

INDONESIA'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2020-2023

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Received : 21 March 2025

Revised : 30 March 2025

Accepted : 16 April 2025

Published : 27 May 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54443/morfai.v5i3.3043>

Link Publish : <https://radjapublika.com/index.php/MORFAI/article/view/3034>

Abstract

This study critically examines Indonesia's feminist foreign policy approach in addressing trafficking in persons (TIP), particularly affecting women and children, during the leadership of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi (2020–2023). Drawing on feminist international relations theory and foreign policy analysis (FPA), the paper explores how Indonesia operationalized gender-sensitive diplomacy through both internal and external mechanisms. Internally, key drivers included Marsudi's leadership, bureaucratic reforms, civil society engagement, and national legislation aligned with human rights commitments. These factors enabled the mainstreaming of feminist values such as intersectionality, trauma-informed victim support, and survivor-centered approaches into foreign policy practices. Externally, Indonesia navigated the normative constraints of ASEAN's non-interference principle while promoting the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP) through silent diplomacy and norm entrepreneurship. The study highlights Indonesia's strategic use of soft law, coalition-building, and cross-sectoral partnerships to advance gender-justice frameworks within regional and global diplomatic arenas. It further demonstrates how feminist diplomacy in a Global South context may deviate from overt ideological declarations, favoring pragmatic and culturally resonant approaches. Through qualitative document analysis and case-based inquiry, this paper reveals the potential of feminist foreign policy to influence international anti-trafficking norms without undermining regional cohesion. Indonesia's experience offers an alternative model of feminist diplomacy characterized by quiet persistence, inclusive engagement, and context-specific implementation. The findings contribute to broader debates on how non-Western states can localize and institutionalize feminist foreign policy principles within constrained geopolitical settings.

Keywords: *Feminist Foreign Policy, Women Migrant Workers, Indonesian Diplomacy, ASEAN*

Introduction

Indonesia's foreign policy strategy during the period of Retno Marsudi's leadership embodied feminist values through the emphasis placed upon the intersectionality of vulnerabilities faced by trafficked persons. Intersectionality, a central feminist theory concept, illustrates the ways in which identity categories that overlap (e.g., gender, ethnicity, migration status) give rise to distinct experiences of subjugation (Crenshaw, 1991; True, 2012). Marsudi's campaigning in the region frequently placed focus upon how women migrant workers are uniquely at risk of trafficking based on economic disparities, patriarchal expectations, and the invisibility of their legal status (Piper & Segrave, 2014; Ford, 2012). By bringing these intersectional experiences to the forefront, Indonesia advanced a more sophisticated understanding of trafficking, avoiding the oversimplification of victimization narratives, and thereby furthered a feminist foreign policy approach. Public diplomacy activities conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during Marsudi's tenure further embedded feminist values in the fight against human trafficking. "Safe Migration" and "Stop Human Trafficking" campaigns, for instance, aimed to raise awareness among prospective migrants, notably women and young people (Ford & Lyons, 2011; Gallagher, 2010). According to feminist scholars, feminist strategies emphasize empowering approaches to agency development rather than resorting to top-down forms of protection (Enloe, 2014; True, 2012). Through the incorporation of local populations, religious groups, and diaspora organizations in its public

diplomacy, Indonesia aimed to create grassroots resistance to trafficking consistent with feminist ideals related to participatory activities and empowerment.

Critics may point out that the feminist foreign policy initiatives by Marsudi were constrained by larger structural factors, ranging from patriarchal state institutions to the culture of non-intervention of ASEAN (Rüland, 2016; Acharya, 2009). International relations scholars of feminist theory accept the reality that institutional resistance to change stalls the emancipatory possibilities of feminist foreign policy (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Hudson, 2010). Yet, constrained by these limitations, Marsudi navigated diplomatically the available space to implement incremental yet significant gender-sensitive changes. Indonesia's calls for stronger victim protection standards, gender-targeted protocols, and survivor-centered support in regional forums can be counted as feminist wins in a conservative diplomatic culture. Marsudi's feminist-oriented foreign policy was further enhanced through the projection of Indonesian support for the inclusion of trafficking concerns in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework at the UN (True, 2016; Hudson, 2013). Though historically centered on conflict-affected areas, the WPS framework increasingly recognizes trafficking as gender-oriented violence fuelled by insecurity and displacement (Tickner & True, 2018; Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006). Indonesian foreign policy insisted upon an expanded interpretation of WPS by suggesting trafficking in Southeast Asia warranted increased attention in its pillars. This strategic framing enabled trafficking to be discussed not merely as a crime, but as a systemic gender injustice demanding collective international action.

Another feminist innovation in the period of Retno Marsudi's tenure was Indonesia's focus on trauma-sensitive victim assistance and rehabilitation. Trauma-sensitive approaches to victim assistance and rehabilitation had been a longstanding demand made by feminist scholars (Piper, 2005; Chuang, 2010). Indonesian diplomacy pushed partner states to embrace protocols guaranteeing the non-criminalization of trafficking victims, psycho-social assistance, and gender-sensitive re-integration schemes (Gallagher, 2017; Palmer, 2016). This prioritization of survivor empowerment was a testament to the core feminist precept that victims of injustice should be treated as not just aid-recipients but as holders of rights to be respected and to exercise agency. Legally, the country's role in norm entrepreneurship aimed at establishing international legal benchmarks on trafficking (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Gallagher, 2010) reflected feminist foreign policy's requirement for laws and rules to be grounded on the lived reality of marginalized groups and not on legal abstractions (True, 2012; Enloe, 2014). Indonesian proactive engagement with negotiations over the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) and the revision processes of the anti-trafficking treaties substantiated its role in advancing legal principles focusing on protection of the victim, gender justice, and justice accessibility in borderland situations.

Marsudi's feminist-oriented diplomatic leadership also exemplified the value of forging transnational feminist solidarity. Through interregional networks such as the Bali Process and the mechanisms of ASEAN, Indonesia enabled not just cooperation between states but among governments and feminist-oriented NGOs, international institutions, and civil society organizations (Piper, 2017; Sundström, 2020). Feminist foreign policy demands dismantling hierarchical conceptions of international relations and encouraging egalitarian, cooperative models (Hudson, 2010; Tickner, 2001). Indonesian participation in a multistakeholder approach to engagement opened the door to local and intra-regional feminist perspectives informing anti-trafficking policy discourse and decisionmaking (ILO, 2016; UN, 2017b). Retno Marsudi's feminist practice of diplomacy was not tension-free and compromise-free. Navigating national interests, regional stability, and human rights ideals inevitably resulted in contradictions (Nabbs-Keller, 2018; Rüland, 2016). Feminist scholars acknowledge the contested nature of foreign policy as a terrain of struggle between contending imperatives (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Enloe, 2014). Nevertheless, Marsudi's consistent prioritization of protection, empowerment, and inclusion even in the face of such constraints testifies to feminist approaches to diplomacy as adaptable and resilient. Her time in office provides valuable lessons to the international strategies of other states in the Global South.

Theoretical Framework: Internal and External Factors in Foreign Policy Analysis

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) offers a critical perspective to analyze the ways in which states design and execute their external policies taking into account both intra-state as well as external considerations (Hudson, 2005; Smith, Hadfield, & Dunne, 2016). FPA proves to be a useful framework to study the feminist-oriented diplomacy of the Indonesian government during the tenure of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi to tackle the issue of human trafficking. FPA transcends the classic realist concentration on systemic constraints by examining the manner in which domestic

politics, leadership, national identity, bureaucratic organization, and international pressures converge to generate foreign policy behavior (Hill, 2016; Hudson, 2014).

Internal Factors

Internal factors encompass the domestic social, cultural, political, and institutional dynamics behind foreign policy decision-making. A number of these drivers were applicable to the Indonesian context regarding the inclusion of feminist aspects in anti-trafficking diplomacy. First, President Joko Widodo's presidential tenure prioritized human rights and the projection of soft power domestically, facilitating greater diplomatic activism for gender-sensitive foreign policy (Laksmiana, 2019; Anwar, 2010). Second, bureaucratic hierarchies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kementerian Luar Negeri) facilitated Marsudi's efforts, notably through specialist directorates dedicated to human rights, women, and the protection of migrant workers (Rüland, 2016). Third, national identity was pertinent; the self-perception of Indonesia as a humanitarian Southeast Asian actor and a moderate Muslim democracy supported the pursuit of moral leadership in the fight against trafficking (Acharya, 2011; Sukma, 2003).

In addition, civil society involvement was a significant internal influence as well. Indonesia's active NGO sector, especially women's and migrant worker organizations, shaped foreign policy agendas at the grassroots level through advocacy, lobbying, and policy forums (Piper, 2005; Palmer, 2016). According to Feminist Foreign Policy scholars, meaningful policy reform usually arises from effective engagements between civil society and state actors (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; True, 2012). As a result, Indonesian feminist-inspired diplomacy can be partly credited to pressures and coalitions at home which prioritized gender-sensitive victim-centered foreign policy undertakings.

External Factors

The external factors include the structures of the international system, global norms, bilateral relations, and multilateral pressures conditioning a nation's foreign policy behavior. Under the tenure of Retno Marsudi, international normative changes towards gender equality and combating human trafficking heavily impacted Indonesian diplomacy. Tools like the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encouraged states to accommodate gender-sensitive, human rights-oriented foreign policies (True, 2016; Gallagher, 2017). Indonesian receptivity to these norms demonstrates the FPA wisdom that states are not mere passive receptacles but active interpreters and creators of international standards (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

At the national level, both enabling and restrictive influences were derived from the country's membership in the ASEAN. Regional support for anti-trafficking diplomacy was seen in the signing of the ASEAN Convention Against the Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) during the first years of Marsudi's tenure (ASEAN, 2017; Piper, 2017). Nevertheless, the region's doctrine of non-interference restricted how boldly member states could advance gender-sensitive human rights enforcement (Rüland, 2016; Acharya, 2009). Bilateral diplomacy with labor-receiving nations, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, further entailed balancing diplomacy to obtain protections for Indonesian workers abroad while preserving strategic political and economic associations (Ford, 2012; Piper & Segrave, 2014).

Transnational networks of feminist and human rights groups based abroad also served as external drivers. These groups put pressure on the Indonesian government to bring its foreign policy behavior in line with progressive international standards regarding trafficking and gender justice (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; True, 2012). Interaction with multi-lateral institutions such as the Bali Process, UN Human Rights Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) further subjected the country to feminist scrutiny and best practice, solidifying Marsudi's determination to instill feminist values in the country's external affairs.

Literature Review

The theory of feminist foreign policy (FFP) originally emanated from Sweden's articulation of a gender-oriented foreign strategy in 2014, led by then Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (Thompson & Clement, 2019; Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). FFP aims to redefine diplomacy around the principles of justice, human rights, and peace anchored in a gender paradigm. In contrast to a focus on state interest and security secured by the military, FFP promotes a human-oriented approach, prioritizing the marginalized, starting with women and girls (Enloe, 2014; Hudson, 2010). This represents a paradigm shift away from masculinized international relation practice, situating care principles, justice, and inclusivity at the center of foreign policy action (True, 2012; Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Though pioneered by states

such as Sweden, Mexico, and Canada, feminist foreign policy values are increasingly influencing the Global South states, though in customized variations (Sundström, 2020; Aggestam & Towns, 2018). It has been argued by scholars that FFP cannot be narrowly categorized as a Western import but rather as a malleable framework contextualized to various socio-political settings (Tickner, 2018; True, 2016). Globally in the South, where histories, religions, and socio-economies vary greatly from liberal democracies of the West, feminist values take on a pragmatic form, placed in the larger development, human rights, and humanitarian discourse (Piper, 2017; Enloe, 2014). This body of literature emphasizes the contextualization of FFP into the local politics. Moreover, human trafficking is an issue of utmost importance for feminist foreign policy as it overlaps with gender violence, migration, labor abuse, and institutionalized inequality (Gallagher, 2010; Chuang, 2006). These scholars highlight how the phenomenon of trafficking disproportionately impacts women and girls, especially in household work, the underground economy, and forced sexual exploitation (Piper & Segrave, 2014; True, 2012). FFP frameworks therefore make a case for addressing the issue of trafficking not as organized crime but as an offense to human rights commanding survivor-oriented, trauma-sensitive international action (Hudson, 2010; Tickner & True, 2018). All the literature calls for the end of diplomacy on trafficking with an intersectional, victim-oriented approach.

In addition, Indonesian foreign policy has traditionally focused on the region's stability, sovereignty, and economic diplomacy (Sukma, 2003; Anwar, 2010). Nevertheless, it has been noted in recent scholarship that gender-sensitive endeavors are increasingly being incorporated into the country's external activities, especially during the leadership of Retno Marsudi (Rüland, 2016; Laksmana, 2019). Although Indonesia has not explicitly announced a feminist foreign policy, aspects of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping, human rights, and the protection of migrant workers embody feminist values in practice (Ford & Lyons, 2011; Piper, 2015). Indonesia's commitment to international human rights mechanisms has been seen by scholars to create diplomatic space to advance gender-sensitive policies across multilateral forums. A number of scholars emphasize how Marsudi's leadership from 2014 to 2024 marked a new turn in Indonesia's foreign policy path, prioritizing humanitarian diplomacy, gender empowerment, and victim protection (Nabbs-Keller, 2018; Palmer, 2016). Marsudi's period is described in terms of her consistent but quiet efforts to support women's right through the systematic changes made at the ASEAN, the Bali Process, and the bilateral talks regarding workers and trafficking victims (Piper & Segrave, 2014; Gallagher, 2017). Her diplomacy mirrors the feminist foreign policy doctrine of quiet leadership—achieved through effective structural shift while avoiding direct confrontation (Rüland, 2016; Enloe, 2014). Marsudi's diplomacy has been described increasingly in the literature as an instance of feminist practice developed to fit Southeast Asian geopolitics.

The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) represents a milestone subregional instrument to address human trafficking from a gendered perspective (UNODC, 2015; ASEAN, 2017). Academics recognize the progressive attentiveness to women and children in ACTIP but critique the limited enforcement provisions and normative obscurity of ASEAN (Piper, 2017; Rüland, 2016). International feminist relation theory stresses the necessity for effective accountability institutions to guarantee gender-sensitive formulations in treaties give rise to meaningful protections for trafficking survivors (True, 2012; Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006). Indonesian leadership in advancing the ratification and implementation of ACTIP reflects the country's diplomacy embracing feminist-enlightened anti-trafficking governance. Indonesian attempts at anti-trafficking diplomacy during the tenure of Retno Marsudi align with the theory of norm entrepreneurship, by which states proactively fashion and advance novel international standards (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Acharya, 2011). International feminist foreign policy discourse recognizes the status of norm entrepreneurs as drivers of gender justice on a global stage (True, 2012; Hudson, 2010). Indonesian efforts to advance victim-centered, gender-sensitive human trafficking norms at the Bali Process and UN Human Rights Council demonstrate the country's status as an Asia-Pacific norm entrepreneur. Theory indicates feminist foreign policy includes not just compliance with norms but proactive creation and dissemination of new norms.

Intersectionality, developed by Crenshaw (1991), has become a basis for feminist approaches to analyzing trafficking. Victims of trafficking typically suffer from intersecting forms of oppression related to gender, class, migration status, and race (True, 2012; Piper & Segrave, 2014). Feminist foreign policy scholarship maintains that effective antitrafficking must accept and address these intersecting vulnerabilities. Indonesian diplomacy's treatment of trafficking during the tenure of Marsudi increasingly addressed intersectional concerns, recognizing the double disadvantage of women migrant workers and displaced persons (Ford, 2012; Gallagher, 2017). Intersectionality becomes an essential analytical framework in assessing feminist diplomacy. Moreover, the one common thread throughout the scholarship is the feminist criticism of soft law tools, namely regional declarations and non-binding agreements, to combat trafficking

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(Piper, 2015; True, 2012). Although soft law can push forward normative alignment, the argument has been made by scholars that in the absence of binding commitments, the most marginalized groups—trafficked women and girls in particular—suffer from a lack of adequate protection (Chuang, 2010; Enloe, 2014). ASEAN's culture of consensus and noninterference tends to stifle the emancipatory impact of gender-sensitive regional agreements such as the ACTIP (Rüland, 2016; Acharya, 2009). Feminist foreign policy models support greater enforcement to guarantee human rights promises go beyond rhetorical support.

The feminist scholarship highlights the contribution of transnational feminist networks to state action on trafficking and gender justice (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Piper, 2017). States are pushed to implement feminist values in foreign policymaking, advance intersectional approaches to analyzing trafficking and migration, and hold their governments to international human-rights expectations (True, 2012; Tickner & True, 2018). Indonesia's enhanced cooperation with NGOs and feminist groups at the international and regional levels during Marsudi's time highlights the potential of state and non-state actor synergy towards feminist foreign policy. This model of cooperation enhances feminist foreign policy by integrating both bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to critically analyze the ways in which Indonesia's feminist foreign policy tenets under the helm of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi were utilized to fight human trafficking during the period 2014 to 2024. A qualitative approach is used because the study seeks to explore narratives of diplomacy, policy initiatives, and international engagement from the perspective of feminist foreign policy (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative methods can provide in-depth interpretation of complicated political behaviors, motivations, and institutional strategies whose measurement via quantitative indicators proves to be arcane (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study takes a case study approach to the study of Indonesia as a separate instance in the larger framework of feminist diplomacy and human trafficking governance. Case study research, as defined by Yin (2018), represents an empirical study examining a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in situ. This design best qualifies to inform how the particular Indonesian internal and external dynamics impacted its foreign policy outcomes. The case study provides a contextual examination of Marsudi's feminist-oriented diplomacy strategies in the Indonesian political, regional, and international context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Data were gathered using a mix of document analysis and secondary sources. Primary documents studied comprise the official statements of Indonesia's foreign policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs press statements, the ASEAN agreements (e.g., ACTIP), UN Human Right Council resolutions, Bali Process communiqués, and international organizations' reports (e.g., UN Women, IOM, and ILO) (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003). Policy briefs, books, and journal articles by reputable researchers and authentic news outlets provided further information on the national and international facets of Indonesia's anti-trafficking diplomacy. A document analysis provides a systematic method for examining and analyzing printed and electronic materials to enable the researchers to derive meaning, understand, and create empiric knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Because of the nature of human trafficking problems and the classified nature of diplomatic communications, document analysis ensures the study relies on public and verifiable information while maintaining scholarly rigour (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Findings and Discussion

This part examines how Indonesia's feminist foreign policy in addressing human trafficking during the time of Retno Marsudi was influenced internally and externally, as examined using the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) lens. Each thematic conclusion that follows will be interpreted using the double lens of internal and external factors to reveal the intricate interaction between domestic configurations and international contexts.

Internal factors influencing feminist diplomacy

Gender Mainstreaming in Diplomatic Practices

Internal political support for gender equality played a major role in the mainstreaming of feminist values in the foreign policy of Indonesia. President Joko Widodo's government espoused a development discourse incorporating women's empowerment, opening space for gender-sensitive diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Retno Marsudi (Anwar, 2010; Laksmana, 2019). Bureaucratic culture in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs further facilitated this

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change, with separate directorates dedicated to the protection of migrant workers and human rights (Ford & Lyons, 2011). Civil society groups, particularly women migrant worker groups, placed further inward pressure, ensuring the framing of trafficking as a gendered human rights concern (Piper, 2005; True, 2012). Hence, gender mainstreaming in Indonesian external engagements represented the intersection of domestic political will, bureaucratic support, and civil society activism. Another endogenous factor influencing feminist diplomacy in Indonesia is the bureaucratic reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which focused on capacity development and professionalization with a gender perspective. The incorporation of gender-sensitive education into the study of diplomacy has gradually transformed the culture of diplomacy (Bhatia & Rai, 2013; Hernandez, 2021). By empowering diplomats with instruments for the identification and management of gendered power structures in international negotiations, Indonesia embedded feminist practices from the inside (Robinson, 2006; Tickner, 1992). This bureaucratic development corresponds with gender equality commitments at the broader state level under national development plans and global agreements. Codes of diplomatic conduct were updated to reflect gender-sensitive terms and conduct standards (Elmhirst, 2007; Oestreich, 2007). These developments collectively enabled a diplomatically responsive culture to the rights of women migrant workers and trafficking survivors. If not revolutionary, they represented incremental yet embedded changes. Thus, the internal reform was not symbolic but directly impacted the implementation of policy. These changes to the bureaucracy fortified feminist diplomacy by aligning inner procedures with normative commitments. In addition, the personal commitment and leadership style of Retno Marsudi were an effective internal catalyst for feminist diplomacy. As the first female foreign minister of Indonesia, Marsudi represented a shift away from entrenched male foreign policy traditions (Prihatin, 2021; Davies & True, 2017). She placed gender concerns on the agenda as strategic matters rather than humanitarian (Acharya, 2011; Hudson et al., 2013) owing to her international law and human rights background. Marsudi's discourse often prioritized the role of women's agency in peacebuilding and economic resilience and placed her diplomacy in accordance with international feminist foreign policy directions (Aggestam & Towns, 2019; Nikogosian & Chuang, 2021). During her tenure, the Ministry initiated plans aimed at preventing trafficking and protecting women overseas. It not only performed the role but incorporated these into the country's multilateral and bilateral schemes. Marsudi's feminist leanings institutionalized the efforts even after leaving office. Marsudi's personal agency therefore contributed significantly to the strengthening and legitimation of gender-sensitive foreign policy discourse.

Thus, personal leadership has been a crucial internal variable to further feminist diplomacy. Indonesian President Jokowi's national development program has stressed "inclusive growth" as a discourse model, which gendered the entire country's development plans across different sectors, including diplomacy. This political support enabled the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to approach feminist principles in a conciliatory framework (Jones & Resh, 2018; Krook & True, 2012). Feminist diplomacy was not a standalone phenomenon but was placed in a larger national narrative linking women's empowerment to national development and foreign image (Suryakusuma, 2011; Black & Hernandez-Truyol, 2016). This discursive framework enabled feminist values to be framed as augmentative to, not erosive of, the country's national interests. Synergy between domestic policy agendas and foreign affairs initiatives was provided by the state's proactive role in the gender and migration discussions in the forums of ASEAN. The presentation by the state of a "moderate Muslim democracy" self-image added further strength to the appeal of the empowerment of women abroad (Fealy, 2008; Bush, 2009). Thus, feminist diplomacy was an extension of national branding and soft power diplomacy. Convergences in internal political narratives, when gendered in a pro-equality framework, enhanced the strength of feminist foreign policy. These are the moorings to comprehend the available political opportunity structures for feminist diplomacy in the country.

Educational reform and heightened gender awareness among Indonesia's foreign affairs institutions further enabled feminist diplomacy. The Center for Education and Training at the Foreign Ministry incorporated gender, human rights, and humanitarian diplomacy modules (Setiawati, 2020; Parpart, 2010). These institutionalized practices helped foster a cohort of women-sensitive diplomats. These institutions were further consulted by feminist scholars and think tanks in forming policy (Cohn, 2008; D'Costa, 2016). This production of knowledge enabled the reframing of trafficking not just as a criminal concern, but as an infringement upon gendered human and social justice rights. Diplomatic posts overseas were incentivized to partner NGOs and local civil society organizations, leading to feminist-understood response formations on the ground (Willett, 2010; Zalewski, 2013). These reforms in education and knowledge production resulted in feminist ideals becoming embedded in the professional selves of the diplomat. Indonesian foreign policy consequently developed a keener understanding of intersectionality in foreign affairs. Education with a gender perspective was not an

afterthought but a core tenet to the shift. Knowledge and education thus played an intrinsic part in the development of Indonesian feminist diplomacy.

The national human rights institutions (NHRIs), most notably Komnas Perempuan, added to feminist diplomacy by providing valid information and policy suggestions. These institutions acted as a conduit between civil society and the state, ensuring the concerns of women migrant workers were placed on the foreign policy agenda (Bakker, 2015; Hafner-Burton, 2008). Systematic reporting on trafficking, abuse, and violence in the destination nations helped the Ministry of Foreign Affairs create evidence-based policies. Komnas Perempuan's outputs were even directly mentioned during bilateral talks and during the ASEAN forums (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013) in a majority of cases. This synergy between independent institutions and government ministries was a hallmark of the Indonesian approach to gender-sensitive policy. The independence and standing of these institutions made feminist diplomacy audible to the core concerns of empirical reality instead of being mere lip service. These institutions further helped hold the government accountable to international human rights law. Hence, these institutional connections in Indonesia acted as endogenous mechanisms to entrench feminist norms in diplomacy.

Domestic legal reforms, the Anti-Trafficking Law No. 21/2007 and the Protection of Migrant Workers Law No. 18/2017, provided an enabling framework for feminist diplomacy. These laws insisted on proactive state protection and defined tangible frameworks of victim support and prevention (Ford, 2009; Magnis-Suseno, 2018). The convergence of foreign policy with the demands of domestic laws guaranteed congruence in the international engagements of Indonesia. Diplomats were authorized to appeal to national legal instruments during negotiations with host nations and international organizations (Piper & Lee, 2016; Arifianto, 2017). Legal requirements further assisted in giving credibility to Indonesia internationally, particularly in negotiating gender abuse and gendered violence. These legal frameworks were not only defensive mechanisms but also negotiating resources in international discourse. Internalization of these principles guaranteed solid national frameworks to support the diplomacies of Indonesia. This convergence is central to an understanding of how legal reforms at home supported feminist diplomacies. Internal legal congruence provided a mandate and the authority to make Indonesian diplomacies legitimate in the pursuit of women migrant workers internationally.

The inclusion of women in leadership roles at the ministerial level facilitated the institutionalization of feminist practice. Women ambassadors, consular officers, and delegates to multilateral organizations contributed lived experience and feminist awareness to the practice of diplomacy (True & Hewitt, 2018; Aggestam et al., 2022). Their representation made policy diversity and increased sensitivity towards intersectional vulnerabilities. For instance, female consular officers were acutely aware of the concerns of trafficking survivors and collaborated with NGOs to obtain protection (Zwingel, 2012; Enloe, 2014). The initiatives of the Ministry to promote gender equality, in the form of mentorship for young women diplomats, retained and promoted women in the foreign service. Representation served as a symbolic as well as practical component of feminist diplomacy. These initiatives from the inside represented a long-term strategy to transform the gendered nature of diplomacy from the inside out. Enlargement of the scope of feminist diplomacy from the macro to the everyday practice at the bottom echelons was made possible by the structural inclusion of women. Thus, gender-inclusive representation was an input and an output of the inner feminist transformation of Indonesia.

Silent Feminist Diplomacy: Coalition-Building Over Confrontation

The "silent diplomacy" approach used by Retno Marsudi was motivated by domestic considerations as well. It was conditioned by Indonesian political culture, which appreciates harmony, avoiding conflict, and consensus (Sukma, 2003; Rüländ, 2016). Public naming and shaming was something Marsudi deliberately avoided. She used coalition politics and soft tactics of persuasion in both the ASEAN and the broader regional settings. This political culture at the domestic level shaped a pragmatic feminist foreign policy tradition, in which gender justice was advocated through strategic negotiation and backroom diplomacy consistent with feminist theory's stress on incremental reform of the patriarchal system (Aggestam & Towns, 2018; Enloe, 2014).

Indonesia's silent diplomacy demonstrates a keen awareness of the cultural and institutional constraints of its regional influence. A foreign policy doctrine of "bebas aktif" (independent and active) advises against any public criticism and supports constructive engagement (Sukma, 2003; Anwar, 1994). It has cleverly navigated these boundaries to tackle controversial gender issues such as trafficking without risking nationalist and religious reaction. This accords with feminist diplomacy strategies of strategic silence and negotiation over radical intervention (Davies & True, 2015; Zalewski, 2013). Coalition politics with likeminded states in the ASEAN region enabled Indonesia to make common

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cause for women's protection without sounding coercive. Diplomacy behind the scenes was an deliberate strategy to insert gender-sensitive agendas into regional institutions (Robinson, 2006; Tickner, 1992). Indonesia practically exemplified a Southeast Asian form of feminist pragmatism. It framed trafficking as a development and human rights concern to create space for the possibility of multilateral cooperation. These steps highlight the strength of quiet activism in patriarchal and consensus-driven institutions.

Indonesia's feminist diplomacy has involved ASEAN's institutional culture as well, where informal agreements and soft law are the standard. Confrontation in the public sphere is assumed to be counterproductive in the ASEAN culture of diplomacy, based on the principles of non-interference and mutual respect (Acharya, 2001; Rüländ, 2016). Indonesia has instead worked with the culture rather than challenging it, using its moral leadership and regional influence to advance protections for women migrant workers. This strategy reflects the principles of feminist institutionalism, which proposes that feminists take advantage of pre-existing rules and norms to bring about incremental changes to institutions (Mackay, 2011; Krook & True, 2012). A series of informal coalitions with ministries, embassies, and NGOs throughout the region has been a priority for Indonesia to create gender-issue momentum. The coalitions have resulted in joint statements, action plans, and initiatives across borders that advance quietly the rights of women (Piper & Lee, 2016; Davies & True, 2017). The strategies are not made in public but effective, based on the idea that sustainable reform in ASEAN has to be nonconfrontational and locally legitimized. Silent diplomacy therefore represents feminist norm entrepreneurship in institutional weaknesses.

Indonesia has expanded this silent diplomacy approach in international forums through the employment of terminology familiar to both progressive and conservative states. It has spurned ideologically charged terminology like "feminist foreign policy" for the universally approvable phrases "inclusive development," "human security," and "women's empowerment" (True, 2012; Nikogosian & Chuang, 2021). This judicious discursive approach is an example of a pragmatic feminist ethos prioritizing strategic advantage over ideological purity (Zalewski, 2013; Aggestam & Towns, 2019). It has highlighted the importance of women's roles in peacekeeping and sustainable economies through its representatives in the UN and G20 rather than taking on states over gendered abuses. It enables it to occupy a middle path between the agendas of the women of the West and the concerns of the Global South and to increase its credibility (Acharya, 2011; Hudson et al., 2013). Effectively, it has promoted feminist objectives without engendering resistance at the diplomatic level. Linguistic flexibility displays the nuanced balancing act demanded of feminist diplomacy. Silence, in this instance, represents a calculated diplomatic tool rather than a withdrawal.

Indonesia's strategy also prioritizes inter-ministerial coordination and multi-stakeholder interaction as central elements of silent feminist diplomacy. Unlike compartmentalizing gender concerns in an isolated bureaucratic silo, Indonesia has encouraged inter-agency action among the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Manpower, and the National Agency for Migrant Worker Protection (BNP2TKI) (Ford & Lyons, 2011; Setiawati, 2020). These forms of coordination allow for a better umbrella response to abuse and trafficking, short of antagonizing the destination states. Feminist theory posits that intersectional diplomacy is more likely to bring about system change (Cohn, 2008; Parpart, 2010). Silent diplomacy thus becomes an agent to multiply inter-agency coordination, aligning gender not as a niche issue but rather a cross-cutting priority. These coalitions involve civil society organizations as well, further integrating feminist viewpoints into foreign policy practice (Bakker, 2015; Willett, 2010). This strategy illustrates the ways soft-spoken coordination between institutions can bring about significant policy changes. The lack of confrontation by no means suggests the lack of ambition—it rather shows Indonesia's careful navigation of intricate political landscapes.

A strength of the silent feminist diplomacy of Indonesia is its dependence on human rights reporting and statistics to quietly compel states. Through the employment of documented civil society reports from Komnas Perempuan, UN Women, and IOM, Indonesia highlights abuses diplomatically rather than openly denouncing particular states (Hudson & Leidl, 2015; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Hafner-Burton, 2008). This aligns with the focus of feminist diplomacy on evidence-induced policy to reduce intersectional vulnerabilities (Piper, 2005; Hafner-Burton, 2008). The government employs this information to institute greater protection and monitoring procedures, particularly in bilateral labor arrangements. The vocabulary of common cause obviates blame's vocabulary, leading to a receptivity in the conversations. This approach illustrates the manner in which knowledge and campaigning can be quietly weaponized towards promoting feminist ideals. The discreet employment of "naming without shaming" maintains the partner states' cordial relationships while advancing gender agendas (Bhatia & Rai, 2013; Enloe, 2014).

Data proves to be a diplomatic currency in Indonesia's silent feminist approach, substantiating the argument that diplomacy cannot be boisterous to be significant. Indonesia's quiet coalition politics are equally apparent in its leadership

role in the Bali Process and other inter-regional efforts to combat trafficking. Far from pressing a feminist agenda, Indonesia positions trafficking as a collective regional issue deserving of cooperative solutions (Renshaw, 2015; Piper & Lee, 2016). This enables it to organize senior ministry-to-ministry meetings and taskforces sans ideologically oriented resistance. Feminist foreign policy in this instance takes the form of embedded technical solutions in the form of victim identification, safe repatriation, and capacity building—solutions advancing gender justice sans contentious politics (Elmhirst, 2007; Davies & True, 2017). Feminist diplomacy is therefore incorporated into security and development agendas. Indonesian policymakers sidestep positing gender as an external agenda, instead situating it in terms of migration and economic vulnerability in the region. This reinforces the policy of continuity and acceptability in the framework of the ASEAN approach to decision making. Coalition politics proves to be a stealth strategy in feminist norm diffusion in conservative regional politics.

Indonesia's feminist diplomacy makes strategic use of silence as a survival tactic in patriarchal settings of diplomacy, particularly as a predominantly Muslim country. Being too vocal about women's issues in international fora invites charges of cultural insensitivity or Westernization (Fealy, 2008; Suryakusuma, 2011). Performing rather than declaring, Indonesia maintains the integrity of culture while pursuing feminist objectives. This resonates with Enloe's (2014) argument that silence can be a strategic mechanism through which feminists are able to operate in patriarchal frameworks without openly combating them. The occupant of the Indonesian positionality can challenge gender expectations by engaging with and being believed. Indonesian foreign policy in action becomes feminist action in its own right (Prihatin, 2021; True & Hewitt, 2018). Where feminism is politically fraught, this approach allows women to make gains while avoiding polarization. Silent diplomacy becomes an effective feminist strategy, especially in consensual cultures. The Indonesian experience illustrates how feminist objectives can be met not just by protest, but by endurance and the exercise of quiet strength.

External Factors Determining Feminist Foreign Policy ASEAN, ACTIP, and Regional Norms

Regionalism via ASEAN offered both opportunities and limitations. On the outside, the acceptance by ASEAN of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP) had a normative and legal framework available which was actively promoted by Indonesia (ASEAN, 2017; Piper, 2017). ASEAN's non-interference policy, however, usually undermined the application of instruments of this sort (Rüland, 2016; Acharya, 2009). Marsudi's feminist foreign policy strategy successfully bridged these regional constraints by seeking cooperative, non-contentious steps which furthered gender-sensitive protection while not infringing the sovereignty standards of the region. This outside regional context involved strategic balancing, revealing the necessity of feminist foreign policy to accommodate regional political circumstances.

Indonesia's approach to the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP) marks its strategic leadership in norm entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia. Being among the strongest advocates of ACTIP, Indonesia endeavored to frame human trafficking as a common concern across the region deserving of harmonized action (ASEAN, 2017; Piper & Lee, 2016). Nevertheless, the convention's dependence on soft law instruments rather than legally enforceable mandates vested a limited transformative capability (Acharya, 2009; Rüland, 2016). Feminist scholars describe how these legal tools tend to be gender-agnostic, further peripheralizing the distinctive vulnerabilities of women and girls (True, 2012; Hudson et al., 2013). Indonesia endeavored to move past this by initiating diplomacy aimed at supplementing ACTIP with gender-centered programming. By facilitating cross-border coordination on victim identification, information exchange, and safe repatriation, Indonesia enabled the localization of feminist agendas in a curtailed legal framework. This illustrates the ways in which feminist foreign policy evolves through norm inclusion rather than norm imposition. ACTIP was therefore a platform over which the Indonesian state could layer additional gender-sensitive interpretations. The role played by the country demonstrates the ways in which feminist diplomacy occurs even in restrictive normative regimes.

In spite of the limitations of ACTIP, Indonesia has used its provisions in the interest of promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperative frameworks aimed at women migrant workers. By bringing a gender perspective to the victim-centered approach of ACTIP, Indonesia has prioritized protections for trafficked domestic workers, caregivers, and entertainers—concerned occupations dominated by women (Piper, 2017; Ford & Lyons, 2011). Indonesia's foreign missions in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong, for instance, have employed the soft legal authority of ACTIP to negotiate improved consular protection and labor conditions (Arifianto, 2017; Piper & Satterthwaite, 2008). Though

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ACTIP supersedes no national laws, its symbolic authority reinforces the bargaining advantage of diplomacy when negotiating over rights and protections. Feminist foreign policy in this instance works by piling soft norms on top of hard politics to make the discourse over human rights actionable by quiet diplomacy (Aggestam & Towns, 2019; Davies & True, 2017). Indonesia's application of ACTIP demonstrates the potentiality of regional instruments to be stretched via feminist translation and situational application. Through it, ACTIP remains a living document rather than a static one, molded by the narratives at the state level.

Indonesia is also hindered by the "non-interference" norm of ASEAN, which dissuades criticism of the inner affairs of member states, including human trafficking abuses. This norm tends to de-limit the ability of ASEAN to implement the provisions of ACTIP, leaving most of the responsibility to the member states (Sukma, 2003; Rüländ, 2016). Indonesian feminist foreign policy in turn sidestepped public criticisms and focused on capacity building and technical assistance to the surrounding ASEAN neighbors. This approach accords with what feminist analysts see as "quiet resistance" advancing change through cooperation rather than confrontation (Enloe, 2014; Zalewski, 2013). Indonesian leadership in the ACWC enabled it to interpose gendered recommendations into larger trafficking discourses (True & Hewitt, 2018; Setiawati, 2020). Through the cultivation of confidence and the evading of sovereignty-sensitive terminology, Indonesia shaped ASEAN policy directions while being respectful of the politics of the region. Silent feminist diplomacy therefore works through the creative application of norms, walking a tightrope between advocacy and legitimacy. In doing this, Indonesia maintained the social fabric of the region while advancing a gender justice agenda.

ACTIP's implementation has further highlighted the divergent capacities and political will among member states of the region, again complicating coherency at the regional level. This gap has been capitalized upon by Indonesia to establish it as a facilitator at the regional level in terms of improving governance related to trafficking (Acharya, 2011; Piper, 2017). Joint workshops, training schemes, and technical assistance enabled Indonesia to build capacity at the regional level consistent with the principles of victim protection in the ACTIP. The foreign policy approach in this instance relies not on coercion but on coalition building and norm diffusion through practical action (Hudson & Leidl, 2015; Mackay et al., 2010). Indonesia, for example, has advocated support for community rehabilitation for women returnee migrants, setting the standard for inclusive victim-centered strategies. These move to enhance the impact of ACTIP while leaving it unchanged legally, demonstrating the potential for embedding feminist values in operations. Indonesian strategy illustrates the role of regional diplomacy in the bridging gaps in implementation through feminist-infused solidarity. The provision of being a source of resources had further enhanced its diplomacy credentials while carrying a subtle feminist agenda. The absence of gender terms in ACTIP has been a significant criticism among feminist scholars of law. Although the convention mentions victim protection, it never specifically mentions the intersection of trafficking with gender, migration status, and informal labor (Piper, 2005; Gallagher, 2010). To address the gap, Indonesia has employed the collection of gender-disaggregated information, the training of female consular officers, and the development of closer collaboration with women's NGOs. These "micro-practices" are what Tickner (1992) has characterized as the "everyday" work of feminist diplomacy, where informal initiatives make up for formal legal vacuums. By Indonesia's gentle pressure, gender sensitivity has been institutionalized in regional antitrafficking negotiations, even in the lack of formal mandates. Here, Jakarta's feminist foreign policy becomes an insurgent movement, reinterpreting regional conventions to prioritize women's lived experiences. ACTIP becomes a law text not only but a political arena in which feminist agency takes hold through practice. Jakarta's innovative engagement appropriates the gender-blind text and turns it into an intersectional toolkit.

Indonesia has further promoted the ASEAN-wide implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the identification and protection of victims, with a focus on gender sensitivity. These SOPs were drafted together with civil society organizations and represent a move towards a more inclusive approach to regional governance (Bhatia & Rai, 2013; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). The role played by Indonesia in the development of these guidelines illustrates how feminist diplomacy can proceed through procedural reform rather than the wholesale reform of the law. Rather than pursuing changes to the treaty, Indonesia works on incorporating gender perspectives into operating instruments and diplomatic training (Ford, 2009; Willett, 2010). This approach echoes feminist institutionalism's focus on incremental change through the workings of the bureaucracy (Krook & True, 2012). By working towards the practical implementation of the ACTIP, Indonesia enhanced its reputation as both a human rights defender and a regional leader. The approach bypasses resistance from the more conservative of the member states of ASEAN while still achieving

substantive reform. Feminist diplomacy in this case succeeds on the basis of methodical, institutionalized procedures rather than declarative statements.

Indonesia's involvement with ACTIP reinforces the vital role of reconciling regional norms with international human rights frameworks. Although ACTIP denotes ASEAN's resolve to combat trafficking, its shortcomings mandate it to be supplemented by international partnerships. Indonesia has enabled exchanges between ASEAN and the UNODC, IOM, and UN Women to make the implementation of ACTIP consonant with international standards (Hafner-Burton, 2008; True, 2012). This bridging function bolsters the credibility of ACTIP while enabling Indonesia to function as a go-between among regional sensitivities and universal standards. Feminist diplomacy at this trans-scale role prioritizes dialogue and complementarity over rivalry (Aggestam et al., 2022; Nikogosian & Chuang, 2021). With multilateral coordination, Indonesia raises the stakes for regional commitments without subverting the core principles of ASEAN. This strategic location showcases the ways in which feminist foreign policy can maximize influence not just by gathering strength through direct activism, but by affirming normative union between regional and universal spaces. Indonesia's ACTIP diplomacy depicts the careful action of feminist norm entrepreneurs negotiating constrained yet fluid institutional contexts.

Conclusion

Indonesia's feminist foreign policy from 2020 to 2023, led by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, demonstrates the effective operationalization of feminist principles in the context of the Global South despite institutional, political, and regional limitations. Through an elegant synthesis of gender mainstreaming, quiet diplomacy, and norm entrepreneurship, Indonesia has promoted a foreign policy agenda prioritizing the protection, empowerment, and dignity of trafficked women and children. It was not a declaratory feminist foreign policy in the form of Western states but a context-sensitive and pragmatic diplomatic approach to prioritizing cooperation over confrontation, adaptation over imposition, and incremental over radical change.

Internally, solid bureaucratic support, leadership commitment, legal reform, and civil society engagement were central to institutionalizing gender-sensitive policies. Having women in leadership in the foreign service, along with education reform and cooperative engagement with feminist researchers and NGOs, provided a basis for ongoing activism. Indonesian feminist diplomacy was not reactive; it was proactive, seeking to redefine diplomatic standards to accommodate intersectional vulnerabilities and survivor-centered justice. Externally, Indonesia employed the ASEAN forums like ACTIP and the Bali Process to advance gender-sensitive agendas while not infringing upon the region's central norm of non-interference. Silent diplomacy helped the country to walk the tightrope between treating the political cultures of the region with reverence while pushing feminist agendas. Through the invocation of universal human rights norms in terms of culturally relevant regional practice, it was both a norm entrepreneur and a bridge-builder between universalist and local feminist demands.

Positioning trafficking as a human security issue enabled Indonesia to frame its diplomatic efforts in line with larger UN agendas of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Palermo Protocol. Through this, Indonesia transformed anti-trafficking diplomacy not just as a criminal or legal issue but a gendered development and humanitarian one. This reframing validates feminist IR scholars' contention that effective diplomacy requires locating the lived experiences and structural vulnerabilities of victim groups at the forefront. Though limitations exist—e.g., the lackluster enforcement instruments of ASEAN, patriarchal cultural attitudes, and the shifting political will—Indonesia's feminist foreign policy during this period provides an interesting model for the Global South nations. It illustrates how states can advance gender justice in international affairs through coalition dynamics, institutional reform, and translation of norms despite the lack of a formal feminist foreign policy doctrine. Indonesia's 2020–2023 approach to diplomacy is a Southeast Asian variant of feminist foreign policy—low-key but calculated, limited but far-reaching. It serves as a significant case study of how feminist values can shape and transform foreign policy action in both context-sensitive and universally applicable ways. As the international feminist foreign policy discourse evolves further, Indonesia's experience acquires valuable lessons regarding the potential of equity-, inclusivity-, and human-rights-centred transformative diplomacy.

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