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Are the feminists taking over? A critical analysis of Sweden and Canada's feminist foreign policy and implications in the Middle East

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**Are the Feminists Taking Over?
A Critical Analysis of Sweden and Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy and Implications in
the Middle East**

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Abstract: This research examines the new political phenomenon of feminist foreign policy, which aims to recenter foreign policy construction and implementation in a humanist framework. Feminist foreign policy arose in the 2010's as a response to traditional foreign policy approaches, which have not been effective in combatting systemic violence and inequalities upheld by nation-states. Sweden and Canada, in 2014 and 2017, respectively, were the first to launch feminist foreign policy initiatives and pledged to apply a human rights approach in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in their foreign affairs strategies. Drawing upon government handbooks, primary sources, and both international and transnational feminist theory, this research will address several questions. Can a state feminism adequately and comprehensively serve the need for a feminist consciousness in the seemingly "gender-neutral" field of international relations? How does a state feminism measure up to a transnational feminist activism? This paper will attempt to answer these questions through a comparative critical analysis of both Sweden and Canada's contemporary feminist foreign policy agendas. Further, this study will analyze the impact of a feminist foreign policy in the Middle East and North African region. Both analytical works and government-published handbooks and statistics describe these Feminist foreign policy initiatives as a strategy to promote and attain a more just global order. This research will suggest that foreign policy development could benefit from the reintroduction of traditionally "feminine" areas of academic discourse, such as phenomenology and care ethics, to international relations. However, the efficacy of a state feminism must be addressed in conversation with other feminist approaches, such as transnational feminist activism, which includes local initiatives.

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1. Introduction

A new perspective to foreign policy has emerged on the international stage, for the first time claiming to be explicitly “feminist” in its approach. A “feminist” approach to international relations is based on the fundamental principle of gender equality and awareness of the fact that, until today, policymaking, including foreign policymaking, has failed to include and consider the voices, needs, and interests of all those affected—girls, boys, women, and men alike. This approach not only serves to analyze and inform policymaking, but also to guide the work of governments around the world.

“Feminist” foreign policy first gained international prominence when former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallstrom, announced a new policy, *feministisk utrikespolitik*, in October 2014, (Gennarini and Oas). Just three years later, in June of 2017, Canada became the second country to adopt a Feminist International Assistance Policy under the liberal government of Justin Trudeau, (Robinson, 2). In her foreword to the policy, Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development, stated that “we need to make sure that women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential so they can earn their own livelihoods, which will benefit families as well as the economic growth of their communities and countries,”(Robinson, 6). Taking a human rights–based approach, the Canadian government has pledged that, by 2022, 95% of their international assistance budget would be directed towards “gender equality” and “women’s empowerment,” (Canada's National Action Plan 2017-2022). At its most basic level, a feminist foreign policy calls upon the state to prioritize gender equality and women’s rights in its international dealings. A feminist foreign policy further pledges to recognize women and girls as unique actors in the global community, with needs and contributions that differ to those of men.

This research project investigates why such a foreign policy agenda was seen as necessary, and what a feminist foreign policy agenda means in theory and in practice through a comparative analysis of Sweden and Canada's respective approaches. Further, this project will examine how a feminist foreign policy is received by countries in the Middle East and North Africa, a region that continues to be impacted by damaging legacies of Western intervention and colonial efforts. I will synthesize government handbooks, UN activity, interviews with experts, and both international and transnational feminist theory, to suggest that foreign policy development could benefit from the reintroduction of traditionally "feminine" areas of academic discourse, such as phenomenology. However, the efficacy of a state feminism must be addressed in conversation and practice with other feminist approaches, such as transnational feminist activism and efforts spearheaded by local groups.

The first section of this report outlines academic discussions of the past 30 years that precede and support feminist foreign policy agendas in order to present a frame for analysis of how these policies have come to fruition. Feminists have been critiquing international relations and foreign policy and practice since the 1960s, with several feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, Karen Garner, and Ann Tickner arguing that traditional approaches in the field favor a "gender-blind," "masculinist" approach. That is to say, "unmarked" foreign policy, like the "unmarked" body, places the masculine point of view at the center of its paradigm, culture, and history, thereby marginalizing femininity, and masquerading as "gender-neutral," (Smith). In the second section of the paper, I outline the specific motivations for and applications of the Swedish and Canadian feminist foreign policies, respectively. In the third section, I discuss and analyze the connections made and found between several Middle Eastern states and feminist foreign policy

agendas. This section has been shaped by the materials and resources that are available, and thus this paper does not attempt to make comparative judgements based on which countries in the region are included and excluded from the analysis. Some countries such as Turkey have introduced state feminism projects, while in other cases, nations have begun employing a “feminist” strategy in their various dealings with states such as Syria, Afghanistan,¹ Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, among others. In this section, I describe and discuss these arguments while further complicating them by including Middle Eastern “state feminism” projects and critiques of colonizing projects by scholars of transnational feminism and post-colonialism. In particular, I will include scholarship from Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in order to examine critiques of the current feminist foreign policies. Further, I will examine whose, or which feminism is being employed in both Canada and Sweden’s respective “feminist” approaches. In my concluding section, I consider the efficacy of these policies and expand upon the larger implications of the introduction of a feminist foreign policy.

2. Feminist Theory & Practice in International Relations

In this section I will include a selection of actions taken by the international relations community that lead to the inception of an explicitly “feminist” foreign policy. Further, I will outline a brief history of feminist theory which will inform the ongoing arguments of this project.

Understanding “gender-neutral” practice as “gender-blind” practice

Since the mid-19th century, feminist scholars of international relations have denounced the field as, “one of the most gender-blind, indeed crudely patriarchal, of all the institutionalized forms of contemporary social and political analysis,” (Jones, 405) Scholars including Cynthia

¹ While Afghanistan not traditionally regarded as a part of the Middle East and North Africa region, linguistic, religious, and cultural ties remain that call for its inclusion in this paper

Enloe, Karen Garner, and Ann Tickner argue that while gender is fundamental to the constitution of the state and the inter-state system, international actors have rarely behaved as though this were the case. Since the inception of the modern international relations system after the first World War, foreign policymaking has been undoubtedly gender-blind, rather than gender-neutral. That is to say, nations have not taken the initiative to address foreign policy issues in a gender-sensitive way, and often employ a “one-size-fits-all” framework. Feminist theory has indeed shown that traditionally, international relations is in fact gender-blind, and thus the embedded masculinism of the study and practice of the field has been made integral to its very identity, (Tickner, et al., 33)

Thus, states and other international actors have been masculinist without intentionally or overtly pursuing the “interests” of men. Therefore, it is not surprising that the study and practice of international relations has historically placed the masculine point of view at the center of its paradigm, culture, and history, thereby marginalizing femininity, and masquerading as “gender-neutral.” In truth, threats to human security may be economic or environmental in nature or may be driven by racial or ideological or religious differences, but, they are always gendered (Garner, 39) This androcentrism has been built into all constructs of Western civilization, and it cannot be adequately addressed simply by “adding women,” (Scheyer and Kumskova, 57) Rather, a radical restructuring of thought and analysis must occur, in order to take into account the lives experience of women and girls when drawing conclusions or generalizations. This task would also require an untangling of masculinized notions of power and protection. Gendered misunderstandings influence ideas of the state and what must be protected, and identity informs the ways in

which gendered protection and ideas of the state enact different policies that remain underwritten by masculinist impulses and conceptions, (Tickner, 83).

The domination of masculinity over femininity is a structural pattern that may have existed prior to the development of the states system. However, the gender division of masculine public and feminine private spheres submerged within civil society is one of the foundations upon which modern European states were built and postcolonial states beyond Europe were subsequently established, (Tickner, 33). This public-private division takes particular forms with specific manifestations in different Western and non-Western contexts. However, gender structures similarly differentiate male and female, masculine and feminine, rational and emotional, public and private in mutually constitutive ways, (Tickner, 33). These structures continue to play a crucial role in the constitution of state identities, diplomatic practices, and the maintenance and transformation of international relations. Gender-blind policy permits masculinism to underwrite not only policy but also the very identities of a state. Of course, this system cannot be undone by merely adding the language of “girls and women” to gender-blind policy and practice. Instead, the system requires a radical restructuring and analysis which comes to terms with the reality that women’s experiences must be valued at every level of the international decision-making process.

“Feminist” practice in the international relations community

International institutions have concerned themselves with so-called “gender issues” since the mid-20th century, especially as they relate to conflict and war. Wartime language and practice often hinges upon essentialist gender stereotypes. Male leaders who determined war policies and who built military institutions drew on notions of Western hegemonic, heterosexual, and aggres-

sive masculinity to cultivate male power and dominance, and utilized misogyny and homophobia to train military recruits, (Garner, 67). This militarized masculinity reinforces male dominance in a society in wartime and even extends into post-conflict “peacetime.” If “peace” is constructed as “feminine,” then “war” is constructed as “masculine,” (Garner, 42). That is, essentialist gender constructions of women as “natural” peacemakers as well as “maternalist” critiques of violent and aggressive militarized masculinity put forth during twentieth-century wars have also reinforced the dominant male-over-female gender power relations post-conflict. This reinforced gender binaries in Western and non-Western societies between private, feminized spheres, and public, masculinized spheres, and justifies male-over-female gender power hierarchies. Warring groups have employed gendered forms of coercive force to defeat their enemies and to overcome internal resistance to war within their own group.

Although sexual violence, which disproportionately affects women, has been a tool of warfare occurring across cultures, it was not described as a weapon of war by the international relations community until the 20th century. The tactic to use rape as a weapon of war to “emasculate” the enemy’s men and to “spoil” the enemy’s women, (Garner, 42) is one built upon gendered stereotypes of dominance and power. Even the language of war itself, which entices young men and boys to “defend the motherland,” serves as a way of understanding oneself through masculinized notions of men as strong protectors and women as sufferers in need of this militarized protection. Sexual violence and rape are prevalent in regions of war as well as in refugee camps, and 80 percent of the world’s refugees are women and children, (Women for Women International). Rape is a crime of domination, not an act driven by sexual desire. As such, during wars, rape becomes a weapon of war often utilized to dominate the enemy. According to feminist

international relations theorist Karen Garner, “directing global attention to the mass rapes taking place in Bosnia allowed feminists to redefine the rape as a “weapon” used to “humiliate, shame, degrade, and terrify an entire population,” (Garner, 85) These reports also resulted in the widespread recognition of rape in war on the international agenda and in legal human rights discourses, which was a crucial moment for feminists to transform the political discourse and institutional policy regarding women’s rights.

Along with an expansive history of women’s activism, feminist scholarship, and critical approaches to international affairs, groundbreaking international attention on the issues of women and girls, as legitimized by institutions such as the United Nations, has contributed to what is today called “feminist foreign policy.” Prior to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1993, rape and other forms of sexual assault had been classified as “lesser crimes” under the Geneva Conventions, not as “grave breaches” of international law, (Garner, 87). Since then, United Nations agreements have begun addressing the special needs of women and girls during times of conflict, in particular with the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 passed in 2000, which illuminated states’ obligations to protect women and girls in conflict zones and to ensure that women were involved in all aspects of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict peace building.

Sweden played a leading role in the implementation of Resolution 1325, presenting its first action plan as early as 2006, (Aggestam, 31). UNSCR 1325 both recognized women as both in need of specialized protection, as well as key actors in promoting peace and stability. Veronika Wand-Danielsson, who has served as the Swedish Ambassador to NATO and France, discusses the impact that UNSCR 1325 has had on the development of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy:

In military operations, if we want to do a good job and produce results, we have to have the understanding and acknowledge and develop all those tools in the military framework to be able to meet the target groups. Then to be able to draw intelligence from women, you have to approach them differently. Resolution 1325 has been more important and still used more often... Having women advisors in these key positions will access other women, and the information that women will gather will be different.

The Government of Canada also described its 2019 action plan as, “guided by UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent UN resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, (WPS)” (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020). However, progress has been stalled on swiftly implementing UNSCR 1325. Significant barriers to achieving the objective of the resolution include the structural exclusion and devaluation of women in peace processes, (Subramanian-Montgomery, et al.). There is also a widespread problem of simply viewing women as victims and not recognizing their potential as active participants in the process of building a more stable and secure world.

Lieutenant Colonel and military officer leading on the integration of Women, Peace and Security in the UK Defense, Rachel Grimes, further discusses barrier to implementing 1325 during her time in the UK Defense, that it was seen as a “product of Western ideals” and not an agreed-upon consensus of human rights advocacy:

Whenever I've been teaching a mixed audience, or just talking to senior male officers, about why the military should be implementing 1325, I frequently hear that it's a Western value that I can't expect. But when British soldiers aren't learning in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, or anywhere that has traditional conservative values that we the Brits should not be

trying to put onto that culture. I find that hugely offensive. And I'm almost, I mean, I left the army and part of the reason why I left the army was, that that was a contributing factor to my decision, because I felt like I was having to argue with people to do the right thing. And yet, they would go back to this cultural argument that we're trying to change other people's cultures and religions. And they weren't looking at it from a human rights perspective.

How is the “woman problem” handled, or not handled, during national crises? Rachel Grimes discussed this trend as it relates to the implementation of UNSCR 1325:

People say, ‘look, be patient, we need to deal with something else,’ and overlook the fact that if they had included a general perspective, they could probably have developed a way more sophisticated plan that would be more successful... On 1325, it kind of has this dual action plan built in, in terms of addressing women who are victims of gender based violence during wartime but also getting women to participate on the back end of decision making and peacekeeping. To me, I'm surprised and disappointed, but I think that on the whole, the majority of militaries who looked at plans for support to other countries interventions in other countries are not looking at it from a gender perspective —not yet. I think that some of them are aware of it. I think that their senior officers can speak quite eloquently about subjects. But, I think if you were able to dive down into the planning process, you would discover that, apart from maybe somebody saying, ‘of course, we're thinking about agendas perspective,’ it would be challenging to find countries which are actually integrating 1325 into their operations.

The introduction of feminist foreign policy internationally

A feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a manner that prioritizes gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocated significant resources to achieve that vision, and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male-dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense, and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups, and movements.” (Thomson, 2) A feminist foreign policy implies a collaborative effort between the state that develops the policy and the states with which it engages, and requires an “ethical commitment to the care and support of distant others,” (Aggestam, 38). Perhaps one of the most important tenants, feminist foreign policy calls for need of feminist consciousness as vital rather than peripheral to an effective and “gender-just” foreign policy.

3. Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden and Canada

In this section I will detail the Swedish and Canadian feminist foreign policy agendas. I will include reactions to these policies and further compare their motivations and applications. While the Swedish model includes gender equality as a goal in itself, the Canadian model views achieving gender equality as a key component in achieving the country’s greater goal of eradicating poverty. This section will outline specific policy which is directed towards nations in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy

The Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy’s theoretical framework is largely connected to the tenants that Margot Wallstrom described in “*A Womanly Virtue: Female Representation as Glob-*

al Security Strategy,” published in the *Harvard International Review* in 2010. In this article Margot Wallstrom outlined the gender-blind nature of international relations and made the case for the more equitable inclusion of women. Wallstrom argued that men act as a barrier to women’s full participation and leadership in politics: “This situation arises not from a shortage of capable women, nor from lack of ambition, interest, or ability in women. Rather, it arises from men choosing men,” (Wallstrom, 31). She states that the “glass ceilings,” “glass walls,” and “sticky floors,” while legitimate concepts of gender inequalities built upon stereotypes, have not been what is primarily holding back women in politics. Rather, she points to “a thick layer of men” which has prevented women from reaching the top, (Wallstrom, 30).

Wallstrom contends that there can be no sustainable development without equitable development, and there can be no equitable development without gender equality,” (Wallstrom, 30) She lays out the widespread detrimental consequences of what this “thick layer of men” is prohibiting. Gender-equal representation is not called upon for its own sake; women bring different attitudes to the negotiating table and to the political agenda, and can contribute valuable experience given the roles they fulfill in their communities and their families. Equal gender representation is about filling the democratic deficit, creating a more balanced society, and making decisions that better represent the people. According to Wallstrom, Sweden’s feminist foreign policy is about systematically and holistically implementing policies that contribute to gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights of all women and girls (Wallstrom, 30).

Further, Wallstrom argues that women’s participation at all levels of international decision-making is crucial to not only more traditional “hard” security threats, such as war, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction, but also in countering “soft” security issues, such as educa-

tion and infrastructure. Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy centers gender equality not only as a goal in itself, but as a precondition for achieving its wider foreign, development, and security policy objectives. Thus, the Swedish model refutes the differentiation between "hard" and "soft" security as highly gendered and falsely prioritizing. Instead, Feminist Foreign Policy is rooted in a positive concept of peace and security that includes dimensions of human security, such as equitable and sustainable development as well as social cohesion. It also points to the fact that sustainable peace can only be achieved if all those dimensions are addressed.

While the Swedish government assumed a "feminist" identity and announced its adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy in 2014, the policy had not yet been fully formulated, and it took some time for the Swedish government to elaborate on how Feminist Foreign Policy would transpire in practice. The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the official Handbook outlining Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in August of 2018.

According to the Handbook, the nation's foreign policy goals are to be achieved through a theoretical focus on the so-called three "Rs"— Rights, Representation and Resources , which are anchored in the fourth "R" — Reality, (Handbook, Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy). According to the policy, Sweden shares a formal commitment to ensuring the rights of girls and women globally, whether it be through the support for the prohibition of female genital mutilation and forced marriage, equal rights to inheritance and education, or the rights to sexual and reproductive health. The importance of women's representation is emphasized throughout the Handbook, which argues that it should be second nature for policymakers to ask if women are being represented and whether women are allocated the same resources as men when formulating foreign policy and delegating resources internationally. The third R refers to the "shifting of resources"

to conflict prevention and peace building with a gender lens, although it remains unclear from where these resources are being shifted. Wallstrom argued that providing resources for humanitarian aid and peace processes is not a humanitarian problem, but a political problem. She posited that the inclusion of women “transcends the divide between hard and soft security and enables sustainable peace building.” All of the “Rs” are to be informed by the unique and specific reality of the women being reached by the Feminist Foreign Policy.

The six primary focus areas for the implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy in the Handbook are: (1) To strengthen women and girls’ human rights in humanitarian situations; (2) To fight and prevent gender-based and sexual violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations; (3) To promote women’s participation as actors in peace processes and peace promoting measures; (4) To promote women and girls’ participation in the work for economic, social and environmental sustainable development; (5) To strengthen women and girls’ economic independence and their access to economic resources, including through productive work under decent living conditions; (6) To strengthen sexual and reproductive rights for girls and young people. When describing the motivation for the policy, Former Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom described that, “we see it as an objective in itself to achieve gender equality and human rights. However, we also see gender equality as an essential element in order to achieve other objectives, such as sustainable peace, security and development,” (Handbook, Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy).

Implementation

In October 2017, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs released a report outlining the most significant changes and results in The Foreign Service’s practice since the implementation

of a Feminist Foreign Policy just three years prior, in regards to the six objectives outlined in the Handbook. In March of 2018, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs published a similar report, further outlining progress that was made following the “Three R’s” model. In the 2016 - 2020 Women, Peace, and Security Action Plan, the Swedish government outlined 12 countries which would be particularly prioritized for foreign missions. A third of these countries are located in the Middle East: Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Syria. Additionally, the Swedish WPS Action Plan indicated the African Union as a key regional partner for its implementation. Further, the government described how it had contributed to highlighting the link between gender equality and childcare in Tunisia. In 2016 an expert visit and seminar on preschools and Swedish children’s literature focusing on gender equality were held in cooperation with the Swedish Institute and attended by, among others, Tunisia’s gender equality minister. The Swedish Embassy has followed up on this with other initiatives, including the launch of the “Swedish Dads” photo exhibition and a collaborative project with UNICEF to further develop the concept with a focus on Tunisian fathers. As Tunisia is in the process of building and reforming its childcare system and thus increasing women’s ability to participate in social and political life, this active exchange of experience is believed to have contributed to the thinking around these issues.

In 2017, the Swedish government described that it had supported the participation of Syrian women in political processes at local and international level, and in the Women’s Advisory Committee of the Syrian opposition. With support from Sweden, the Women’s Advisory Committee has contributed to several rounds of the UN-led peace talks in Geneva and strengthened its influence, thereby enabling it to impact the opposition’s vision for the future so that it sets a

quota of 30 percent women in political bodies. Rachel Grimes further discusses gender quotas and their impacts in successful gender mainstreaming:

I think there's a balance, probably not gotten balanced yet. But I am hugely proponent of the tipping point, I think that you can see this with race relations, I think you can see it with having a more diverse workforce. But if you can reach 25, 30%... I think that an organization that has 25, 30% women in it will start to have a different outlook. And you could look at the thinking the Norway introduced this rule that every company or CEO has to have 25% 30% of women on board. And the way the board in the meeting started to operate changed and apparently became more successful. But on the whole what I read is that when you have a diverse and inclusive organization, it's more productive. So I feel that for the UN, and for most militaries, it's going to be painful for the women that come in at the beginning. Because they will be a novelty, and they will be different. If you can get to that tipping point, I think that the environments will become more and more women-wanted.

In 2018, Sweden reported to have established a leadership program for women leaders and entrepreneurs in the Saudi Arabian business sector. The program also served as a network for Swedish and Saudi Arabian business sector actors. Further, Swedish funding has supported the training of thousands of new midwives per year in Afghanistan. Another example of Sweden's reported contribution to women's entrepreneurship and employment is the through the funding of networks of local support centers for women based on the Swedish model of women's networks for economic empowerment and on collaboration between civil society, the state, the private sec-

tor and academia. In Armenia, support to local networks has resulted in the establishment of more than ten support centers. These centers have created jobs and skills development opportunities for vulnerable women as a way of promoting their empowerment, leading in turn to, “greater self-confidence and increased interest in political engagement and participation,” (Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy – Examples from Three Years of Implementation, 2017).

One key to the implementation of several of Sweden’s feminist campaigns is the usage of social media. In 2017, Sweden allocated an additional SEK 200 million to the #SheDecides movement, which works with local organizations to form a global network of support for women’s and girls’ bodily autonomy and reproductive agency and education. Similar social media movements supported by the Swedish government include the #WikiGap, #Midwives4all, #SheTrades, #MoreWomenMorePeace, #HeForShe and #SwedishDads. #SwedishDads is an online trend which features Swedish fathers on paternity leave, a practice that Swedish families have been entitled to since 1974.

While paternity leave is not explicitly outlined as an implementation measure in Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy, the Handbook and 2017 follow-up report include further language directed to boys and men as key actors in the pursuit of a more feminist world. The Handbook describes how, “influencing negative and stereotypical masculinity norms is important, as is changing attitudes and behaviors among men and boys who represent and act based on such norms,” (Handbook, Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy). Further, the Handbook includes the message that it is important to involve men and boys in the work to prevent conflict and to combat gender-related and sexual violence. It is also highlighted that unpaid housework and caring must be shared equally between men and women, as well as that men and boys especially need to

be involved in order to change attitudes regarding the usage of contraception in developing countries.

The 2019 - 2022 action plan for Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy describes the first five years of the policy as a success. Certainly, Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy handbook clearly outlines the special attention given to the way policy is formulated in Stockholm. The current action plan for Feminist Foreign Policy prioritizes three areas for improvement: (1) Promotion of women's and girls' economic and social conditions, (2) Increased efforts for sexual and reproductive health and rights, and (3) Enhanced action on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, (The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019–2022).

However, due to the relative recentness of the implementation, information regarding specific outcomes in the policy's target countries are not well-documented. The most recent government report of outcomes that Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy has contributed to was issued in 2017. In this update, the Swedish government claimed that a Swedish-backed program is thought to have, "prevented hundreds of thousands unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions in East Africa," (Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy – Examples from Three Years of Implementation, 2017). Further Swedish funding has led to thousands of midwives having been trained in Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Sudan, Zambia and other countries. Sweden has also started a network for women peace mediators, which has "inspired" the emergence of similar mediation networks in Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. The report further shows that between 2015 and 2016, Sweden increased its support to women's organizations by 35 percent within the framework of development cooperation. In 2017, an extra SEK 200 million was allocated at the same time as Sweden helped found the She Decides movement. In this year, Sweden

was the largest donor of core support to the UN body for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, (Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy – Examples from Three Years of Implementation, 2017).

Feminist foreign policy and trade

What does gender equality in trade mean? To begin, gender-blind trade policy benefits men more than women. Additionally, women's poverty can largely be linked to a lack of access to economic resources and financial services. The growing share of the world's population of women living below the poverty line is often attributed to the "feminization of poverty," (Garner, 150) The feminization of poverty was first recognized as a global phenomenon in the 1980s. It is a consequence of the combined adverse effects of gender discrimination, neoliberal economic policies, and the globalization of the labor market. Even as the global capitalist workforce employed more women than at any time previously in world history, women faced more barriers than men to "lifting themselves" out of poverty, (Moghadam, 39). Gendered divisions of labor has persisted, in that "men's work" is constructed as paid, productive, independent work that provides the primary income for the family; "women's work" is constructed as unpaid, reproductive, dependent, and supplementary to the family income, (Garner, 151).

Consequently, more often than men, women worldwide were employed as part-time, temporary, or casual labor, which allowed global capitalist powers to pay women lower wages to minimize labor costs and maximize profits. Moreover, women worldwide continued to serve as the primary, and unpaid, household laborers and caregivers for children within their families. Thus, economists such as Ester Boserup and others devised the phrase, "feminization of labor" to describe the devaluation and disempowerment of women in the global labor market, (Garner,

150). To ensure that trade enhances opportunities for women, policymakers should assess the potential impact of trade rules on various groups of people and develop policy responses based on evidence. Additionally, gender-sensitive policy must be implemented with a diverse understanding of gender equality as it relates to trade. Gender equality cannot only be measured by women's access to economic participation. Rather, women's employment must be considered alongside the generation and accumulation of capital, assets, and wages, as well as consumption and related decisions affecting individual and household well-being.

Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy Handbook addresses not only humanitarian action, but also trade and the financial sector. The Handbook argues that there is also overwhelming evidence that gender equality boosts economic growth, even if governments and businesses continue to act as though this is not the case. With this in mind, the Swedish government's feminist trade policy includes several focus areas which are dedicated to efforts ensuring that trade policy and trade promotion activities benefit women and men equally. In regards to the financial sector, the Swedish government views gender as a market access issue, and pledges to give priority in trade negotiations to sectors, products and services that have positive implications for women.

The Swedish Handbook outlines several measures to pursue gender sensitive trade policy. The government now requires that a "gender analysis" must be part of impact assessments and sustainability impact assessments conducted in connection with trade negotiations. Similarly, it states that sectors, products and services that have positive gender impacts must be given priority in trade negotiations, and that "gender experts" must be given a greater role in policy making to ensure better results. Further, the Handbook broadly addresses the Swedish government's commitment to prioritizing a gender perspective into the development of international trade stan-

dards, simplifying trade and removing barriers in the services sector, advocating for the improvement of working conditions in developing countries, as well as collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data on women's consumption and entrepreneurship for further research and response.

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

Justin Trudeau famously began his work as Prime Minister by forming Canada's first-ever gender balanced Cabinet, providing the justification that, 'because its 2015!' when asked why he chose to do so. In October 2017, Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). In this section I will outline the Canadian government's motivations for the adoption of such a policy. Further, I will discuss how this new "feminist" approach to FIAP and trade is outlined and implemented. While Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy is officially labeled as such, Canada instead employs the title of *Feminist International Assistance Policy*. This is likely because unlike Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy, which aims to include gender analysis at every step and in every sector of the foreign policymaking process, Canada's FIAP is limited to humanitarian action which simultaneously seeks to eradicate poverty in developing countries.

According to the Canadian government, the primary objective of its FIAP is to, "contribute to global efforts to eradicate poverty around the world." The Canadian government reasons that in order to eradicate poverty, it must address inequality. FIAP was born out of the conclusion that promoting the equality and empowerment of women and girls is the most effective approach to achieving these goals.

"Canada knows that women, as well as men, are full members of their society and must actively participate in the negotiations, reconciliation and reconstruction within their communi-

ties required as a result of conflict. The path to peace needs empowered women because where women are included in peace processes, peace is more enduring, where women are included in the economy, economic growth is greater, where women are included in governance, states are more stable, where women are included in security, everyone is safer, where gender equality is upheld, societies are more peaceful. It is based on the understanding that addressing root causes of gender inequality requires the transformation of power relations associated with discrimination, coercion and violence in Canada and abroad. Increasing gender equality can deliver strong economic growth, help cut down on extreme poverty, reduce chronic hunger, benefit entire families, and empower all those who face discrimination,” (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020).

Similarly to the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy model, Canada’s FIAP also employs six areas of action. These areas are: (1) Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, (2) Human dignity, (3) Growth that works for everyone, (4) Environment and climate action, (5) Inclusive governance, and (6) Peace and security. Canadian FIAP highlights the first of these goals as the core of its action plan. As such, Canada has pledged to fund initiatives that enhance the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls, increase the participation of women and girls in equal decision-making, and give women and girls more equitable access to and control over the resources they need to secure ongoing economic and social equality.

In 2019, the Canadian government released its FIAP action plan, which included the following objectives: increase the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict state building, preventing and responding to gender-based violence perpetrated in conflict, and strengthen the capacity of peace operations to advance the WPS

agenda, including by deploying more women and fully embedding the WPS agenda into CAF operations and police deployments, (Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2017-2022). With regards to the last of these objectives, Canadian Minister of National Defense, Harjit Singh Sajjan, suggests that, "the continued operational excellence of our military also requires that it reflect Canada in all its diversity, that it be inclusive, and that it provide at all times and in all ranks a respectful environment for women,"(Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020). The conflict that arises when discussing military activity as part of a "feminist" agenda will be revisited later in this section.

As for the allocation of funding under the FIAP, targets outlined in the policy's introduction include a minimum of 80 percent of Canadian international assistance to integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in pursuit of the FIAP's goals, (Tiessen). They also include a minimum of 15 percent (up from around two percent in 2017) of Canadian international assistance explicitly targeting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Both of these goals are projected to be achieved by 2021-2022, (Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2017-2022).

Implementation

In relation to its FIAP, Canada has given special attention to "women's rights" in the Middle East and North Africa. The Canadian government has found that in the region, more women than men attend university, yet women's participation in the labour market is less than half the world average. Women hold only 18 percent of parliamentary seats, and few women rise to positions of influence where they can participate in decisions that most affect the lives of women and girls. In politics, the Canadian government states that woman representatives are,

“catalysts of change, and that the leadership of women sparks reforms that benefit everyone,” including, “health and sanitation services, gender equality laws, parental leave and elimination of sexual and gender-based violence,”(Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020).

While women’s participation and representation is important at every level of government, it is unclear that women will inherently make decisions that pursue a feminist agenda. While women may act within their own interests, women are not necessarily natural feminist actors.

With this in mind, Canada has stated that it wants to help equip women in Arab countries for more active roles in politics, at the heads of companies and in other decision-making spheres, and so the Canadian government pledges that “training” will be offered to more than 9,000 women in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. As a part of this “training,” the government states that “these women” will acquire new key leadership and management skills, and they will be “introduced” to journalism and public speaking. Further, the government claims that they will be able to learn how their region’s political systems work, while women who are already leaders in their fields will be able to become trainers and mentors who will encourage other women, especially young women, to become “agents of change,” (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020).

Further, the Canadian government argues that communities also need to value women’s involvement in public affairs, and so “seminars and meetings on gender equality and the political rights of women” will be held in the three countries, including in rural areas, with the participation of about 3,000 men, (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020). Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy also includes language on boys and men’s roles in pur-

suings its “feminist” agenda. Canada’s feminist approach involves men and boys as partners in transformative change, due to the policy’s assertion that men and boys can be powerful actors in preventing gender-based violence and the marginalization of women and girls, as well as in creating opportunities for them. Canada’s feminist approach further claims to challenge the normalization of harmful gender relations.

Canada also includes a gender component to its “integrated response to the protracted crisis in the Middle East,” in particular referring to the complex armed conflict in Syria and Iraq and the resulting humanitarian crisis. While Global Affairs Canada provides more than \$1.1 billion in multi-year humanitarian assistance to affected and displaced populations, the Canadian government also outlines that a, “particular effort” is being made to meet the needs of women and girls affected by the crises, (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020). This “effort” includes psychosocial support and specialized medical services for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as the provision of reproductive health services.

The Canadian government has made further commitments to its objective of ensuring “human dignity for women and girls” affected by the hostilities in Iraq, which have led to the forced displacement of almost 5 million people. Canada recognizes that the conflict has been marked by serious violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual violence. The FIAP outlines how thousands of women and girls, particularly from the Yazidi community, have been abducted and have suffered unimaginable horrors, and that those who escape must overcome serious injuries and trauma. Canada has assisted in the establishment of 29 community centers in refugee camps and communities in Kurdistan and other regions which are meeting the

urgent needs of thousands of women and girls every year. At the centers, survivors of sexual violence receive emergency care from gynecologists and mental health specialists. They also get clothing and hygiene items, they have access to reserved areas, where therapeutic activities help them overcome their physical and psychological wounds and their children can play in safe areas. Cases of serious sexual abuse, 90 percent of which have been committed against Yazidi women, are referred to a new, specialized centre in the city of Duhok. There, enhanced services are now available, including psychiatric care and legal assistance.

According to Canadian FIAP, 87 percent of Afghan women will be assaulted in their lifetimes. Domestic and sexual violence are still widespread, as is child, early and forced marriage. Sexual harassment remains common in public places, workplaces and schools, and cases are rarely reported to authorities. The Canadian government has expressed its desire to, “help Afghan women assert their rights in these situations.” Together with the government and civil society, Canada is working to ensure that Afghan women receive equal treatment from public institutions, including the justice system. “Training sessions” are provided for police officers, paralegals and prosecutors which aim to ensure the legislation is interpreted accurately and truly protects complainants’ rights.

The Canadian government reports helping civil society organizations, such as the Afghan Women’s Network, strengthen their skills in order to better advocate for the rights of women and girls. Canada is helping these women gain job skills to become financially independent, particularly in agriculture and entrepreneurship. Information sessions are offered to religious and community leaders to raise their awareness of the risks entailed by child, early and forced marriage.

As a result of Canada's efforts, the government claims that, "more and more Afghans recognize that violence-free families are healthier, better educated and more prosperous," stating that, "with the support of society as a whole, women and girls will be empowered for the good of all," (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020).

Women's participation in conflict resolution, as negotiators or mediators for example, makes peace agreements more durable. The Canadian government reports that when women fully participate in peace processes, agreements are 20% more likely to last at least two years and 35% more likely to last 15 years, (Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, 2020).

Canada further claims that women have organized and performed mass action campaigns in favor of peace agreements more than any other group, pressuring parties to start negotiations and sign peace deals. Because men and women experience conflict and understand peace differently, women bring a different perspective to resolving conflict and building peace. They broaden and deepen the discussion on peace and security beyond the interests of combatting parties, they increase community buy-in, and they help address the root causes of conflict.

Canada and "feminist trade"

Canada's government has adopted the title of "feminist donor," not only in regards to its humanitarian provisions but also in its engagement with the private sector. While Canada's "Feminist Trade Deals" are not included as a foundational pillar of the FIAP agenda, Canada includes women as one of the key underrepresented groups in its Trade Diversification Strategy, which aims to ensure that the benefits and opportunities that flow from trade are more widely shared. Canada has included language regarding the elimination of employment discrimination

by gender in its labour cooperation agreements and labour sections in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). However, mainstreaming gender considerations throughout its FTAs is a recent endeavor that has only been practiced since 2017, as marked by the modernized Canada-Chile FTA. This new section, which builds upon the section on gender in the 2016 Chile-Uruguay FTA, is a first in terms of Canadian FTAs and a first for any G20 country. Since then, Canada has gone on to include a dedicated trade and gender section in its modernized Canada-Israel FTA. Going forward, Canada has promised to ensure that FTAs include trade and gender sections as a priority.

Canada's "feminist" approach pledges to fulfill additional goals with its FTA partners, such as prioritizing the improvement of working conditions for women — "including workers, businesswomen, and entrepreneurs." The Canadian government also promises to establish a dedicated trade and gender committee, which is to be composed of officials from each party to the trade agreement. The "feminist" approach to FTAs also claims to "mainstream gender" by including gender-related provisions throughout a free trade agreement, in addition to including a dedicated trade and gender section.

The Canadian government argues that this "gender mainstreaming" in trade policy can be used to promote access for women to trade and to advance gender equality and other gender-related objectives in its FTAs. These gender-related objectives may include policies that address the gender wage gap and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Similarly, parties of an FTA may choose to require the nomination of women for the senior management or board of directors of an enterprise, or the inclusion of, "provisions that ensure the wording 'gender equality' is included in the illustrative list of areas where parties reaffirm their right to regulate in the

public interest.” This paper will discuss the usage of language in Canada’s FIAP and “feminist” trade policy in its analysis.

Reactions to feminist foreign policies in the international relations community

The usage of the term “feminist” in both Sweden’s “Feminist Foreign Policy” and Canada’s “Feminist International Assistance Policy” is worth examining. While the explicit employment of the words “feminist” and “feminism” may be refreshing to some, others may view the approach as “too radical,” or “too idealistic” to be taken seriously, especially against the widespread practice of *realpolitik*, or “power politics,” (Robinson, 2)

A 2019 study conducted by Malena Rosen Sundstrom and Ole Elgstrom found that other European Union members generally perceived Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy positively, although knowledge of the policy was often superficial. The study found that Sweden is generally regarded as a leader in the promotion of gender norms and although most respondents of the study were reported to believe that Feminist Foreign Policy had a positive effect on Sweden’s international image, it was unlikely that other states would make it a priority to follow suit in the coming years, (Sundstrom and Elgstrom). However, it is possible that this projection may change in light of the COVID-19 crisis, as Swedish Ambassador Wand-Danielsson noted how,

It [the COVID-19 crisis] probably has exposed women's vulnerability... violence in the home has increased, women are more exposed to violence, women had to take the larger task at home now they're locked up with her husband and children. And, therefore, the issue is coming back more and more by highlighting with the vulnerability of women, even in a crisis situation.

While Canada's FIAP has been generally welcomed by the development community, several sources have been critical of Canada's actions, some of which appear to contradict its stated "feminist agenda." The government faced criticism after the announcement that there would be marginal, if any, new funding allocated to FIAP, even as Canada continued to fall below the United Nations recommendation of 0.7% of GDP for foreign aid to begin with. This concern was furthered in context with an announcement given just two days earlier of a 70% increase in defense spending, (Wyeth). Sweden has received similar criticism regarding its ongoing arms trade with Saudi Arabia, which I will outline further in the next section.

Barriers to implementation

In this section, I will discuss several formal and informal barriers present to the integration of a feminist foreign policy. Despite a feminist foreign policy's assurance to pursue ethical approaches to counteract traditional hierarchies, the spaces in which foreign policy is made are inherently hierarchical. Powerful developed countries continue to hold dominion over the disenfranchised Global South, while patriarchal structures permeate negotiations at every level, affecting each actor in the international system. Further, as a "feminist" approach to international relations is in its early years of practice, governments with feminist foreign policy initiatives rest upon the support of several other actors in order to be successful and sustainable. With such a reliance on the approval of other nations and non-governmental organizations, "feminist" policies are required to strike a careful balance. In order to act with "feminist" values, the policy must be transformative as to shake up existing hierarchies, yet palatable enough to maintain the support of established actors. The term "feminism" alarms some international relations experts. As Jenny Nordberg wrote in *The New Yorker*, "Within the diplomatic community, where words

are carefully chosen so as not to offend, ‘feminism’ is usually avoided, as it risks being perceived as inflammatory and indicative of a stand against men.” (Nordberg)

Even those committed to a "feminist" agenda may worry about first world countries choosing to adopt the terminology of “feminist” in their foreign policy strategies. Among existing feminist academics and practitioners, the term “feminism” is one that is highly scrutinized and constantly evolving. While feminism as a term generally rests upon the notion of patriarchal resistance, one must understand “patriarchy” itself as a dynamic and flexible system that differs across physical, cultural, and temporal boundaries. Just as there is no universal form of patriarchy, there is no universal form of feminism. As such, many feminist thinkers have recognized that feminism may never be able to speak for all women at all times, (Dow and Wood). Instead, a more useful assessment of a feminist policy begins with recognizing the diversity of many *feminisms*, and from there, asking the question of, “*whose feminism?*”

There are also existing concerns in the international relations field that a feminist agenda is too radical, or wishes for too rapid change. While speaking to the pushback against gender equality initiatives abroad, Rachel Grimes discussed how,

Some people in the British military tend to think that equality is only for democratic countries, and if we go to these which are democratic, we should, I mean, the biggest thing I hear is, “we've got to take small steps. We don't want to scare them, we want to, you know, win over their veterans. We can't go into a country and say, you know, why don't you open up the police or the military to women and things like that.” So, I'm a little bit disenchanted with that sort of approach. And I think that is very much alive issue... even in regional military organizations, such as NATO, there will be individuals in there

who just don't have equality for women as something that the military needs to be concerned about. And I think that they're missing a big point for those that want a stable, secure country. And it's not just about stopping people from fighting using weapons. It's also about giving the civilian population, both men and women, the same opportunities.

Additionally, feminism, and more broadly, “women's issues,” are still considered, by most states in the international system, as special interest policy spaces, rather than those that are treated as integral to all affairs of the state. This creates a lack of urgency to act within “gendered” lines, especially in times of crisis or national emergency. When questioned about this trend in relation to the COVID-19 crisis, Ambassador Wand-Danielsson insisted that, “in my Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it [the focus on “women's issues”] has not faded, it’s still the main issue.” In September 2020, Minister for Gender Equality Åsa Lindhagen released a statement, acknowledging how, “the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of women being subjected to men’s violence and to discrimination and marginalization, and has led to additional challenges in efforts to advance gender equality,” (Joint Press Statement Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-Responsiveness in the COVID-19 Crisis, 2020). The Swedish government announced that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had developed targeted support for the Foreign Service, presumably to address this linkage. In March 2021, approximately a year since the outbreak of the pandemic, Justin Trudeau’s government unveiled an all-women task force to address gender inequality issues laid bare by COVID-19, although the program appears to be limited to informing domestic policy, (Cision Canada).

Comparison and analysis

In this section I will consider reflections on Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy and Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy using a transnational feminist lens. While there have been some promising moves on behalf of governments regarding funding for local women's groups and programs promoting reproductive rights and access to family planning, including safe, legal abortion, there are still concerns about the ultimate effectiveness of so-called "top-down feminism," or "state feminism" in the context of development and its ability to implement real or sustainable change.

Neither the Swedish nor Canadian policy explicitly define the term "feminism." This could be perceived as something negative, due to the lack of clear direction. However, the ambiguity of these terms can also serve as a way to allow more flexibility in approach and measures of outcome. Further, both models take for granted the assumption that there is a well-accepted or generally understood definition of terms like "feminism," "gender equality," and "women's empowerment." In the context of a feminist policy, neither Feminist Foreign Policy or FIAP establish an explicitly defined "feminism," and instead seemingly treat it as one set of approaches when there are, in fact, an array of feminist lenses. When questioned on the definition of the word "feminist," in the policy, Ambassador Wand-Danielsson responded that, "I think you need the flexibility, I would definitely say the flexibility is important."

While there are several identifiable characteristics of the feminist foreign policy agendas, feminist foreign policy remains a contested term. Further, there is limited discussion of the intersectional realities of women and girls in the Canadian Feminist International Assistance Policy handbook. While the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy handbook does include language that ac-

knowledges women face unique challenges within their own contexts, no specific examples are outlined. Ambassador Wand-Danielsson describes how,

We will never go tell African countries, Latin American or Asian countries what to do, we will work always partnering with local entities who, then, are the driving force, who will identify the projects and, of course, then share experiences... So I think that it is, adapt to local circumstances, let them define what's important to them... The exchange of experiences be at north, south or east, west or lower than the EU, I think is a very important part of this our work great.

Thus, it could be argued that this omission of specific examples in the Swedish handbook is purposeful, instead allowing for flexibility and deferral. What makes the foreign policy 'feminist' is contingent on a country's specific conditions and environment.

While these feminist foreign policies have different strengths and weaknesses, both are notable for explicitly acknowledging gender equality as a core component for achieving foreign policy goals. For Sweden, gender equality is a goal in and of itself, while it does coincide with additional foreign policy goals. Canada is explicit in their approach to gender equality as a mechanism to achieve other desirable foreign policy outcomes, including the reduction of poverty and trade diversification. For Sweden, gender inequality is the central problem that feminist foreign policy must address. Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy is a continuation of domestic commitments, international treaty promises, and its membership of international and transnational bodies. Its policy works from systematically mainstreaming feminist understandings into the workings of state bodies, human rights discourse, and political institutions. It presents a liberal feminist outlook on foreign policy, which can work within existing national and international

structures to enact change. Canada's feminist foreign policy does not conceive of gender inequality in such a central fashion as Sweden. Instead, poverty is understood as the key problem to be tackled in the international assistance policy, and a feminist policy is the way to achieve this.

Differing approaches to feminist practice

Since the 1960s, there has been a separation between Western feminists and "Third World" feminists. This occurred largely because Western feminists subscribed to white, liberal feminist perspectives, which focus on the "universal" patriarchal oppression of women, rather than recognize the unique disadvantages women are subject to as a result of colonial and globalized imbalances, (Mohanty, 346). Women in developing countries then argued that Western feminism did not represent them or align with their struggles. Thus, transnational feminist movements allied together to recognize both the continued significance of patriarchal distinctions between nations, as well as their transcendence by feminist movements across borders. Thus, a transnational feminist approach was created in opposition to the white, liberal feminist assumption that the "monolithic, Third World" woman is subject to the same oppression as the Western woman, (Mohanty, 333).

White, western liberal feminists have generally emphasized the value of freedom for women and argue that the state is responsible, at least partly, for ensuring this freedom, (Baehr). While liberal feminists understand "freedom" differently, the principal tenants of liberal feminism emphasize the importance of individual women's freedom from coercive interference, as well as the freedom to pursue personal and political autonomy, (Baehr). Liberal feminism has a long tradition of working within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure, while transnational approaches recognize feminism as both a liberatory formation and

a practice that has been oppressed by and sometimes been complicit with colonialism, racism, and imperialism. Post-colonial, “third world,” and transnational feminist scholars such as Spivak, Abu-Lughod, and Mohanty have critiqued the approaches taken by Western liberal feminists. While the white, Western liberal feminist agenda promotes organization through the notion of a “shared womanhood,” or “global sisterhood,” it has long been argued that this “universalism” of the women’s experience has glossed over differences of class and race, which ultimately leave poor and non-white women out of important discourse, (Mohanty, 334).

These “cracks” in the Western liberal feminist agenda only become more pronounced across national boundaries. Transnational feminist scholars have argued that white, Western feminisms have ignored the differences between themselves and non-white, Western women, despite incredibly diverse experience of oppression that is contingent upon historical and cultural differences. Further transnational feminist work has highlighted the difficulties faced by feminists from the Third World in being heard within the broader feminist movement. Ultimately, any legitimate evaluation of patriarchy and feminism hinges upon the analysis of power relationships. While Western liberal feminism focuses on the inequality in power between men and women as almost monolithic categories, transnational feminism calls for the reflection of the unequal power relationships between Western and Non-Western feminists, arguing that liberal feminism fails to recognize the power dynamics that are in play with women of color and transnational women, which involve multiple sources of oppression.

There is a long history of “state feminisms” that Western countries have attempted to “export” to the Middle East. Several transnational feminist scholars have criticized Western intervention that is justified through means of “saving brown women from brown men,” (Spivak).

Scholar and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak argues that imperialism has been historically justified under the guise of “liberating” non-Western women from traditional, “barbaric” practices and systems. Spivak argues that “subaltern” women are used as “symbols,” merely representations framed and created by the West to justify imperial and colonial endeavors as rescue missions, of sorts. Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod’s work, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, presents a similar assessment of this long-standing mindset that has justified all manner of foreign interference, including military invasion, in the name of rescuing women from Islam.

Both of these works refute the “West” as “rescuer,” and instead describe the exportation of Western patriarchy to a non-Western context, otherwise known as “colonial feminism,” wherein women are colonized in a twofold way by imperialism and male dominance. These works highlight the existence of a “white woman’s burden”² or white savior complex. Critics such as Black feminists and postcolonial feminists assert that mainstream liberal feminism reflects only the values of middle-class, heterosexual, white women and fails to appreciate the position of women of different races, cultures, or classes. With this, white liberal feminists reflect the issues that underlie the White savior complex. They do not understand women that are outside the dominant society but try to “save” or “help” them by pushing them to assimilate to their ideals of feminism. As such, when examining contemporary forms of Western interventions, even those which operate under the presumption of “humanitarianism,” it is important to question whether policy truly pursues a feminist agenda, or merely instrumentalizes women.

² The phrase “white woman’s burden” derives from Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.”

Chandra Tolpade Mohanty, a feminist critic and author of cornerstone pieces in transnational feminism such as *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, and “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” unpacks this question by addressing the divide between Western liberal feminism and “postcolonial,” or “Third World” feminism. Mohanty critiques the political project of Western feminism and its discursive construction of the category of the “Third World woman” as a generic, homogenous, victimized stereotype that Western feminists must save. Mohanty plays an integral role in articulating concerns about Western feminism's failure to account for non-Western subjects. She critiques feminism during this time period to be more inclusive of intersectional struggles, identifying that feminism and inequalities are not linear, and the idea of female being a basis of shared oppression ignored the individual within their specific context and time. The term “transnational” is rejection and the rejection of terms like “international” and “global” feminism. Transnational feminists believe that the term “international” puts more emphasis on nation-states as distinct entities, and that “global” speaks to liberal feminist theories on “global sisterhood” that ignore Third World women and women of color's perspectives on gender inequality and other problems globalization inherently brings. It rejects the idea that people from different regions have the same subjectivities and experiences with gender inequality.

Feminist foreign policy and the military-industrial complex

Given that war is seen as particularly detrimental to the well being of women, one might ask how a feminist foreign policy considers and justifies military activity. In 2017, Sweden described success in strengthening a “gender equality perspective” in disarmament and non-proliferation. Despite this, Sweden has been criticized for pursuing a “feminist” agenda while simulta-

neously trading arms with Saudi Arabia. How can Sweden reconcile providing aid to Yemen while still arming the country that is enacting incredible violence unto Yemen? In *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*, Tickner, et al. argue that perhaps Sweden, in its efforts to discard its neutral past, deploys concepts of gendered protection to make permissible its new military engagements (Tickner, 83). However, when questioned on this notion, Swedish Ambassador Wand-Danielsson insisted that perceptions of neutrality do not guide feminist foreign policy decisions, stating, “we gave up neutrality when we joined the EU in ’95.”

The Canadian government has faced similar criticism for supplying military equipment to Saudi Arabia. Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy also addresses gender mainstreaming of the Canadian Armed Forces, as the Canadian government draws a clear connection between women’s participation in peace operations and the effectiveness of the missions. Women and men alike are more likely to report sexual and gender-based incidents of violence when they can speak to women officers. This and other evidence shows that when women are put in key roles in peace operations, peace processes and military deployments, the effectiveness of the missions and processes increases considerably.

There is concern that women are thrust into peacekeeping spaces by feminist foreign policy efforts as a result of existing patriarchal symbols and essentialized notions of gendered care. That is to say, it is possible that women are being instrumentalized due to their association as inherent caregivers or healers. Karen Garner in her book, *Women and Gender in International History: Theory and Practice*, argues that,

Women may be gender stereotyped as natural peace makers because women have the biological potential to give birth and therefore have a special interest in nurturing human life. These gender stereotypes of women as victims of wars, keepers of traditions, symbols of the nation, peacemakers, and nurturers predominate in many cultures (Garner, 39)

When presenting the benefits to peace, security, economics, etc. that come from women's inclusion, there does exist a fine line between gender justice and instrumentalizing women. Thus, states and other actors must take care that they fall on the side of gender justice.

Often, the inclusion of women as soldiers and peacekeepers is regarded as an effective intelligence collection tool. The Canadian government further reifies this instrumentalism, reporting that in post-conflict states, up to 40% of households are headed by women, making women highly attuned to their community's reconstruction needs. Evidence shows that "with access to income generation and economic security as a result of just peace agreement outcomes, women tend to be quicker to invest in child welfare and education, to build food security, and to rebuild rural economies, greatly contributing to longer term stability." In regards to women in military, Rachel Grimes similarly argues that, "Men will say, 'well, okay, we need the women to talk to women,' and they look at it from a functionalist approach. I think with the military, you're probably going to get the functionalist approach being taken onboard more than the fact that it is the right thing to do.

Not surprisingly, many observers regard the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia as existing in outright contradiction to the aims of feminist foreign policy. According to feminist political theorist Fiona Robinson, Saudi Arabia represents a sort of "test case" for feminist foreign policy. While Saudi Arabia is well known in the West as a flagrant denier of women's rights, Saudi Arabia re-

mains an ‘ally’ of the West as an importer of arms from many Western countries and a fellow fighter in the war against Islamic terrorism. While not denying this, Robinson suggests that our attention should shift away from this contradiction – which again relies on binary logics and assumptions of, “essential difference between Saudi Arabia (authoritarian, backward and violent) and Sweden/Canada (democratic, progressive and peaceful,)” (Robinson, 3).

Policymakers and diplomats must aim to build understanding by recognizing the material and discursive factors that have constructed, over time, the relationships between Saudi Arabia and Sweden/Canada, as well as the ways in which patriarchal institutions and structures – across the globe and at multiple scales – hinder the possibility of attentive listening and connection across national borders and cultural/religious difference. It is only through the prism of this relationship – where difference takes on meaning – that the more complex role of Western states in the contemporary system of transnational militarism is revealed. Furthermore, countries such as Sweden and Canada must recognize that progressive change on women’s and human rights in a country like Saudi Arabia can never be imposed by ethical or feminist Western governments. Countries espousing feminist foreign policies must refuse to buy in to an order of living that ‘splits humans into the superior and the inferior,’ (Robinson)

4. Significance and Application in the Middle East

While both feminist foreign policies and the transnational feminist agenda claim to be interested in “global justice,” we must ask what this means and theory, and in practice, specifically towards the in the Middle East and North Africa, a region that has historically suffered great harm by and Western intervention and imperialism. Feminist foreign policy agendas are not "introducing" feminism to the Middle East and North Africa. Rather, countries in the region have

employed “state feminisms” of their own, that may very well be in conflict with the feminist foreign policy agendas of either Sweden or Canada.

State feminisms in the Middle East

In some Middle Eastern and North African countries, “state feminisms” have been linked with secularization movements and the adoption of a “Western” progressivity. Women were, again, used as symbols to signify modernity, and their “liberated” status was designed to contrast the then-rising Islamist movements of the early-to-mid 20th century. Several Western scholars have pointed to the Ataturk regime in Turkey, for example, as “one of the most important success stories of women's empowerment in the early twentieth century,” (White)

Ataturk’s vision for Turkey was both secular and Western-inspired. He also made the judgment that, as a modern state, Turkey must lead the way for Turkish women to be equal with men, (Bennett, 111) Consequently, the Kemalist initiative tasked itself with “granting” gender equality to women through Turkey’s administration and educational efforts. At this point, Turkey was preparing to be a beacon for the world as well as a role model for all other Muslim countries. However, this masculinist administration, “‘emancipated’ women because it suited them ideologically, then did little to encourage their political empowerment,” (Bennett, 114) While Turkey achieved high standards of women’s literacy and female employment in some sectors, politics remained almost exclusively a male domain. Kemalists both actively discouraged women from wearing the headscarf and circulated the idea that women in public threaten social order, and by extension, that their visibility should be minimized. Kemalism furthered this agenda by “developing a stereotype of a Turkish woman: modest in appearance, companion to her male in modernizing the country,” (Bennett, 114) As a result, women’s participation in political

life remained low, and after the introduction of multi-party, competitive politics in 1945, the number of women in parliament fell. Today, just 103 of 600 seats in Turkish parliament are held by women, (Avundukluoglu).

Often, “women’s legislation” has been performative — a form of pageantry used to curate and sustain the image of a feminist nation — rather than a mechanism of ensuring the rights and freedoms of the women who live with the consequences of said legislation. These reforms by the “feminist” state did not evolve as a result of demands originating within society, but were imposed from above. Furthermore, state feminism often does not concern itself with what happens behind closed doors, but focuses instead on expanding women's public roles, (Mazur and McBride, 252). “State feminism” can, thus, be a way that the government takes over the role of speaking for and on behalf of women, rather than allowing women themselves speak and make demands. Rather than understanding “women’s legislation” as inherently feminist, we must instead analyze “state feminist” agendas as top-down social engineering projects, motivated by their own, independent contexts and ulterior or concurrent motives.

Implications of contemporary feminist foreign policies in the Middle East

Much of Canada’s focus on “feminist” endeavors in the Middle East and North Africa rely on training and education programs. This trend does raise concern of the Western perpetuation of neoliberal ideals, which may place further undue burden on the very women the policy claims to uplift, rather than address the systemic factors which maintain these women's oppression in the first place. Further, the language used in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy employs the premise that Canada is “introducing” feminism to Middle Eastern and North African women, which only serves to undermine how these women already resist, or even bene-

fit from, the patriarchal structures present within their own unique contexts. Cynthia Enloe discusses this tension in her book, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, arguing that, “those who are trying to persuade women to ‘become informed’ are not inviting women to reinterpret international politics by drawing on their own experiences as women.” (Enloe, 33)

Both Canada and Sweden claim to work with not only women, but also men in Middle Eastern and North African target countries. While the incorporation of men into a feminist foreign policy is indeed pertinent to creating a comprehensively gender-sensitive agenda, similar concerns regarding Western imposition of normative gender roles exist. Thus, this notion of “feminist re-education” that is present in both the Canadian and Swedish models to differing degrees suggests that these policies work instrumentally, rather than transformatively, in their respective pursuits of “global gender equality.”

The language in the Swedish model of feminist foreign policy insists on taking a more “intersectional” approach. Through its explicit partnerships with regional organizations and consistent acknowledgement of unique challenges that women face in their own contexts, rather than relying upon a general notion of “African,” “Arab,” or “third-world,” women, Sweden is arguably more closely informed by a transnational feminist approach. In any case, it is imperative that “Western” states, academics, and other actors reject the implicit notion that feminist foreign policies are “enlightening” Middle Eastern and North African women through their export of “feminist education.” Further, it must be recognized that the ambiguity as a feature in both feminist foreign policy initiatives regarding the definition of “feminism” can lead to a lack of transnational analysis and understanding.

5. Conclusion

Gender equality connects to global prosperity, contributes to economic growth, contributes to stronger democracies, improving security, more efficient use of foreign aid, improves health of family, communities, societies. Investing in gender equality would pursue other foreign policy priorities. However, many institutions continue to act as though this were not the case. In the international relations community in particular, diplomats must recognize that doing their work requires engaging with women and girls, and local community members from a broad range of backgrounds. That is to say, the "work" of pursuing a feminist agenda does not end at adding the language of "and women and girls" in policy.

Both Sweden and Canada's policies, as well as UNSCR 1325, stress the importance of women's representation in spaces where decisions are being made. Several countries have instituted "gender quotas" in their governing bodies in recent years following this same notion. However, it is unclear whether simply adding female bodies to these spaces is truly in line with the pursuit of a feminist agenda. It can be argued that individual women gaining decision-making power in an unquestioned masculinist governing system is not "feminist." Of course, women, like men, are prone to acting within their own interests. However, in order to achieve sustainable transformative change, we must question the reliance on "magical" thinking that suggests women in power will inherently pursue feminist agendas. Further, we must further explore how we may construct narratives of "good" female or gender minority leadership that are not reductive or dependent on essentialized notions of care. Further, with its emphasis on the binary of men and women, both feminist foreign policies also fail to encompass all genders.

The structures that guide the formation and implementation of foreign policy are based on modern states and are inherently colonial. Thus, we must consider how it may be possible to advocate for a more inclusive foreign policy in a system that in itself perpetuates structural inequality. To begin, countries must practice critical self reflection and take care to avoid “exporting” the Western patriarchy present in their own societies. That is to say, when attempting to tackle gender inequality in the Global South, states must resist applying context-blind solutions by acting within white liberal feminist values. In contrast, a transformative feminist lens instead encourages actors, including states, to question and reform preexisting patriarchal systems, rather than solely attempt to work within them.

A transnational feminist agenda calls for the integration of the lived experience of women in their own contexts to any “feminist” action. Women and girls possess unique experiences and different needs, and as such a feminist policy must analyze factors that are relevant to its policy targets in addition to simple gender identification. that come from the different realities of women. Therefore, states must be specific, and identify which women and which girls they are discussing at all times, as well as include these women at the decision-making level. Further, specific goals and achievements must be outlined, as opposed to relying on ambiguous language of “women’s empowerment” as a projected outcome.

The feminist foreign policy agenda in particular developed rapidly in the 2010’s and gained a foothold in national and international discourse, although the official adoption of such a gender strategy has only been enacted by Sweden, Canada, and, most recently, Mexico in 2020. While the UK, France, Luxembourg, and Australia have all discussed intentions to adopt a feminist foreign policy, they have yet to do so at the time of writing. While there are very few states

that declared an explicitly feminist foreign policy, many others are simply gender mainstreaming. I offer various reasons for this. To begin, the label of “feminist” can be off-putting due to its perceived radicality, and therefore “gender” is often employed as more acceptable choice of language. Often, these labels both refer to the realm of women and girls, further reifying that “unmarked” foreign policy is not fundamentally formulated with their interests in mind.

Thus, it is imperative that a “fully gender-inclusive” policy must address such variables as cultural norms, discrimination, political processes and institutionalized gender inequality, and examine how and where they intersect. Policy implementation must include input and advice from local organizations that are aware of marginalization, as well as from individuals who have lived the experience of inequality and understand its local context. However, this paper does not necessarily insist that every Western nation should adopt a “feminist” foreign policy, or that existing policies do not come with their own risks and criticisms.

In conclusion, a “feminist consciousness” is undoubtedly needed in the international relations field, particularly in the practice of foreign policy. However, it is unclear if a Western state feminism answers this call to action ethically or adequately. To begin, a state feminism such as feminist foreign policy works instrumentally, rather than transformatively, to address existing global gender imbalances, which remains a point of concern for various feminist critics. Further, current and future Western state feminisms must take care to not contribute to a long history of imperial endeavors in the Middle East and North Africa under the premise of “empowering” its women. Achieving global gender justice is not one event, but rather a process that in any case calls for a profound reordering of values in the international community.

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