, in many cases, by eliminating them” (National Inquiry into MMIWG 2019, 54).

Two years later, in response to the 231 calls for justice resulting from the Inquiry, the state produced a National Action Plan (NAP) promising a series of “transformative changes” (Tasker 2021). In a speech, Trudeau stated that.

when the National Inquiry into MMIWG presented its final report, it called on us to work together to develop a National Action Plan to end systemic causes of violence. We accepted their findings, including that what happened amounts to genocide. (Trudeau 2021)

However, despite the government’s rhetorical show of recognition and commitment, the NAP has been highly criticized by Indigenous groups and communities for its lack of action, accountability, and direction. Described as an “evergreen document” created to accommodate growth and change “as priorities shift or change, or as new priorities are identified” (National Action Plan 2021), the NAP was critiqued as a misleading and empty show of state-sanctioned care. As argued by Neskonlith Kukpi7 (Chief) Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, “[j]ustice delayed is still justice denied... We can’t wait three years for some of these priorities to be handed down. Since the national inquiry, hundreds of women have gone missing and murdered” (Deer 2021). A year after the launch of the NAP, the government had still not shown any signs of movement or direction as to redressing the Indigenous justice claims set out in the Inquiry, and Anderson-Pyrz declared the NAP a “national shame” (Deer 2022).

As demonstrated by the ongoing pursuit of justice in the case of MMIWG, despite the state’s enduring narrative of care and promises to commit to reconciliation, local forms of gendered and racialized colonial violence remain a key feature of state articulations of feminist power. Thus, Canada’s practice of feminism operates as a value-laden mechanism crucial to the re-articulation of the country’s colonial identity. Rather than transforming colonial relations, feminism works to re-embed and disguise the gendered and racialized forms of colonial violence that persist in spite of the state’s rhetorical acts of reconciliation. Such forms of violent paternalistic care are only made visible when juxtaposed against Indigenous articulations of self-care that function to trouble Canadian self-narratives of moral progress.

## Conclusion

This article commenced by critically examining Swedish and Canadian articulations of the feminist state as expressed through their approaches to foreign policy. Departing from existing scholarship on FFPs, we have argued that the Swedish and Canadian FFPs represent a re-articulation of colonialism,

whereby state care is mobilized as a means to re-assert gendered and racialized colonial power relations. Notably, we have contended that though FFPs rest on principles of care, state understandings of care do not include self-reflexive examinations of state-sanctioned historical harms against marginalized communities both within and beyond borders – namely, in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities. Through our illustrative readings, we have shown that the truth and reconciliation processes of Sweden and the Canadian state's response to the National Inquiry into MMIWG are not rooted in a transformative commitment to Indigenous articulations of harm and injustice. In examining state narratives of care, we have highlighted the inconsistencies and silences contained within these narratives by juxtaposing them against Indigenous articulations of self-care. Through our findings, we have been able to conclude that the failure of both Sweden and Canada to redress Indigenous justice claims is symptomatic of their respective legacies of colonialism, whereby practices of paternalistic care function as a means to disguise and obfuscate the historical violence that persists today.

As demonstrated through our illustrative readings, the silencing of Indigenous justice claims through the mobilization of paternalistic forms of feminist care represents a re-articulation of colonialism. Thus, rather than living up to the transformative potential of feminism as expressed through FFPs, Sweden and Canada have disregarded and silenced Indigenous justice claims in favor of promoting their own narratives of feminist benevolence. In Sweden, redressing land theft has been highlighted by Sami communities as a prerequisite for justice. The Swedish government has failed to acknowledge these articulations of self-care, instead focusing on the less contentious issue of culture and language rights. Despite narratives of the caring state, Sweden has also failed to formally recognize and apologize for its colonial legacies. Though Canada has apologized and more visibly engages with its colonial history, state-sanctioned violence is treated as a thing of the past, despite evidence of continuing land theft as well as “gendered harms” affecting Indigenous women and communities (Cohn 2013). Furthermore, Canada's development and implementation of its NAP has failed to respond to the 231 calls for justice resulting from the National Inquiry into MMIWG.

To conclude, we argue in favor of adopting a critical stance whereby the care that undergirds FFPs is interrogated as an ongoing effect of colonialism operating within and beyond state borders. In doing so, we identify state care toward marginalized communities as constituted and constitutive of the colonial power relations and structures that define its existence. Consequently, the feminist benevolence that has endowed countries such as Sweden and Canada with an ethically superior status must be reframed as an ongoing re-articulation of gendered and racialized colonial violence. As these forms of colonial violence move across, within, and against

imagined state boundaries, states claiming to be feminist or adopting FFPs must be scrutinized in their domestic claims to care even if it falls outside the normative remit of foreign policy. This is not a call for the reproduction of paternalistic care paradigms within or beyond state borders, but a demand for a self-reflexive approach that questions who and what is at stake in the mobilization of feminism as an expression of colonialism. As Indigenous articulations of self-care and self-preservation have shown, transformative justice is not built on the imposition of paternalistic state-sanctioned care needs, but on opportunities for self-definition and self-articulation. Until this is recognized, FFPs will remain firmly fixed in the false ethical image of the caring feminist state.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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