

Dropping F-Bombs:

Canadian Feminist Foreign Policy from Harper to Trudeau and Beyond

Major Research Paper submitted to fulfill the requirements of API6999

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Date: 21 March 2018

Abstract

This paper elucidates important similarities and differences in the Harper (2006-2015) and Trudeau (2015-present) Governments' use of feminist foreign policy. Since the Trudeau Government took power in 2015, it has often presented itself as a feminist government. But what does it mean to practice a feminist foreign policy? Does the Trudeau Government's shiny new rhetoric on feminist foreign policy signal true change, or is it simply a more progressive spin on the Harper Government's approach? This paper undertakes a feminist critical discourse analysis of the Harper and Trudeau Governments' approaches. Methodologically, this paper draws upon a wide evidence base from both Canada and abroad, including official policy documents, speeches, budget and fiscal documents, parliamentary reports, social media, and news coverage to arrive at a fuller understanding of the nature and magnitude of any shifts in Canadian feminist foreign policy between Harper and Trudeau. Overall, the paper aims to provide a reckoning of the Trudeau Government's self-identified feminist foreign policy credentials to date, particularly in its rhetoric, policy, and actions. Broadly speaking, the paper moves through four main stages. First, it outlines the theoretical underpinnings of feminist international relations (IR) and feminist foreign policy, casting light on what feminist foreign policy is. Second, it explores the motivations and intentions of states (including Canada) when they practice a feminist foreign policy. Thirdly, it examines the credentials of the Trudeau Government's feminist foreign policy, particularly in comparison to the Harper Government's. Fourthly, it concludes with policy recommendations for Canadian feminist foreign policy as it moves forward in a precarious world order. Ultimately, this paper will find that the Trudeau Government's use of feminist foreign policy is significantly different than the Harper Government's use of feminist foreign policy, especially in its use of rhetoric and in its attempts to be intersectional, but the actual results of these different intentions remain to be seen.

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Introduction

On 6 June 2016, Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland rose in the House of Commons to deliver what would become a landmark speech in the Trudeau Government's mandate. The speech was a young government's anthem of Canadian values as it defined them: peacekeeping, environmentalism, order, diversity.¹ Freeland's speech also served as a polite yet firm denunciation of Trumpian politics, with Canada taking the role as a disappointed but caring friend attempting an intervention, urging the United States to make choices more befitting their status as a global leader.² Most intriguing of all, however, was the strong emphasis on one Canadian value in particular: feminism.

The feminist vision espoused by Minister Freeland wasn't meek and watered-down, designed to appeal to fence-sitters and swing voters. Rather, the vision charged ahead unapologetically, daring its listeners to protest: "It is important, and historic, that we have a prime minister and a government proud to proclaim ourselves feminists. Women's rights are human rights. That includes sexual reproductive rights and the right to safe and accessible abortions. These rights are at the core of our foreign policy."³

Most media coverage and Canadian interest around the speech focused on its American aspects, with anxious eyes turning to Trump and Twitter in the speech's aftermath. Yet there was no denying that Minister Freeland—and the government she represented—had quietly and confidently dropped an F-bomb. Feminism wasn't a fringe value, tacked on at the end of a lengthy list of Canadian values. It had been highlighted, praised, upheld specifically. The messy and sometimes uncomfortable realities of a feminist foreign policy—like sexual rights, abortions,

¹ Global Affairs Canada, 'Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities', 6 June 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html.

² Global Affairs Canada, 'Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities'.

³ Global Affairs Canada, 'Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities'.

and birth control—were not mere line items quietly slotted into a program budget, but matter-of-fact priorities.

The inclusion of this brand of feminism was even more remarkable in context. A mere six years earlier, in 2010, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper had refused to consider or even debate abortion as part of his government's maternal health strategy abroad, despite "high profile criticism" from Hillary Clinton, amongst others.⁴ Clearly, a shift had occurred. But did the Trudeau Government's shiny new rhetoric signal true change, or was it simply a more progressive spin on the Harper Government's approach?

This paper will outline important similarities and differences in the Harper (2006-2015) and Trudeau (2015-present) Governments' use of feminist foreign policy. Beginning with a theoretical examination of feminist foreign policy overall, including recent developments in the field, this study undertakes a feminist critical discourse analysis of the Harper and Trudeau Governments' approaches. Methodologically, this paper draws upon a wide evidence base from both Canada and abroad, including official policy documents, speeches, budget and fiscal documents, parliamentary reports, social media, case studies, and news coverage to arrive at a fuller understanding of the nature and magnitude of any shifts in Canadian feminist foreign policy between Harper and Trudeau. It attempts to be both broad and deep in scope while remaining as relevant as possible. The evidence presented was selected based on its ability to throw conclusions about Canadian feminist foreign policy into sharp relief. Overall, the paper aims to provide a reckoning of the Trudeau Government's self-identified feminist foreign policy credentials to date, particularly in its rhetoric, policy, and actions. Broadly speaking, the paper moves through four main stages. First, it outlines the theoretical underpinnings of feminist

⁴ Julia Keast, 'Missed Opportunity: A Discursive Analysis of Canada's Commitments to Maternal Health under the Muskoka Initiative', in *Obligations and Omissions: Canada's Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality*, ed. Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 53.

international relations (IR) and feminist foreign policy, casting light on possible definitions of feminist foreign policy. Second, it explores the motivations and intentions of states (including Canada) when they practice a feminist foreign policy. Thirdly, it examines the credentials of the Trudeau Government's feminist foreign policy, particularly in comparison to the Harper Government's. Fourthly, it concludes with policy recommendations for Canadian feminist foreign policy as it moves forward in a precarious world order.

Ultimately, this paper will find that the Trudeau Government's use of feminist foreign policy is significantly different than the Harper Government's use of feminist foreign policy, especially in the Trudeau Government's use of rhetoric and in its attempts to be intersectional, but the actual results of these different intentions remain to be seen.

You Mean Women Matter? A Brief Overview of Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist IR

As feminist international IR and feminist foreign policy becomes more 'mainstream,' the field continues to grapple with issues of intersectionality and intention. While the Trudeau Government proclaims feminist values and attempts to practice feminist foreign policy, there are ongoing debates in intellectual and academic circles about the purpose and helpfulness of various strands of feminist thought. The feminism practiced by states can vary widely in definition, scope, and intention; with this in mind, we will turn to a broad examination of the strands of feminist IR thought. This section will outline some major tenants of feminist IR thought from the 1980s to the present, and offer a balanced critique of what feminist IR has to offer. Although this section is largely theoretical in nature, it will draw upon practical examples of feminist foreign policy in the 'real world' to help illustrate the debates and theoretical challenges in the field.

The modern intersectional incarnation of feminist foreign policy that is the subject of this paper has its roots in intellectual movements from the 1980s and 1990s. In these decades, feminist IR sought to add to the broader IR conversation. During this time, IR overall was a deeply masculine field, with a “relative paucity of women IR theorists and practitioners.”⁵ Feminist IR attempted to add to the IR conversation and challenge the frequently masculine and patriarchal nature of IR, which left little room for different perspectives. Although feminist thought had been trying to “infiltrate” the IR field for decades, it was not until 1988 that the study of ‘gender and IR’ was “formally initiated” when the journal *Millennium*—based at the London School of Economics—published a special issue focusing on gender and IR issues.⁶ Foundational feminist interventions and critiques in the IR field began to solidify and gain legitimacy into the 1990s, and the dearth of robust feminist IR literature began to ease. So as to give a better understanding of the evolution of feminist IR and feminist foreign policy, we will now discuss some examples of these fundamental theoretical contributions.

The IR “hegemony” held by realism was suggested to be deeply gendered, with “its assumptions about the way the world is divided—inside-out, strong-weak, rich-poor, peace-war, men-women” creating false dichotomies and inherently privileging some perspectives over others.⁷ According to feminist IR, these dichotomies carried over into states themselves, meaning developed countries were masculine, strong, rich, and peaceful, while developing countries were weak, poor, conflict-ridden, and feminine. The theory seems almost clichéd now, but its current ubiquity is a mark of its original astuteness.

⁵ Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson, ‘The Radical Future of Realism: Feminist Subversions of IR Theory’, *Alternatives* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1991), 75.

⁶ V. Spike Peterson, ‘Feminisms and International Relations’, *Gender & History* 10, no. 3 (1 November 1998): 581.

⁷ Runyan and Peterson, ‘The Radical Future of Realism,’ 70.

As Anne Runyan argued, these dichotomies of realism were also seen in “the politics of protection,” wherein the world is divided into “two classes of people, those who protect and those who are protected, with men characterized as the former.”⁸ During the 1990s, feminism attempted to illustrate warfare and conflict—supposedly demanded by the anarchy of realism—through a gender lens, postulating that women faced opposition and insecurity from the very state that promised to keep them secure. The masculine state thus both protected from and perpetuated conflict, leading to a gendered protection racket; “a negative symbiosis which continues to reproduce asymmetrical gender relations and violent international relations.”⁹ This contribution may seem simplistic, but the fact that we now view it as such reflects how far feminist IR has managed to come, and so quickly. These early feminist critiques of security and defence are a crucial stepping stone for the feminist foreign policy currently praised and practiced by states across the globe.

Cynthia Enloe’s now famous query “where are the women?” was also a major contribution, urging the IR field to look beyond the masculine lens of realism and into the neglected world of women.¹⁰ This question was “motivated by a determination to discover exactly how this world works,” as Enloe elucidated how the very *business* of international relations was underpinned by female secretaries, office cleaners, civil servants, factory workers, and other women who went unseen on the world stage, yet were crucial parts of the international relations construct.¹¹ By neglecting women—feminist IR argued—the IR field could never fully understand the world order.

⁸ Anne Sisson Runyan, ‘Gender Relations and the Politics of Protection’, *Peace Review* 2, no. 4 (1 September 1990): 28–31.

⁹ Runyan, ‘Gender Relations’, 28.

¹⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 1.

¹¹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, 1.

Theorists such as V. Spike Peterson and Anne Runyan added to Enloe's radical argument, pointing out that "to the extent that feminist scholarship is understood simply in terms of a liberal-feminist orientation—requiring only that we 'add women'—there is no perceived need to take feminism seriously as a theoretical project."¹² Feminist IR in this era was not seeking tokenism, but rather legitimacy and respectability in a field which made much of "the top-heavy, expensive, and male-dominated formal sector" that mainstream IR of the time was focused on.¹³ When considering these decades, it seems remarkable that we can now discuss feminist IR as a valuable way to view the world without endlessly justifying the usefulness of a gender lens, and even more remarkable that states around the world now view feminism and feminist foreign policy as integral to their policy development.

A crucial but nascent development in the feminist IR field in the 1980s and 1990s was the introduction of intersectionality. IR feminist thought has consistently struggled to incorporate understandings of feminism that 'work' for women across the globe, rather than the mainly white women in positions of power and privilege. As Chandra Mohanty elucidated in her seminal work on colonialism and feminist scholarship, feminist IR and feminist foreign policy has been deeply hindered and limited by its "priority of issues around which apparently *all* women are expected to organize."¹⁴ Feminist IR made—and makes—the frequent error of treating women as "an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location."¹⁵ There can be "no easy generalization" of 'women,' and even my use of the term throughout this paper belies the incredibly complex experiences of women universally; "the category of woman is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often

¹² Runyan and Peterson, 'The Radical Future of Realism,' 73.

¹³ Runyan and Peterson, 'The Radical Future of Realism,' 79.

¹⁴ Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review; London*, no. 30 (Fall 1988): 62.

¹⁵ Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes', 64.

exist simultaneously and overlay on top of one another.”¹⁶ Many states like Canada make this error when they use language such as “Canada believes that women...,” or “Canada knows that women...,” presenting the state as the mouthpiece for all its citizens, particularly female ones, who are presumably not all in agreement with the state’s ideas.¹⁷ Moreover, the subjects of this discourse who do *not* reside in the state—i.e., women in developing countries—are at a double disadvantage, as they are now included in dialogue by a mouthpiece over which they have no input whatsoever, unlike the citizens of the developed state. The colonial threads of this process are clear.

Indeed, feminist IR approaches can uphold colonialist assumptions that treat “Third World Women” as “monolithic,” in need of ‘saving’ by more ‘enlightened’ people in the Global North.¹⁸ Feminist IR and feminist foreign policy can demonstrate a stunning lack of contextual awareness, assuming that “religious, legal, economic, and familial systems are...constructed by men” rather than allowing for nuances of culture or history in other countries.¹⁹ The “simplistic formulations” of “men exploit, women are exploited” merely “reinforce [the] binary divisions” of gender, and further problematic attitudes rather than dismantle them.²⁰ Women, particularly in developing countries, are assumed to be “uniformly less corrupt, harder-working, more peace-loving, closer to nature, more oriented toward their children, and more altruistic than men.”²¹ The insidiousness of this dialogue can be seen all around us; women in developing countries are frequently presented as having “needs and problems” instead of “choices or the freedom to

¹⁶ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 73.

¹⁷ Government of Canada, ‘Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace (Canada’s National Action Plan 2017-2022)’, accessed 2 November 2017, <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/cnap-eng.pdf>.

¹⁸ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 77.

¹⁹ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 78.

²⁰ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 73.

²¹ Erin Beck, ‘Reconsidering Women’s Empowerment: The Contradictory Effects of Microfinance for Guatemalan Women’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 52, no. 2 (1 June 2017): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-017-9247-9>.

act.”²² Feminist foreign policy is not free of these biases simply because it attempts to uphold a marginalized viewpoint. Moreover, feminist foreign policy frequently relies on development aid as a major source of ‘improvement’ or ‘change,’ which carries its own issues of colonialism and agency. As Erin Beck notes, “we should adjust our understanding of women’s agency to include the agency women exercise when they transform, challenge, or reject...[development] projects themselves.”²³ The change offered by feminist foreign policy may not be welcome in all contexts, and to assume so would be breathtakingly arrogant.

As discussed above, Cynthia Enloe elucidated how deeply gender was embedded in the way we think about and practice international relations. She urged for an individualistic, context-specific approach that “exercised genuine curiosity about each of these women’s lives,” entering and examining spaces usually conceived of as “private, domestic, local, or trivial.”²⁴ This is hard for any one person to do, let alone a state. The main hurdle for feminist foreign policy is to move beyond the pitfalls of treating ‘women’ as a bloc. In other words, debates in feminist foreign policy and feminist IR reflect the ongoing struggle of feminism itself to be relevant and helpful to all people in all contexts. Feminist foreign policy cannot “assume an ahistorical, universal unity among women based on a generalized notion of their subordination.”²⁵ Unfortunately, the theoretical underpinnings of feminist foreign policy that seek to avoid these pitfalls are frequently lost in translation by the time feminist ideas make their way into politics and government.

It must be noted that few other IR theories face such rigorous testing of worth; realism, constructivism, and liberalism are all permitted to have exceptions and failings, but rarely face

²² Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 72.

²³ Beck, ‘Reconsidering Women’s Empowerment’, 222.

²⁴ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, 3.

²⁵ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 72.

demands for justification as vociferous as those for feminist IR. In a world where female politicians decry the double standards imposed upon them, the very theory meant to further the agency of women across the globe faces possibly unfair standards from the theoretical community. The debates surrounding the ‘failures’ and pitfalls of feminist thought and activism may in fact be a source of strength, as it illustrates how the field continually re-examines and re-orientates itself critically in a “kind of continuous self-reflection on representations of feminism, keeping feminists cognizant of the dangers of totalizing moves.”²⁶

The recent flurry of global interest in feminism and feminist foreign policy may be due to the “flavour of the day” effect, in which the international community eagerly seizes on a new silver bullet for all the world’s ills.²⁷ Not too long ago, microfinance was going to lift the world out of poverty; now it seems that impetus has been placed on the world’s women. 2015 was a banner year for feminism and feminist foreign policy, as the Swedish Government implemented the “world’s first self-defined feminist government with the explicit ambition of pursuing a feminist foreign policy,”²⁸ and Justin Trudeau made his now-famous “because it’s 2015” remark regarding his gender balanced cabinet.²⁹ Also in 2015, gender equality became one of the United Nation’s seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, and therefore the focus of much funding and attention by the UN as well as its partner organizations and member states.³⁰ According to the World Bank, 2015 marked “a watershed year in the international community's efforts to advance gender equality”; World Bank itself named gender equality as “central” to their goals,

²⁶ Runyan and Peterson, ‘The Radical Future of Realism’, 74.

²⁷ Corinne L. Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency: The Development Industry and Violence Against Women* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2017), 3.

²⁸ Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender’, *Ethics & International Affairs; New York* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 323, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/S0892679416000241>.

²⁹ Jennifer Ditchburn, “‘Because It’s 2015’: Trudeau Forms Canada’s 1st Gender-Balanced Cabinet”, CBC News, 4 November 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trudeau-liberal-government-cabinet-1.3304590>.

³⁰ United Nations Development Programme, ‘Goal 5: Gender Equality’, accessed 6 March 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality.html>.

arguing enthusiastically that gender equality is “smart economics” and “smart development.”³¹ Simply put, by practicing feminist foreign policy, Canada is in vogue.

The trendiness of a feminist foreign policy also brings with it what Corinne Mason calls “manufacturing urgency”; a concerted, likely unconscious effort on the part of governments, NGOs, and development organizations to make their latest ‘flavour’ a priority. When wielded improperly, feminist foreign policy can be used to manufacture urgency and “provide a justification for top-down, swift solutions” rather than grassroots, long-term improvement.³² It can create a false sense that ‘someone is doing something’ simply by placing new terms and timelines on existing strategies and interventions. This “sudden and intensified interest” in women and women’s issues, as well as in feminist foreign policy, brings both opportunity and risk; the attention may be welcome to those who have worked for decades to place feminism at the centre of international agendas, but at what price is the surge of feminist sentiment being extracted?³³ As feminism is propelled forward and presented as a pressing issue, we must consider the motives of those who seek to do so; “how urgency is produced and sustained, where emphasis is placed and where it is not.”³⁴ As we continue our analysis, questions such as ‘why now?’ and ‘for what purpose?’ need to be asked continually.

Feminist scholars have also pointed to the “tyranny of urgency,” in which the long-term systemic issues that face women are constantly pushed aside to provide band-aid solutions to more acute crises.³⁵ Feminist foreign policy risks falling into this trap, particularly in Canada. In a worrying trend which began as early as 2000, Canadian development aid appears to “favour

³¹ The World Bank, ‘World Bank Group Gender Strategy (FY16-23): Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth’ (The World Bank, 1 December 2015), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/820851467992505410/World-Bank-Group-gender-strategy-FY16-23-gender-equality-poverty-reduction-and-inclusive-growth>

³² Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency*, 3.

³³ Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency*, 6.

³⁴ Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency*, 10.

³⁵ Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency*, 9.

development assistance that leads to tangible and immediate results” rather than long-term projects with mixed or imperceptible results.³⁶ The latter kind of programming tends to be disproportionately concerned with women and gender equality, meaning that an obsession with quick results may implicitly favour projects that are less likely to have long-term positive impacts on women.³⁷ Moreover, this fixation stems from bureaucratic rather than political actors, meaning it is likely to have continued through several changing Canadian governments of both Conservative and Liberal bent. Hints of this today can be seen in the Trudeau Government’s emphasis on “evidence-based policy,” a style of governance which necessarily favours numbers and statistics.³⁸ In isolation, this is no bad thing, but the hidden consequences of Canada’s penchant for spreadsheets over systematic change must be acknowledged. Moreover, in any development project there is the risk of manipulation for results; “various levels of coercion and social control as policymakers work to promote their images of women and their choices.”³⁹

Overall, different applications of feminist foreign policy can be exciting, yet flawed. The thrill of seeing women’s issues at the forefront of international relations is undeniably inspirational, yet questions remain around the motives of actors who seek to push ‘feminism’ as the flavour *du jour*. The struggles of feminist foreign policy to practice a form of intersectional, anti-colonialist feminism also need to be noted as a persistent yet not insurmountable problem. Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond sum these struggles up as the “inherent tension between idealism and pragmatism in the practice of a feminist foreign policy.”⁴⁰ The ideals are as lofty as the problems are leaden.

³⁶ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 59.

³⁷ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 59.

³⁸ Philip Cross, ‘The Evidence Is in — Evidence-Based Policy Can Have Disastrous Results’, *Financial Post*, 24 August 2016, <http://business.financialpost.com/opinion/philip-cross-the-evidence-is-in-evidence-based-policy-can-have-disastrous-results>.

³⁹ Beck, ‘Reconsidering Women’s Empowerment’, 238.

⁴⁰ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making’, 329.

A very real example of this tension exploded onto the world scene in February 2017, during a Swedish delegation's visit to Iran to discuss trade-related issues. The female contingent of the delegation—11 out of the 15 total members—opted to don “Islamic headscarves” while in Iran, in deference to Iran's laws that require women to “cover their hair and wear loose-fitting clothes when they appear in public.”⁴¹ The decision by the Swedish delegation to comply with Iranian law was decried by a variety of actors, such as international human rights groups as well as Swedish politicians, for betraying the feminist values of the Swedish government.⁴² Hillel Neuer, executive director of human rights group U.N. Watch, tweeted a photo of female Swedish officials walking past President Rouhani of Iran, captioning the image a “walk of shame.”⁴³ (Few, if any, seemed to see the irony of Neuer using a sexist term of promiscuity in his call for a more feminist approach.) Interestingly, Sweden's trade minister Ann Linde portrayed the issue as a legal one, stating “One can hardly come here [to Iran] and break the laws”; however, Linde was quick to state that she would “of course” decline to wear conservative dress in Saudi Arabia, “where conservative religious dress is customary but not required by law for foreigners.”⁴⁴

The Swedish incident in Iran highlights the tension between theory and practice that this section has sought to elucidate. The exceptions and compromises made by states in their practice of feminist foreign policy speak to the state's values and priorities, as well as the international balance of power. Was Sweden right to bow to Iran's legal sovereignty while flouting Saudi Arabia's customs? Can Sweden ‘afford’ to create anger Saudi Arabia whereas doing so in Iran would be foolish? Did the trade deals sealed by Sweden in Iran create more good for more

⁴¹ Adam Taylor, ‘Sweden's “Feminist” Government Criticized for Wearing Headscarves in Iran’, Washington Post, 13 February 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/13/swedens-feminist-government-criticized-for-wearing-headscarves-in-iran/>

⁴² Taylor, ‘Sweden's “Feminist” Government Criticized for Wearing Headscarves in Iran’.

⁴³ Taylor, ‘Sweden's “Feminist” Government Criticized for Wearing Headscarves in Iran’.

⁴⁴ Taylor, ‘Sweden's “Feminist” Government Criticized for Wearing Headscarves in Iran’.

people—specifically women—than if the Swedish women officials had refused to don conservative wear and took a moral stand? Is the Swedish state now ‘less feminist’ because of this pragmatic compromising of values? As feminist foreign policy becomes a more popular and legitimate way of conducting international relations, these clashes have been happening with greater frequency.

In fact, one of the Trudeau Government’s first major scandals revolved around a very similar issue: their 2016 decision to follow through on a \$15-billion sale of “light armoured vehicles” to Saudi Arabia, despite that country’s abysmal human rights record, especially regarding gender equality.⁴⁵ In his quantitative analysis of Canadian arms sales from 1970 to 2015, Vucetic found that “Liberals and Conservatives do not radically differ in the way they steer the export permit regime for the military goods and services Canada sends abroad,” suggesting that despite its insistence on a feminist foreign policy, the Trudeau Government is not truly ‘different’ in this regard. As we move past 2015, time will tell whether or not behavioural change occurs; the results of this first litmus test are not promising. One must also note that Canada is not alone in this seeming hypocrisy. Sweden and the Netherlands—also seen as “global good Samaritans” occupying a similar space in the international hierarchy as Canada—have faced criticism for their arms deals that belie their apparently feminist agenda.⁴⁶ Interestingly, all three countries appear to compromise their principles roughly the same amount of time; “15% of Canada’s military deals were with buyers with ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ human rights records,” with the Netherlands close behind at 14%, and Sweden at 10%.⁴⁷ Again, statistics like this raise more questions than they answer. Can one argue that the money earned

⁴⁵ Srdjan Vucetic, ‘A Nation of Feminist Arms Dealers? Canada and Military Exports’, *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 72, no. 4 (December 2017): 503, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1177/0020702017740156>.

⁴⁶ Vucetic, ‘A Nation of Feminist Arms Dealers?’, 516.

⁴⁷ Vucetic, ‘A Nation of Feminist Arms Dealers?’, 516.

from these sales creates more overall good than harm? How can one possibly begin to untangle the threads of utility and ethics, both placed under serious strain when a state attempts to do what is both right and pragmatic? In Vucetic's pithy phrasing, can Canada be a "nation of feminist arms dealers?"⁴⁸ This paper seeks to explore these questions, paradoxes, and contradictions, rather than offer any firm answers.

Finally, it must be noted that despite all the discourse about feminist foreign policy, there is no sole definition, or even a vague and mutually-agreeable one. Feminist foreign policy is very much defined by the state practicing it; by the norms and ideas of feminism in the state; and by the state's own purposes and ends. This is already clear in our discussion of feminist theory, with its conflicting strands of thought, and it will become even clearer as we continue our examination of feminist foreign policy under Harper and Trudeau, with both governments defining and using feminist thought differently. The lack of any official or global definition makes any examination of feminist foreign policy elusive and slippery, with easy or straightforward answers thin on the ground. To borrow Wendt's now-famous constructivist declaration, feminist foreign policy is what states make of it.⁴⁹

This section has sought to highlight and critically evaluate some of the major theoretical strands that underpin feminist IR while pointing to practical issues that states face when the theory of feminist foreign policy meets reality. The following sections will discuss the arguments used to justify feminist foreign policy, as well as issues around intention and agency.

⁴⁸ Vucetic, 'A Nation of Feminist Arms Dealers?', 503.

⁴⁹ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425.

Why and How is Feminist Foreign Policy Used by States?: Ethical Justifications

All of this background theoretical criticism necessarily culminates in an examination of feminist foreign policy in contemporary practice. Why, exactly, has the Trudeau Government chosen to portray itself as a feminist government practicing feminist foreign policy? The following section will outline two of the main ways in which feminist foreign policy is presented, both in Canadian and international contexts. It seeks to explain *why* and *how* feminist foreign policy is used by states, including Canada. Broadly speaking, these methods and justifications for feminist foreign policy can be divided into two sections: ethical and economical. We begin first with the ethical.

For a state to present itself as ‘feminist’ both at home and abroad is to set itself up as a “good” state; a defender of human rights and progressive ideals.⁵⁰ By undertaking a feminist foreign policy, Canada is self-selecting itself as a ‘good’ rather than ‘bad’ state; “the idea that Canada is an exemplary country in its treatment of women, and that gender equality is a core Canadian value, continues to be professed with regularity.”⁵¹ Feminism is thus part of the discourse of Canadian identity both at home and abroad, and construed as a ‘right’ or ethical thing to practice. The importance of gender equality as a Canadian value has been long-standing and transcends partisan affiliation.⁵² However, as will be discussed later in this paper, the framing of gender equality has differed between the Harper and Trudeau Governments.

Proponents of feminist foreign policy argue that it provides an “ethically informed framework based on broad cosmopolitan norms of global justice and peace.”⁵³ In other words,

⁵⁰ Lisa Richey, ‘In Search of Feminist Foreign Policy: Gender, Development, and Danish State Identity’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 36, no. 2 (2001): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001083601400422351>

⁵¹ Alison Howell, ‘Peaceful, Tolerant and Orderly? A Feminist Analysis of Discourses of “Canadian Values” in Canadian Foreign Policy’, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 12, no. 1 (2005): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2005.9673388>

⁵² Howell, ‘Peaceful, Tolerant and Orderly?’, 55.

⁵³ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making’, 323.

feminism is presented as a good in and of itself, lending credibility to the actions of a state. The use of a feminist foreign policy can also be used to excuse many other moral failings on the part of a state; for example, as discussed earlier, Canada's arms deals with Saudi Arabia—usually considered to be a 'bad' state, where human rights abuses and women's rights violations abound—have been the focus of much controversy.⁵⁴ Feminist foreign policy thus simultaneously creates a moral imperative and a moral justification; in this case, it leaves the Trudeau Government open to criticisms about practicing what it preaches, but also allows the government to point at other initiatives that (in the government's view) outweigh its shortcomings. Howell refers to this moral balancing as a discourse that "projects a virtuous image of Canada, but can also be used to hold the government and others to account when failures to live up to such values are evident."⁵⁵ Whether or not the morals truly balance out is another question entirely—can we justify ignoring Saudi Arabia's violations of women's human rights by funding women's micro-agriculture projects in sub-Saharan Africa? Answers to these sorts of questions are beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless, it is clear that by practicing a self-identified feminist foreign policy, the Trudeau Government seeks to say something about Canada, Canadian values, and the relative utility of certain interventions or moral stands.

For those unconvinced by the inherent value of feminist foreign policy, there are multiple rationales that highlight how feminism can increase global security and improve our world as a whole. The most famous example of this has come to be known as 'The Hillary Doctrine,' after Hillary Clinton and her attempts to spread these ideas during her tenure as Secretary of State:

Investing in the potential of women and girls is the smartest investment we can make. It is connected to every problem on anyone's mind around the world today... There are people who say, well, women's issues is an important issue, but it doesn't rank up there

⁵⁴ Levon Sevunts, 'Ottawa Ready to Review Saudi Arms Deals amid Crackdown', CBC News, 28 July 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/saudi-arms-deal-canada-shia-1.4227018>

⁵⁵ Howell, 'Peaceful, Tolerant and Orderly?', 54.

with the Middle East or Iran's nuclear threat or Afghanistan or Pakistan. I could not disagree more. I think women are key to our being able to resolve all of those difficult conflicts, as well as provide for a better future.⁵⁶

This justification is more than just rhetoric. Research has found that “the best predictor of a state's peacefulness was not level of democracy, or wealth, or civilizational identity: the best predictor of a state's peacefulness was its level of violence against women.”⁵⁷ The states that have improved their standard-of-living metrics the most in the past hundred years or so (e.g. Latin America, Southeast Asia) are the ones that invested in female education and improved the education gap; those that continue to lag (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East) have not been as successful in closing this gap.⁵⁸ The evidence for the spillover effects of supporting women and girls to become full members of society is “overwhelming,” and it is not new.⁵⁹ In this aspect, at least, the Trudeau Government's choice to pursue a feminist foreign policy is evidence-based.

One powerful metaphor popularized by Valerie Hudson describes women as the “canaries” in the “coal mine” of our planet; when something is amiss, the status of women is usually our first and strongest indicator.⁶⁰ Critics of feminist foreign policy point out that we should be helping the coal mine rather than the canaries; “attend to the coal mine, and the canaries will be fine.”⁶¹ Policy recommendations for ensuring that Canada is attending to the coal mine, and not just the canaries will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

Through this lens, feminist foreign policy becomes ethical for more than simply women; it becomes ethical for the planet. State officials and policymakers are quick to point out how

⁵⁶ Hillary Clinton, quoted in Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine: Sex & American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 67.

⁵⁷ Hudson and Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine*, 72.

⁵⁸ Isobel Coleman, ‘The Payoff From Women's Rights’, *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (June 2004): 81-83.

⁵⁹ Coleman, ‘The Payoff From Women's Rights’, 81.

⁶⁰ Hudson and Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine*, 72.

⁶¹ Hudson and Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine*, xi.

“gender equality is not a women’s issue, but rather a make-or-break issue...an issue for peace, security, and sustainable development as a whole.”⁶² Countries like Canada that practice feminist foreign policy therefore present themselves as global do-gooders, saving the world from not only sexism but poverty, climate change, and terrorism, with one well-aimed proverbial stone. In undertaking this ethical fight, the Trudeau Government is emulating the oft-lauded actions of governments like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway; “humanitarian superpower” states that embrace “gender cosmopolitanism.”⁶³ Although these ideas usually play well in the media and on the world stage, there are many for whom such ideas are not compelling. In another attempt to convince doubters of its worthiness, feminist foreign policy has presented another rationale in recent years: economics.

Why and How is Feminist Foreign Policy Used by States?: Economic Justifications

If the ethical argument for feminist foreign policy can be said to appeal mainly to left-leaning voters, then the economic argument for it seems tailor-made for right-leaning ones. Feminism in governance and foreign affairs is frequently seen as the concern of left-leaning think-tanks and NGOs. The vaunted consulting firm of McKinsey is not known for its feminist credibility or engagement; it is the kind of established, global, old-boys firm to which powerful white men in expensive suits pay attention.⁶⁴ In September 2015, McKinsey published a report entitled *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*. Suddenly, after decades of feminism as a fringe issue or side concern, one of the most

⁶² The Fletcher Forum, ‘Leading a Feminist Foreign Policy’, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 161.

⁶³ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond. ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making’, 326.

⁶⁴ ‘A New Boss for McKinsey’, *The Economist*, 1 March 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/business/21737549-kevin-sneader-has-repair-work-do-south-africaand-must-tackle-technology-sector-new>.

influential consulting firms in the world made a business case for gender equality—and the men in suits sat up and listened.

The sprawling, numbers-laden, 168-page report laid out in precise detail how much money was being lost every year to the gender gap. By keeping “half the population” at home or uneducated, both developed and developing countries were missing out on impressive GDP growth numbers, with small gender gap regions (North America, Oceania) standing to increase their GDP by 19% and high gender gap regions (India, the Middle East) standing to improve GDP by 60%.⁶⁵ These are exactly the kind of numbers that appeal to politicians and policymakers; seemingly high-impact, sweeping rather than niche, broadly appealing to voters of all stripes. Surely this kind of attention could only be a help for the advancement of gender equality?

However, when viewed through a feminist lens, *The Power of Parity* makes for somewhat uncomfortable reading. The report’s main concern was the low participation of women in the labour force, not only in actual presence but in lower hours worked than men.⁶⁶ According to *Power of Parity*, improving gender equality in society would allow women to participate in the labour force more fully, thus leading to improved economic success for everyone; as the report proclaimed, “gender equality in society is intrinsically a worthwhile goal, but it is also vital for achieving gender equality in work.”⁶⁷ Once again, the ethical argument for feminism was insufficient, so economic ones had to be relied upon. The confusing message that women should be working more and longer hours in order to support global growth seems backwards; urging women to take on more tasks for the greater good, as if their greatest ambition

⁶⁵ Jonathan Woetzel et al., ‘The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth’ (McKinsey Global Institute, September 2015), <https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>.

⁶⁶ Woetzel et al., ‘The Power of Parity’, 4.

⁶⁷ Woetzel et al., ‘The Power of Parity’, 7.

should be to join the workforce in droves. The “vision of third world women as untapped resources” is uncomfortable and colonialist, painting ‘women’ as a deposit that needs to be mined.⁶⁸

By the report’s own reckoning, unpaid work undertaken by women—child care, housekeeping, elder care, cooking—represents at least \$10 trillion in ‘lost’ or ‘uncounted’ GDP per year.⁶⁹ *Parity* blithely states this fact without noting that their \$10 trillion estimate is very close to the \$12 trillion amount they claim the world could stand to gain; it could be argued that a near-identical result would be achieved if the care work largely undertaken by women—conservatively, 75% of unpaid work is done by women—was valued and quantified in the same way as other forms of labour.⁷⁰ In an interesting clash of values, the report implicitly urges women to leave behind the care work thought of as ‘womanly’ or menial and join the labour force, usually conceived of as a masculine, productive arena. Taken altogether, such a message implies that work done by women is valuable only when it is assigned economic worth. As poignantly expressed by Enloe, “a woman who has traded work as an unpaid agricultural worker for work as a low-paid hotel cleaner has not lost any of her femininity; she has simply confirmed it.”⁷¹

At best, the economic arguments for undertaking a feminist approach to governance and foreign policy can convince reluctant adherents to ‘buy in.’ The numbers are impressive and the outcomes are couched in terms (such as profit, growth rates, and statistics) that those concerned with the ‘bottom line’ can easily understand and conceptualize. However, this mainstreaming comes at a cost; the co-opting of feminist buzzwords and messaging for economic ends may

⁶⁸ Beck, ‘Reconsidering Women’s Empowerment’, 223.

⁶⁹ Woetzel et al., ‘The Power of Parity’, 2.

⁷⁰ Woetzel et al., ‘The Power of Parity’, 2.

⁷¹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, 68.

make feminist policy more palatable, but it simultaneously carries forward problematic conceptions of female agency, worth, and responsibility. As Mason noted, such co-opting can “generate narrow understandings of this multifaceted issue that obscure its complexities and narrow its solutions.”⁷²

Thanks to *Parity* and arguments like it, feminist foreign policy has now become ‘good business sense’ for states, rather than simply ‘the right thing to do.’ The problem with such arguments is that they use feminist policy to further ends, rather than upholding feminist thought as an end in itself. These insertions of intention and purpose are potentially unhelpful, further ingraining the attitudes that first led to these problems. In other words, the ethical argument for feminist foreign policy speaks to the coal mine, while the economic argument speaks to the canary. Recalling that ethical arguments for feminist foreign policy create both moral imperative and moral justification, economic arguments create both negative and positive opportunity: an economic approach furthers the appeal of feminist foreign policy to policymakers, politicians, and voters, while simultaneously hindering the ultimate aims of a feminist approach to policy. It is true that economic arguments may still do more good than harm; it can certainly be argued that an economic approach to feminism pushes policy in the right direction, if not always through the right channels. Whether or not the drawbacks of economic justification overwhelm the benefits is outside the scope of this paper; but these drawbacks must be kept in mind.

Interestingly and perhaps unexpectedly, the Harper Government frequently appealed to ethical sensibilities in its foreign policy, while the Trudeau Government (as of this writing) has made many appeals to economic sensibilities under a feminist banner. Foreign policy rhetoric under the Harper Government “consistently” used keywords like “champion” or “leadership” that portrayed Canada as “saving vulnerable victims,” using the ‘women and children’ stereotype

⁷² Mason, *Manufacturing Urgency*, 13.

as a recurring motif.⁷³ This co-opting of ethical arguments is also problematic, and will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper. In contrast, in both rhetoric and policy documents, the Trudeau Government has pointed to how gender equality will increase “economic opportunities,” improve “global prosperity,” and reduce poverty rates.⁷⁴ The McKinsey report has been frequently cited by the Trudeau Government in speeches and policy documents, with the \$12-tillion figure an area of particular interest.⁷⁵ It is unclear whether the economic rhetoric employed by the Trudeau Government in furthering their feminist aims stems from an attempt to sway right-wing or centre-voters, or perhaps a fixation with results and data.

It could also be noted that ethical arguments seem to put the burden of performance and results on the developed, ‘progressive’ country to intervene, whereas economic arguments seem to place this burden on women living in developing countries, and the choices they make. If a woman living in a developing country prefers to stay home and care for her children rather than join the labour force and join a microfinance group, has she ‘let down’ the feminist politicians in developed countries who believe in her and her economic potential? At the root of this ethics vs. economic debate are some uncomfortable truths about the priorities and values propagated by developed countries, both at home and abroad, when they undertake a feminist foreign policy.

Harper Era vs. Trudeau Era: What are the Shifts?

Having completed a review of feminist foreign policy as well as its major arguments and justifications, we will now turn to more extensive examination of how the Harper and Trudeau

⁷³ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 53.

⁷⁴ Global Affairs Canada, ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy’, accessed 12 October 2017, http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng.

⁷⁵ Global Affairs Canada, ‘Address by Minister Bibeau at the Launch of Canada’s New Feminist International Assistance Policy’, 10 June 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerbibeauatthelaunchofcanadasnewfeministinternat.html.

Governments defined and used feminism in their respective foreign policies. As the Trudeau Government has yet to complete its first mandate, the conclusions drawn reflect a contemporary, *in medias res* evaluation; correspondingly, the Harper Government's decade in power allows for a more robust reckoning, but it must be noted that all governments collect more debris the longer they roll. Overall, this section will evaluate the Trudeau Government's self-identified feminist foreign policy credentials.

Rather than conducting an exhaustive historical analysis of the approaches of these two governments, the following analysis will attempt to evaluate and highlight both similarities and differences through key areas of Canadian feminist foreign policy such as rhetoric, policy documents and decisions, spending, and international relations case studies. This section will conclude with an examination of instances where the Trudeau Government's feminist foreign policy faced tests of rhetoric versus reality, lending a deeper understanding to both the nature and magnitude of shifts in the use of feminist foreign policy in Canada. Note that a corresponding examination of instances of 'rhetoric vs. reality' for the Harper Government era will not be conducted, as this paper seeks to be forward-looking and provide a relevant, timely, and constructive critique.

“Vulnerable Mothers” vs. “Empowered Women”: Shifts in Rhetoric

In 2010, while hosting the G8 Summit, Canada—led by the Harper Government—announced its intention to make maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) a priority.⁷⁶ Outwardly, this action could easily be construed as feminist; after all, the Harper Government was supporting a cause that necessarily affects women. It quickly became clear, however, that any feminist strands of thought in the Harper Government's choice of MNCH were severely

⁷⁶Keast, 'Missed Opportunity', 49.

lacking. Firstly, the MNCH initiative only tackled one side of the maternal equation, with then-minister Lawrence Cannon stating that maternal health programs would “not deal in any way, shape or form with family planning” or contraceptives, and then-Prime Minister Harper adding that “we do not want a debate, here or elsewhere, on abortion.”⁷⁷ Cannon went so far as to say that the purpose of MNCH was to “save lives,” implying that contraception and abortion must necessarily take away more lives than these prescriptions and procedures save.⁷⁸ In other words, the Harper Government’s vision of MNCH was most interested in women when they became maternal, and then afterwards more interested in women as health-promoting parents rather than as people in their own right. The MNCH approach was criticized by NGOs and scholars for its strange emphasis on women as mothers first, people second.⁷⁹

Moreover, the official rhetoric around MNCH “portrayed Prime Minister Harper and the Canadian government as possessing authority, power, and legitimacy vis-a-vis maternal and child health,” setting Canada up as a *preux chevalier* riding to the rescue of pregnant women in the Global South, facing down patriarchal dragons.⁸⁰ This rhetoric “reflected a particularly narrow vision of saving vulnerable victims,” harkening back to an outdated ‘women and children first’ mentality that went down with the Titanic.⁸¹ Tiessen deems this Harper Government trend “gender essentialism,” wherein the “association of women and children with notions of helplessness...frames women as exclusively mothers and/or passive victims.”⁸² Gender essentialism is dangerous not only for women, but also for foreign policy as a whole, as it

⁷⁷ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 53.

⁷⁸ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 53.

⁷⁹ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 52.

⁸⁰ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 53.

⁸¹ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 53.

⁸² Rebecca Tiessen, ‘Gender Essentialism in Canadian Foreign Aid Commitments to Women, Peace, and Security’, *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 70, no. 1 (March 2015): 97, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1177/0020702014564799>.

sidelines a crucial half of the equation; men are essentialized to be warriors and pillagers, and “harmful gender stereotypes are reproduced.”⁸³

In her examination of Canadian MNCH documents under Harper, Keast found that “the words used most frequently in relation to women include ‘mothers,’ ‘vulnerable,’ and ‘saving lives.’”⁸⁴ There is no question that women in the Global South face vulnerability—as do women in the Global North, or indeed any person living, to different degrees and in different contexts. However, the Harper Government’s framing of women as ‘vulnerable mothers’ was problematic because “consistently linking ‘mothers’ and ‘women’ to vulnerability creates the sense that all women throughout the Global South are mothers, and that all mothers are vulnerable simply because they are women and mothers.”⁸⁵ Returning to our elucidation of theory earlier in this paper, it is clear to see that rhetoric of this type creates the homogenous, colonialist discourse that feminist foreign policy should seek to dismantle. The “language of motherhood” sets women up into a particular role, with particular expectations placed upon them, further propagating the myth of femininity in the Global South as something nurturing and in need of protection, rather than as something individual.⁸⁶ By utilising ‘maternal’ and ‘champion’ rhetoric, the Harper Government sought to set Canada up as a saviour rather than as a peer, continuing the problematic strands of colonialism discussed earlier.⁸⁷ Keast suggests that this rhetoric was employed deliberately, to appeal “to conservative, traditional family values.”⁸⁸ However, the rhetoric also allowed Canada to claim on the world stage that it was pro-women, if not specifically pro-gender equality. By pushing MNCH as a policy priority, the Canadian

⁸³ Tiessen, ‘Gender Essentialism,’ 98.

⁸⁴ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity,’ 55.

⁸⁵ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity,’ 55.

⁸⁶ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity,’ 56.

⁸⁷ Tiessen, ‘Gender Essentialism,’ 100.

⁸⁸ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity,’ 58.

government “attempted to retain an image of global leadership on gender equality issues.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the MNCH initiative was met with “controversy” both at home and abroad, as many “civil society organizations” protested against the Harper Government’s use of rhetoric (and the policy priorities implied therein).⁹⁰

The rhetoric around the MNCH initiative also displayed hints that it was ‘manufacturing urgency,’ especially with its focus on ‘saving lives.’ Unfortunately, this rhetoric paid very little attention to the deeper socio-economic issues that contribute to the need for improved MNCH care, such as “pervasive gender inequality.”⁹¹ Rather, band-aid solutions such as greater funding for health clinics was proposed, but “provision of services does not ensure that people will be able to access them.”⁹² Band-aid solutions are (likely) better than no solutions at all, but the rhetoric around the MNCH initiatives fell into many of the pitfalls of feminist foreign policy elucidated earlier. Most damningly, it called upon a very specific definition of ‘feminist’ that did not reflect the experiences of the women it purported to help. As discussed in the section on justifications for feminist foreign policy, the Harper Government appealed to an ethical sensibility, but defined ethics in a narrow way that few would claim truly supported the ethics behind feminist thought.

The Harper Government’s use of rhetoric did not encompass only the MNCH initiative; in 2009, bureaucrats with DFAIT and CIDA (now Global Affairs Canada) were instructed to replace the term “gender equality” with “equality between women and men.”⁹³ This change may appear minimal, but as Tiessen and Carrier point out, “‘gender equality’ distinguishes that giving

⁸⁹ Liam Swiss and Jessica Barry, ‘Did Changes in Language Lead to Spending Shifts?’, in *Obligations and Omissions: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality*, ed. Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 28.

⁹⁰ Swiss and Barry, ‘Did Changes in Language Lead to Spending Shifts?’, 29.

⁹¹ Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 57.

⁹² Keast, ‘Missed Opportunity’, 57.

⁹³ Swiss and Barry, ‘Did Changes in Language Lead to Spending Shifts?’, 23.

men and women the same opportunities may not produce equal results.”⁹⁴ Moreover, in both official policy documents and Harper Government communications, “gender-based violence” was replaced with “violence against women,” while the term “women” was “increasingly” replaced with “mothers.”⁹⁵

Taken altogether, the use of feminist rhetoric under the Harper Government wasn’t truly feminist, despite portraying Canada as a ‘champion’ for women. Many scholars and rights organizations expressed concern and alarm over this seemingly innocuous rhetoric, arguing that it “diminished Canada’s history of promoting gender equality internationally and tarnished Canada’s international reputation as a ‘good state’ and a leader in the promotion of gender equality.”⁹⁶ However, the evidence as to whether or not this rhetoric led to practical shifts is mixed; historically, on gender equality issues, “a greater emphasis on policy and rhetoric than on practice” has been a common trend across all Canadian governments.⁹⁷ Tiessen and Carrier argue that shifts in feminist rhetoric under the Harper Conservatives led to delays in implementing programs due to the “confusion and difference of opinion...over language,” as well as noticeable shifts in the funding and quality of gender programming.⁹⁸ However, in their quantitative examination of funding for gender equality initiatives under the Harper Government, Swiss and Barry found that no “significant shifts” in spending occurred, and that “Canada’s gender programming—at least in terms of spending and relative share of programming—remained resilient.”⁹⁹ As usual, the truth likely lies somewhere in between; rhetoric matters, but policy is also slow to change. Rhetoric also reflects the priorities of a government rather than the priorities

⁹⁴ Rebecca Tiessen and Krystal Carrier, ‘The Erasure of “Gender” in Canadian Foreign Policy under the Harper Conservatives: The Significance of the Discursive Shift from “Gender Equality” to “Equality between Women and Men”’, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 21, no. 2 (2015): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2014.977310>.

⁹⁵ Tiessen and Carrier, ‘The Erasure of “Gender” in Canadian Foreign Policy’, 95.

⁹⁶ Tiessen and Carrier, ‘The Erasure of “Gender” in Canadian Foreign Policy’, 109.

⁹⁷ Tiessen and Carrier, ‘The Erasure of “Gender” in Canadian Foreign Policy’, 99.

⁹⁸ Tiessen and Carrier, ‘The Erasure of “Gender” in Canadian Foreign Policy’, 106.

⁹⁹ Swiss and Barry, ‘Did Changes in Language Lead to Spending Shifts?’, 43.

of its machinery; bureaucratic resistance to rhetoric changes can play a significant role in mitigating policy changes.¹⁰⁰

To date, the rhetoric of the Trudeau Government has been far different than that of the Harper Government. In several of its flagship policy documents thus far—such as the *Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)* and *Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace*—as well as at public events and in House of Commons speeches, the Trudeau Government has consistently pointed to its desire to “empower” women.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the Trudeau Government’s choice of language seems carefully crafted to appeal to feminist scholars and voters while simultaneously pre-empting criticism from former detractors of the Harper Government. Language such as “intersectional discrimination,” “multidimensional nature of poverty,” “women’s active participation,” and “transformative change” all suggest that the Trudeau Government’s use of feminist rhetoric is informed by the theoretical contributions of feminist scholarship, at least in a surface-level way.¹⁰² One can draw a clear line between this language and the feminist theoretical underpinnings. For example, “intersectional discrimination,” “multidimensional nature of poverty,” and “transformative change” all avoid the pitfalls of language that can homogenize women as a group, ignore the complex causes of human suffering, and manufacture urgency. Terms like “women’s active participation” deliberately disrupt the saviour image so frequently employed by the Harper Government, instead portraying women as purposeful, engaged agents of change.

As discussed in our analysis of Harper Government feminist rhetoric, these language choices have power, even if actual policy changes are lacking (as will be analyzed later).

¹⁰⁰ Swiss and Barry, ‘Did Changes in Language Lead to Spending Shifts?’, 43.

¹⁰¹ Global Affairs Canada, ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy’.

¹⁰² Government of Canada, ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy’ and Global Affairs Canada, ‘Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace (Canada’s National Action Plan 2017-2022)’.

Interestingly, given the Trudeau Government's tendency to attempt to please all voters—frequently shying away from being the 'bad guy'—the rhetoric deliberately names “the right to access safe and legal abortions” as “rights...at the core of our foreign policy.”¹⁰³ The Trudeau Government's feminist rhetoric also avoids the 'gender essentialism' that was quietly pervasive in the Harper Government's rhetoric:

Canada recognizes that women and men must be equally committed to changing attitudes, behaviours and roles to support gender equality. This is why Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy requires engaging men and boys, alongside women and girls, as agents and beneficiaries of change in peace and gender equality.¹⁰⁴

The stereotype of men in developing countries as 'exploiters' is noticeably absent in this kind of language. Instead, gender equality is presented as an initiative that will benefit everyone, while also requiring input and work from all parties. Prime Minister Trudeau himself has become world-famous for self-identified feminism as well as his promotion of feminism as a good for everyone, frequently making statements such as “Being a feminist for me means recognizing that men and women should be, can be, must be equal and secondly, that we still have an awful lot of work to do.”¹⁰⁵

Is there a drawback to this carefully curated rhetoric? It certainly seems to anticipate many of the problematic tendencies anticipated by feminist scholarship. Overall, perhaps the sternest criticism one could level at the Trudeau Government's use of feminist rhetoric is that it has a whiff of glibness and insincerity, self-congratulatory and smug in its careful selection of phrases that may or may not reflect real and meaningful change. However, in an age when proud gender equality on the part of governments seems fragile and rare, it is hard to take whole-

¹⁰³ Global Affairs Canada, 'Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy'.

¹⁰⁴ Government of Canada, 'Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace (Canada's National Action Plan 2017-2022)'.

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Agerholm, 'Justin Trudeau Promotes Feminist Movement of Men Sticking up for Women', *The Independent*, 21 September 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/justin-trudeau-men-feminist-movement-stick-up-women-sexism-canada-prime-minister-a7960196.html>.

hearted aim at rhetoric that makes a dedicated effort to respond to and engage with feminist thought. As usual, it is far easier to levy nuanced critique in the area of action rather than rhetoric, and it is to action we now turn.

The Shifts That Were: Adjustments, Small Victories, and Disruptions

As touched on above, the place of reproductive health in Canada's feminist foreign policy is a frequent rallying cry and benchmark. Under the Harper Government, reproductive health was a no-go zone, going so far as to "ban funding to abortion-related services" in its foreign policy portfolio.¹⁰⁶ Ironically, this ban received far more attention retroactively in March 2017, when President Trump issued his own ban that "prevented foreign aid going to groups that even discussed abortion rights."¹⁰⁷ The resulting funding gap was a source of intense concern in the international development community, with many fearing that formerly productive aid organizations would be forced to change their mandates or operate at far less capacity.¹⁰⁸ President Trump was curiously fixated with this shift, asking Secretary of State Rex Tillerson "to identify a larger range of international aid programs that could fall under the ban," suggesting that he took a more personal interest in the issue.¹⁰⁹ The relatively new Trudeau Government was faced with one of its first tests of the realities of feminist foreign policy: would they stay the Harper Government course, or risk angering President Trump by taking a stand?

Not only did the Trudeau Government overturn the Harper Government ban on abortion funding, they also pledged up to \$20 million to a global fund started by the Netherlands intended

¹⁰⁶ Mike Blanchfield, 'Liberals Poised to Fill Trump Funding Gap, but Urged to Raise Overall Aid Spending', CBC News, 2 March 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Molly Redden, 'Trump Expands Policy That Bans US Aid for Overseas Abortion Providers', *The Guardian*, 15 May 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/15/trump-abortion-rule-mexico-city-policy>.

¹⁰⁸ Redden, 'Trump Expands Policy That Bans US Aid for Overseas Abortion Providers'.

¹⁰⁹ Redden, 'Trump Expands Policy That Bans US Aid for Overseas Abortion Providers'.

to makeup the shortfall in funding, entitled *SheDecides*.¹¹⁰ Examining these actions through a realist lens makes little sense; why would Canada risk angering its newly erratic and ever-powerful neighbour, particularly as anxieties about NAFTA continue to reign supreme? One could argue that the decision to participate in the call for funds reinforced Canada's ties to its European allies and contributed to its soft power. However, this argument is undercut by a pragmatic reckoning of the actual worth of the pledge; despite the fairly extensive global media coverage of the 'abortion fund,' Canada's contribution would be a relative drop in the proverbial bucket, especially when compared to the roughly \$4.8 billion Canada allots to official development assistance annually.¹¹¹ It is unlikely contributing to *SheDecides* was a realist, strategic decision. Correspondingly, one could argue instead that the decision was an idealistic and principled one; a statement about Canada's priorities and its feminist foreign policy. Viewed through this lens, contributing to the abortion fund becomes a relatively low-cost way for Canada to practice a feminist foreign policy and make an ethical stand on an issue that received global attention. However, this decision was not low-risk, especially considering President Trump's seemingly sweeping and personal approach to the issue. Canada's decision to contribute easily could have angered him at a crucial time for U.S.-Canada relations, adding unnecessary fuel to an oil field of potential conflagrations.

Interestingly, the Trudeau Government's handling of U.S. relations under President Trump has contained several intriguing examples of a commitment to feminist foreign policy. Prime Minister Trudeau's first visit to the White House in February 2017—an occasion rife with anxiety about NAFTA negotiations and any potential dislike President Trump might take to

¹¹⁰ Mike Blanchfield, 'Liberals Poised to Fill Trump Funding Gap, but Urged to Raise Overall Aid Spending', CBC News, 2 March 2017.

¹¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'OECD Stats - Total ODA by Type of Aid - Canada', accessed 11 March 2018, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=42230&lang=en>.

Trudeau—was hardly expected to have a feminist bent. Yet one of the most discussed items of the visit was the creation of the Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders—a name so unwieldy it belongs on an episode of *Yes Minister*—while its acronym (CUSCAWEBL) could surely be the name of some Paleolithic beast.

Stunningly and cannily, Prime Minister Trudeau’s office proposed the CUSCAWEBL to the White House as a “joint effort” reflecting Trump and Trudeau’s “shared interest” in the advancement of women’s equality in the workforce.¹¹² Even more stunningly, Trump accepted the initiative and took the opportunity to proudly trumpet his supposedly feminist leanings, stating:

We need policies that help keep women in the workforce and to address the unique barriers faced by female entrepreneurs—and they are unique...For me, it’s not just about doing the right thing, but understanding that women in leadership can be a very powerful leverage for success for business, for communities and for our entire economy.¹¹³

Note that President Trump’s justification for his peculiar brand of feminist rhetoric is economic. As discussed earlier, the Trudeau Government’s justifications have also frequently been economic rather than ethical, allowing it to reach out to audiences (like President Trump and his ilk) who may not always be willing to listen to ethical or ‘liberal’ reasoning. The roundtable allowed Canada to continue promoting a feminist foreign policy—at least in a surface-level way—while “building political capital.”¹¹⁴ Does this also reflect the co-opting of feminist ideas for political ends? Absolutely. Was the establishment of CUSCAWEBL a triumph of feminist foreign policy? Absolutely not, particularly as the council’s membership reflects a

¹¹² Catherine Lucey, ‘Trump, Trudeau to Discuss Women in Workforce at Washington Round Table’, CBC News, 13 February 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trump-trudeau-ivanka-trump-women-workforce-1.3979851>.

¹¹³ Joanna Smith, ‘Trudeau, Trump Hold Roundtable Talks on Women in the Workforce’, *Maclean’s*, 13 February 2017, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/trudeau-trump-hold-roundtable-talks-on-women-in-the-workforce/>.

¹¹⁴ Smith, ‘Trudeau, Trump Hold Roundtable Talks on Women in the Workforce’.

narrow band of mainly white, affluent women; out of the 10 all-female members, just 1 is a woman of colour,¹¹⁵ and only 2 founded the companies they now headed.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is significant that out of all the issues Trump and Trudeau could have found common ground on, feminism was the uneasy marsh—or rather, the undrained swamp—on which they met. Even when wielded improperly, far from the theoretical ideals it advocates, feminist foreign policy holds power in the international sphere.

Remarkably, Harper, Trudeau, and Canada’s changing use of feminist foreign policy would meet yet again in delightfully distinct juxtaposition. In October 2017, Harper—now out of office for two years—attracted no small amount of attention for a memo he penned entitled “Napping on NAFTA,” in which he accused the Trudeau Government of being overly stubborn during negotiations, and not capitulating to American demands willingly enough.¹¹⁷ In particular, Harper wrote: “Did anyone really think that the Liberals could somehow force the Trump administration into enacting their agenda—union power, climate change, Aboriginal claims, gender issues?”¹¹⁸

Other progressive issues aside, Harper’s sneering condemnation of the Trudeau Government’s attempt to raise gender issues is puzzling, given President Trump’s receptivity to a vaguely ‘feminist’ initiative barely 8 months earlier. At that time, Trump himself had linked gender equality and economics in a positive way. Moreover, it is unlikely that the gender issues being raised by the Trudeau Government are unduly aggressive or unreasonable, especially given the severity of possible consequences. NAFTA negotiations remain fairly secretive, but an

¹¹⁵ ‘About’, Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders, accessed 23 January 2018, <https://advancingwomeninbusiness.com/about/>.

¹¹⁶ Anne Kingston, ‘Is the Trump-Trudeau Women’s Council Real or Fake?’, *Maclean’s*, 21 April 2017, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/is-the-trump-trudeau-womens-council-real-or-fake/>.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Panetta, ‘Ex-PM Stephen Harper Pens Memo Slamming Trudeau Government over NAFTA Talks’, *The Toronto Star*, 27 October 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/10/27/ex-pm-stephen-harper-pens-memo-slamming-trudeau-government-over-nafta-talks.html>.

¹¹⁸ Panetta, ‘Ex-PM Stephen Harper Pens Memo Slamming Trudeau Government over NAFTA Talks.’

educated guess as to the kinds of gender issues the Trudeau Government is trying to raise can be made by examining a speech Trudeau gave to the Mexican Senate while promoting the idea of a gender chapter in a re-negotiated NAFTA: “Our challenge lies in ensuring that everyone benefits from economic growth. And we do that by pursuing an ambitious, progressive vision of what the future can and should look like.”¹¹⁹ Trudeau later added that the chapter could be “aspirational, [or] it can be concrete.”¹²⁰ In other words, there appears to be no real substance or demands behind the proposed gender chapter as of yet. It could be as meaningless as another women’s business council or as weighty as gender employment protections. Rather, the Trudeau Government’s attempts to discuss gender issues may be let another attempt to connect to the Trump Administration in terms their leader can understand, on an issue he (and his supposedly feminist daughter Ivanka) have previously expressed interest in, and engaged with Canada on. Mexico’s government also appears to support the idea of a gender chapter, with Trudeau receiving a standing ovation after his remarks.¹²¹ Strikingly, one could argue that perhaps gender issues are actually a source of accord rather than discord in the acrimonious talks: at the very least, it seems as if there is little agreement on anything else. At the moment, only the negotiators could say. The conclusion here is that even when feminist foreign policy seems totally incongruous to a given setting, it can actually offer hidden routes of influence.

Yet the Trudeau Government’s attempt to include gender issues in NAFTA talks are remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, the ‘easy’ thing to do would be to follow Harper’s unsolicited advice and largely cede to American demands without attempting to raise additional issues. The Trudeau Government’s willingness to ‘go to the mat’ for gender issues in such a

¹¹⁹ The Canadian Press, ‘Trudeau Addresses Mexico’s Senate, Calls for Renewed Effort on Gender Equality’, CBC News, 13 October 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-senate-speech-1.4353088>.

¹²⁰ The Canadian Press, ‘Trudeau Addresses Mexico’s Senate, Calls for Renewed Effort on Gender Equality.’

¹²¹ The Canadian Press, ‘Trudeau Addresses Mexico’s Senate, Calls for Renewed Effort on Gender Equality’.

high-stakes negotiation implies a dedication that goes beyond pure rhetoric, even if any meaningful policy changes wrought by this dedication are ultimately non-existent or minimal. President Trump's erraticism renders any strategies prone to complete failure, so even if using feminist ideas was an attempt to gain entrée to President and Ivanka Trump's good graces, presumably the Trudeau Government's insertion of gender issues into the NAFTA conversation was not solely for strategic reasons. In other words, the Trudeau Government does appear to have a true interest in raising gender issues in NAFTA renegotiations as a principled stand.

Secondly, if Harper's memo is to be believed, the Trudeau Government's approach to NAFTA renegotiations is significantly different than what would have occurred if the Harper Government had won another mandate, particularly in the area of gender. Harper's control over his Government was legendary, suggesting that his memo can be taken as a frank accounting of how he and his Government would have acted.¹²² Given the individual vagaries that determine politics even in times of stability, this conclusion is perhaps not deeply meaningful. However, it does point to a large shift in the choices Canada makes while approaching its biggest foreign policy partner and priority—the United States—under both Trudeau and a hypothetical Harper.

The Shifts That Weren't: Gaps, Discrepancies, and the Status Quo

Setting aside for a moment that which has changed, it is worthwhile to examine that which hasn't changed. A common theme in Canadian foreign policy is its return to the status quo—as Chapnick has compellingly argued, Canada's "internationalist values" are largely "conservative" and "cautious."¹²³ Stairs puts it more succinctly: "Canada is by nature a status

¹²² Stephen Maher, 'Closed for Business in the Prime Minister's Office', *Media Magazine* 16, no. 2 (2014): 7–8.

¹²³ Adam Chapnick, 'Peace, Order, and Good Government: The "Conservative" Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy', *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 60, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 638.

quo power.”¹²⁴ In other words, regardless of the ideological bent of the Canadian government, the overall tendency is ever towards the pragmatic and trodden path, rather than to strike out boldly. This dynamic is present in our examination of the uses of feminist foreign policy in the Harper and Trudeau Governments. For example, despite their progressive rhetoric that urges a new way forward in the international sphere, the Trudeau Government is “on track to spend less on international development aid than the previous Conservative government.”¹²⁵ One wonders how the high-minded feminist rhetoric can possibly be backed up without correspondingly high funds. As Fraser Reilly-King, senior analyst at the Canadian Council for International Cooperation noted: “Unless—and potentially even if—this [Trudeau] government commits substantial resources to official development assistance, unfortunately this government is in a position of probably having, by the end of its mandate, the worst track record in Canadian history.”¹²⁶ Reilly-King’s commentary seems overly harsh, but the numbers do point to a serious issue: namely, that the Trudeau Government may be setting itself up for failure as it pushes progressive foreign affairs changes without providing adequate funding.

In 2016—the first full year of the Trudeau Government’s mandate—international development funding comprised approximately 0.26% of gross national income (GNI).¹²⁷ For comparison, the United Nations target of the percentage of GNI devoted to international development funding is 0.7%.¹²⁸ Under the Harper Government, the percentage of GNI

¹²⁴ Stairs in Chapnick, ‘Peace, Order, and Good Government,’ 638.

¹²⁵ Levon Sevunts, ‘Canada’s Foreign Aid Bucks Global Trend, Drops under Trudeau: OECD Report’, CBC News, 11 April 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadian-international-aid-drops-trudeau-1.4066640>.

¹²⁶ Reilly-King in Levon Sevunts, ‘Canada’s Foreign Aid Bucks Global Trend, Drops under Trudeau: OECD Report’.

¹²⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, ‘Development Aid Rises Again in 2016 but Flows to Poorest Countries Dip’, 11 April 2017, <http://www.oecd.org/development/development-aid-rises-again-in-2016-but-flows-to-poorest-countries-dip.htm>.

¹²⁸ OECD, ‘Development Aid Rises Again in 2016 but Flows to Poorest Countries Dip’.

dedicated to international development ranged from 0.24% to 0.34%.¹²⁹ It remains to be seen whether or not the Trudeau Government will meet or exceed this range; currently, they are not actually even matching it. It is a disheartening reality in the face of such progressive, tone-appropriate feminist foreign policy rhetoric.

Much of feminist foreign policy is necessarily linked to development aid, as states seek to improve the quality of life for women around the world; it is a crucial benchmark of whether or not a government is actually prioritizing feminist policies. From this perspective, at least, the Trudeau Government is failing. Minister of International Development Bibeau pointed to “currency fluctuations” and “fiscal versus calendar year calculations” as part of the reason for this apparent drop, but also seemed to acknowledge that less dollars were being spent, stating: “if we invest in women, each and every dollar goes much further and it has a bigger impact on development and also on peace.”¹³⁰ If every dollar invested in women goes further, why isn’t the Trudeau Government spending more dollars?

In Budget 2018—tabled three weeks before the final version of this paper—the Trudeau Government appeared to make some attempts to rectify the funding shortfalls, pledging “an additional \$2 billion over five years” to support Canada’s international assistance spending, with a continued assertion that “gender equality will be a focus of all of Canada’s international assistance investments.”¹³¹ This welcome uptick in funding may be “the biggest increase in foreign aid in 16 years,” representing a 9% bump from Budget 2015, but the increase still equals less than 2% a year from 2019 to 2023.¹³² In other words, this bump barely keeps up with the

¹²⁹ OECD, ‘Development Aid Rises Again in 2016 but Flows to Poorest Countries Dip’.

¹³⁰ Sevunts, ‘Canada’s Foreign Aid Bucks Global Trend’.

¹³¹ Department of Finance Canada, ‘Budget 2018: Equality + Growth: A Strong Middle Class’, 27 February 2018, 156-159.

¹³² Mike Blanchfield, ‘Federal Budget 2018: Bono Praises Canada’s Boost in Foreign Aid Spending’, Global News, 27 February 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4051779/federal-budget-2018-bono-canada-foreign-aid/>.

anticipated rate of inflation over the next five years, which will hover around 2%.¹³³ As discussed throughout this paper, no policy can be done perfectly, and all states must balance priorities. However, it seems unlikely the Trudeau Government can live up to its world-changing rhetoric with these kinds of relatively minor funding shifts. Budget 2018 cannot be fully evaluated yet, but rather taken as a signpost of the direction in which the Trudeau Government is headed. The direction is positive, but almost certainly insufficient; more of a ‘catch up’ to years of funding shortfalls rather than a triumphant return. The lack of significant budgetary change remains disappointing and does not fill one with confidence that Canadian feminist foreign policy has been set up for success.

The resulting pressures on Global Affairs Canada have been keen, as public servants struggle to implement the sweeping feminist agenda outlined in the Feminist International Assistance Policy, with no truly new resources. This tension between rhetoric and realities has not gone unnoticed by the bureaucracy. One employee from GAC’s Evaluation Division noted that the new emphasis on feminist programming may not lead to lasting change, as project officers merely “recode” their existing projects to have a feminist slant; for example, a project focused on clean water delivery can easily be slanted from environmental or health outcomes to feminist ones, without actually altering the project’s design or purpose.¹³⁴ The Trudeau Government is proposing “by 2021-22 at the latest, at least 95 percent of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance investments will either target or integrate gender equality

¹³³ Statista. ‘Canada - Inflation Rate 2012-2022’. Statista. Accessed 1 March 2018. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271247/inflation-rate-in-canada/>.

¹³⁴ As as quoted in the author’s personal class notes for API 6339A (Evaluating Public Policy and Programs), University of Ottawa, 16 October 2017.

and the empowerment of women and girls,” meaning that the public servants tasked with turning rhetoric into policy have an uphill battle ahead of them.¹³⁵

In the expert community, reception of the new feminist foreign policy has been mixed. At a Centre for International Policy Studies discussion (during which Chatham House rules were in effect) on Canada’s “new” approach to foreign policy, one participant expressed excitement at the feminist direction in foreign policy, stating that she felt like “the Government had really done its homework” and that real change would result.¹³⁶ Other experts were less keen, with another participant pointing to CIDA’s “gender mainstreaming” in the 1990s as “real change,” and the new feminist foreign policy as “just checking a box.”¹³⁷ The most accurate picture might fall somewhere between these two extremes. To date, the Trudeau Government is not providing adequate funding and resources to meet its lofty aims. However, the mere existence of these aims signals a shift in government priorities that may have important downstream effects. Overall, though, the fact remains that being asked to do more with less is a disappointing return to the status quo, setting up progressive rhetoric for failure. As Nancy Peckford—executive director of Equal Voice, one of Canada’s leading organizations for the promotion of female representation in politics—noted, “well-articulated feminist policy must translate into well-implemented feminist practice within and beyond Global Affairs.”¹³⁸ Peckford’s comments represent the general sentiment amongst (largely left-leaning) groups who really do want the Trudeau Government’s ambitious new plan to succeed, but fear nothing will change without the required funding shifts. The Trudeau Government must put its money where its mouth is; otherwise, their

¹³⁵ Global Affairs Canada, ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy’, accessed 12 October 2017.

¹³⁶ Timothy Donais and Jennifer Erin Salahub, ‘What’s New in Canada’s Approach to Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States?’, 13 October 2017.

¹³⁷ Donais and Salahub, ‘What’s New in Canada’s Approach to Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States?’

¹³⁸ Nancy Peckford, ‘Will Canada’s Feminist Foreign-Aid Program Work?’, *Maclean’s*, 15 June 2017, <http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/will-canadas-feminist-foreign-aid-program-work/>.

mandate in this area risks being as ineffectual and politically-motivated as the Harper Government's. In Peckford's words:

If Minister Bibeau and her cabinet colleagues are indeed successful in creating the conditions for this kind of transformative, long-term systemic change on the global stage, the federal cabinet will have truly earned their feminist moniker. But only time and vigilance will tell the tale.¹³⁹

Now over halfway into their mandate, the Trudeau Government may be running out of time to create true change. The current evidence is mixed, with greater funding going to gender equality projects, but little sense of whether or not these projects are effectual in a new way or simply fresh spins on existing programming. Global Affairs Canada is at somewhat of a loss as how to evaluate this new feminist direction; after all, how can one measure "empowerment" when every woman will have a different interpretation of the term based on her personal, cultural, and economic context, let alone the fact that empowerment is a process rather than an end goal?¹⁴⁰ In fairness to the Trudeau Government, it may simply be too soon to draw serious conclusions about the success of their feminist foreign policy in this area. We know they are on track to spend less than the Harper Government, but less dollars spent in a more concentrated way (i.e., specifically on gender equality) may result in improved outcomes overall.

Additionally, the question of whether or not the Trudeau Government's embrace of this new rhetoric is just a dogmatic, hard turn left—equally as unacceptable as the dogmatic, hard turns right by the Harper Government—must be raised. As discussed earlier, the provision of abortion services in Canada's foreign policy was banned under the Harper Government, with the ban overturned by the Trudeau Government. It should be logically obvious by this point that any successful feminist foreign policy must at least include the option of sexual health and reproductive services; the evidence is clear that to do otherwise is certain to decrease successful

¹³⁹ Nancy Peckford, 'Will Canada's Feminist Foreign-Aid Program Work?'

¹⁴⁰ Beck, 'Reconsidering Women's Empowerment', 222-223.

outcomes, and violate some of the major theoretical tenants of feminism. However, some have argued that the citation of abortion as ‘being at the heart’ of Canada’s foreign policy is isolating and offensive to women who disagree with the provision of abortion services. In a fairly public spat, the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) urged Minister Bibeau to reconsider Canada’s position, stating:

Has Canada forgotten that for a considerable population (both within Canada and abroad) the unborn child is regarded as a human being created by God and worthy of life and love? This moral position can be found among Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Orthodox Christians, a number of Protestant Christians, Roman and Eastern Catholics, in addition to many other people of good will, including non-believers.¹⁴¹

In other words, can it be argued that the Trudeau Government is neglecting the importance of cultural context and ignoring the heterogeneity of women’s experiences by making abortion so central to its foreign policy? In a word: no. This would indeed be the case if the Trudeau Government were urging women in the developing world to get abortions, rather than offering it as yet another option in a full suite of services. However, as Minister Bibeau made clear in her response to the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, the provision of sexual and reproductive health services is just another tool, not the only tool:

Contraception and even abortion is only a tool to end poverty... We have to give [women] the control over their lives. So we shouldn't look at contraception as the objective. This is not the objective. This is only a tool to reduce poverty and inequality and to make an impact in terms of development and peace and security in the world.¹⁴²

The emphasis here is on the woman’s ability to choose, rather than any overriding left-wing agenda that dogmatically pushes contraception and abortions on vulnerable women in the developing world, as the CCCB tried to portray. It is worth noting, however, that the CCCB

¹⁴¹ Laura Payton, ‘Aid Minister Maintains Need for Abortion Rights amid Bishops’ Criticism’, CTV News, 11 July 2017, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/aid-minister-maintains-need-for-abortion-rights-amid-bishops-criticism-1.3498137>.

¹⁴² Payton, ‘Aid Minister Maintains Need for Abortion Rights amid Bishops’ Criticism’.

obliquely raised a valuable point: an emphasis on accessible abortion services in Canada's foreign policy does not reflect the experiences and priorities of women globally, or even of those in Canada. Nevertheless, one must consider the *negative* versus the *positive* rights implied by the Harper and Trudeau Governments, respectively; the banning of abortion services violates the rights of women who wish to access one, whereas the provision of abortion services to women who want them does not violate the rights of women who do not. Although the evidence points to this shift not being dogmatic, one could make an argument that this is an example of continuity between the Harper and Trudeau Governments.

Pausing here for a moment to deviate from the international sphere, this very debate is currently being played out domestically, over the Trudeau Government's "decision to deny summer-job funding to groups that refuse to affirm a woman's right to have an abortion."¹⁴³ Both the Conservatives and the NDP have decried the change, with NDP Ethics Critic Nathan Cullen initially slamming the new policy as "comparable to the Harper government's move several years ago to strip funding from aid organizations that supported abortion — just on the other side of the debate."¹⁴⁴ Cullen later walked back his stance, stating on Twitter:

I apologize for the harm from my comments. I & the NDP are fiercely pro-choice. I reacted to concerns raised by groups in my riding on the gov'ts first statement on the policy. The subsequent examples put those fears to rest.¹⁴⁵

This case study serves to illustrate the difficulties in assessing change and progress; in determining whether or not a policy does harm or good; and the implicit value judgements we assign when we evaluate the 'worth' of one right versus another. On a more prosaic level, it also

¹⁴³ Lee Berthiaume, 'NDP Blasts Reproductive-Rights Rules for Summer Jobs Program', *The National Post*, 24 January 2018, <http://nationalpost.com/news/politics/key-battleground-for-ndp-in-next-session-of-parliament-income-inequality>.

¹⁴⁴ Berthiaume, 'NDP Blasts Reproductive-Rights Rules for Summer Jobs Program'.

¹⁴⁵ Nathan Cullen, Twitter, @nathancullen, 7 January 2018, <https://twitter.com/nathancullen>.

highlights how feminist ideas always face co-opting and spin, regardless of which party is in power. This may be most disappointing conclusion of our examination of the status quo; feminist ideas are more frequently used for political capital than they are for their theoretical truth. We are struggling with the integration of feminist values in our own country; how can we possibly hope to do it successfully in other contexts and countries?

If any one message should be taken away from our analysis throughout this paper, it is that feminist foreign policy is hard. It is hard to use feminist foreign policy for ethical and theoretical ends rather than political and economic ones—although these spheres need not be exclusive. It is hard to act out a feminist foreign policy that is more than just rhetoric; that results in meaningful change that most if not all women can feel engaged by. But like most actions that are difficult, the doing of feminist foreign policy is also incredibly worthwhile.

Where Do We Go From Here?: Policy Suggestions

As discussed throughout this paper, feminist foreign policy will likely always struggle to remain relevant and meaningful to all women. This, at least, is a constant regardless of the ideological bent of the ruling government. We can also take as given that feminist foreign policy will always be subject to the whims and manipulations of the policy makers and politicians who wield it. The question then becomes how a government can use a feminist foreign policy to best effect: for its citizens, for the interest of its state, for economics, for ethics, and ultimately—hopefully—for the improvement of the human condition. The evidence discussed in the first section of this paper has demonstrated conclusively that the promotion of gender equality has far-reaching positive effects; across geography, cultures, and even down into future generations. In brief, how can governments use feminist foreign policy without getting in their own way?

This paper aims to conclude on a helpful note by offering practical policy suggestions for a successful feminist foreign policy; a kind of ‘best practices’ toolkit, drawing upon the conclusions of this analysis as well as the previous work of other scholars.

#1: Spend Harder...

In October 2016, a report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development found that “the paucity of resources dedicated to the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda may be the greatest impediment to its realization.”¹⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier, Canada is not leading (and has never led) the way *vis-à-vis* spending in this area. The difference between Canada and the countries it is attempting to emulate—Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands—is marked, with the percentage of GNI spent on development equaling 1.11%, 0.94%, 0.75%, and 0.65% respectively to Canada’s paltry 0.26%.¹⁴⁷ In order to meet the minimum 0.7% target set by the UN, and truly throw itself behind its feminist ideals, Canada would have to massively increase its foreign aid budget by “as much as \$10 billion” from the current level of roughly \$4.8 billion.¹⁴⁸ Given that Canada’s highest GNI-to-foreign aid benchmark ever is 0.54% (in 1975, under Pierre Trudeau), it is unlikely Canada will ever make this spending shift.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, there are good arguments that it would be irresponsible to do so. A state must weigh many priorities in its spending, and the scope of this paper is not to determine whether or not this spending increase would be feasible. It simply serves to point out the sheer magnitude of the current shortfall.

¹⁴⁶ House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, ‘An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda’ (House of Commons, October 2016), 43, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FAAE/Reports/RP8433298/faaerp03/faaerp03-e.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ OECD, ‘Development Aid Rises Again in 2016 but Flows to Poorest Countries Dip’.

¹⁴⁸ Mike Blanchfield, ‘Liberals Poised to Fill Trump Funding Gap, but Urged to Raise Overall Aid Spending’, CBC News, 2 March 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-abortion-funding-trump-ban-1.4006289>.

¹⁴⁹ OECD, ‘Development Aid Rises Again in 2016 but Flows to Poorest Countries Dip’.

Nevertheless, if the Trudeau Government fully believes in the importance and value of its feminist foreign policy agenda, it will need to spend more to see its weighty rhetoric succeed. Liberal rhetoric paired with Conservative purse strings leaves everyone disappointed. The evidence is clear that a feminist foreign policy can decrease poverty and improve outcomes globally; is the Trudeau Government willing to put its money where its mouth is? Without an increase in spending, the engaged rhetoric will be far less meaningful than it could have been.

#2: ...Or at Least Spend Smarter

If we take for granted that a massive increase in spending is simply unrealistic, other options present themselves. The Trudeau Government could make a choice to follow in the footsteps of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark and practice ‘niche diplomacy,’ in which Canada would focus most, if not all, of its resources on a sole foreign policy issue.¹⁵⁰ As discussed throughout this paper, the Nordic countries have done so with great effect, becoming small but powerful players on the world stage. The Trudeau Government has pivoted in this direction somewhat with their plans to make gender equality central to much of its foreign policy. The House of Commons report discussed above found that “one of the most important steps that Canada could take to advance women’s empowerment and gender equality around the world would be through the provision of multi-year and core funding to the civil society organizations that champion those very issues, particularly at the grassroots level... Witnesses argued for funding that is both predictable and of a scale appropriate to enable those organizations to carry out their vital work.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Welsh, ‘The 2005 International Policy Statement: Leading with Identity?’, *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 61, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 911-912.

¹⁵¹ House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, ‘An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda’, 43.

The shift at Global Affairs Canada under the Trudeau Government has been towards more of this kind of dedicated, gender-aware, secure funding; as Gillian Barth, president of CARE Canada noted, “Global Affairs Canada is walking the talk...[the provision of multi-year funding] has been a major positive shift.”¹⁵² We know from our earlier discussion of feminist foreign policy that women’s issues are usually the most likely initiatives to face low resources and constant insecurity. Removing some of the resource pressures and providing more long-term security is a smart way to ensure that dollars spent on a feminist foreign policy go farther. However, the Trudeau Government—or indeed any government undertaking a feminist foreign policy—must be clear in their decision to spend smarter. ‘Spending smarter’ implies that the moral imperative created by a feminist foreign policy is not absolute; that the government in question is willing to make strategic concessions rather than adopt an ‘all-or-nothing’ ethical approach. This recommendation may be the most realistic for governments and policy makers worldwide: consider the ethical importance of your feminist foreign policy, but be honest with your citizens and yourself about when and how your government is willing to compromise. In this the Trudeau Government somewhat falters, as their sweeping rhetoric leaves little room for strategic maneuvers or acknowledgment of conflicting priorities. Nevertheless, it does appear that efforts are being made to ‘spend smarter’, and this development should be encouraged and furthered.

#3: The Patriarchy is in the Details

Consider the following hypothetical. The Trudeau Government is interested in re-opening diplomatic relations with Iran. Now, let us consider this hypothetical through a feminist lens.

¹⁵² Gillian Barth, ‘Humanitarian Responses on the Horizon in 2018: Learning from Our Past and Anticipating Future Challenges’, Aga Khan Foundation Canada, 30 January 2018.

Should Minister Chrystia Freeland follow the Islamic dress codes required by law for women if she travels to Iran to conduct negotiations? Would doing so violate the Trudeau Government's feminist foreign policy and render them immediate hypocrites? Would *not* doing so instead render the Trudeau Government immediate neo-colonialist absolutists, incapable of respecting other cultures? Is it fair to ask Freeland herself to adjust her manner of dress as she will be representing the Government, or would this represent an extension of the assertion of control over women's bodies? Will the successful re-ignition of diplomatic relations with Iran, earned by the temporary suspension of feminist principles, ultimately do more good for Iranian women? And what of Iranian women—should we conduct a public opinion poll on Freeland's planned dress code and do what the majority represent? Should we discredit the opinions of Iranian women as too deeply ingrained in a traditional, patriarchal culture to represent what they 'really' think, if only they were Westernized? In other words: whose feminism is 'right,' and whose rights matter more?

Taking this hypothetical to somewhat dramatic conclusions, it quickly becomes clear that the practice of a feminist foreign policy raises a dizzying array of questions and counter-arguments, even during the everyday business of diplomacy. The best thing governments can do in such a context is to carefully consider these details, weighing the magnitude of small actions and decisions and considering their implicit, hidden assumptions. Play out feminist foreign policies from multiple angles and differing perspectives. Neglecting 'the little things' can hinder even the grandest plans. In our hypothetical example, a prudent course of action would be to consider what messages are being sent and to whom by Minister Freeland's dress code. Document these decisions and be transparent about the assessed worth of potential drawbacks and ethical compromises.

#4: Empower by Exception

Contrary to the modern obsession with evidence and results, governments practicing a feminist foreign policy should not seek to set consistent benchmarks or strident metrics for the success of their policy. Rather, governments should consider the specific contexts in which they are operating, and the many forms and outcomes that can represent feminism. Instead, feminist foreign policies should seek to understand how exceptions and seemingly ‘negative’ data may hide real progress. The global improvement promised by feminist foreign policy will not occur overnight, and it may take several years—if not decades—before the results are apparent. Aim for a ‘thick’ accounting of results that seeks to put the feminist foreign policy in context. Quantitative data and demonstrable change can only be one piece of the puzzle. Feminist outcomes are frequently at a disadvantage because they are difficult to measure and quantify.

The jury is currently out as to whether or not the Trudeau Government will privilege data at the cost of other less impressive metrics. This certainly is a government that prides itself on being ‘evidence-based,’ and it likes to point to firm, impressive numbers. Quantitative data is valuable, but it incentivizes the neglect of outliers and the prioritization of quick results. As the Trudeau Government continues to implement its feminist foreign policy agenda, it should seek to have patience and consider specificity.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the major differences in feminist foreign policy trends between the Harper and Trudeau Governments. It found that there are important differences in rhetoric, and theoretical underpinnings, but to date, there are essentially no significant funding changes. The conclusions are more mixed at the program level; there is evidence that the Trudeau

Government's spending on feminist issues is more concentrated, but it is far too soon to assess the efficacy of these shifts. The major risk here is that the Trudeau Government will squander its impressive rhetoric and research by not fully investing in the feminist foreign policy agenda; by asking it to do too much with too little, or by focusing on quick results rather than meaningful change. This would also be a disservice to the women that feminist foreign policy aims to empower as well as the global change that could be possible. If the 20th century was defined by the H-bomb, then the 21st century may very well be defined by the F-Bomb. Like all powerful tools, it is best dropped thoughtfully, pragmatically, and ethically.

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