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University of Bath

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What's feminist about feminist foreign policy? Sweden and Canada's foreign policy agendas

Dr Jennifer Thomson
PoLIS
University of Bath
Claverton Down Campus
Bath
BA2 7AY

j.thomson@bath.ac.uk

Abstract:

Across politics and public discourse, feminism is experiencing a global renaissance. Yet feminist academic work is divided regarding the burgeoning use of the term, particularly in reference to economic and international development policy. For some, feminism has been co-opted for neoliberal economic ends; for others, it remains a critical force across the globe. This article explores the nascent feminist foreign policies of Sweden and Canada. Employing a discourse analysis of both states' initial policy documents, it asks what the term feminist meant in their preliminary attempts at feminist foreign policy. It argues that although both use the term feminist, they understand the term very differently, with Sweden centring it in domestic and international commitments to change, whilst Canada places greater emphasis on the private sector. As such, it suggests that this policy agenda is still developing its central concepts, and is thus ripe for intervention on the part of policymakers and civil society organisations.

Key terms:

Feminism, feminist theory, foreign policy, feminist foreign policy, Sweden, Canada

Introduction

What does the word feminist mean? Feminism is experiencing a renaissance, as a global social movement, a singular identity, and a state-sponsored vehicle. Across politics, the corporate world and popular culture, the term feminist is increasingly commonplace. Yet, at the same time, feminist theorists are divided regarding the burgeoning use of the term. For some, feminism has been co-opted from its original emancipatory and radical impulses; for others, this new development is just another chapter in the history of what has always been a diverse and fluid movement.

Whilst gender equality policies have been longstanding within domestic and international development policy, the term feminist is also now used to refer to certain states' approach to their international role. Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is increasingly growing traction. It was initially adopted by Sweden in 2014, with Canada adopting a feminist international assistance policy in 2017. France announced that it would follow a feminist foreign policy in early 2019. The Women 7, a grouping of feminist civil society organisations from G7 countries and around the world, are lobbying the 2019 G7 meeting on a range of issues, foremost of which is feminist foreign (and domestic) policymaking.ⁱ As a policy agenda, FFP is rapidly developing and gaining a foothold in national and international discourse.

Yet, what exactly FFP means or consists of remains contested. There are, as yet, few systematic considerations of FFP within the academic or grey literature. The little literature that has emerged has largely addressed what a feminist approach to a state's international role might or should look like. Karin Aggestam *et al* theorise what FFP should be, based around a normative argument centred on a feminist ethics of care (Aggestam *et al*, 2019). Christine Alwan and Laurel Weldon explore the emergence of FFP and its possible futures as both a policy and research agenda (Alwan and Weldon, 2017). Columba Achilleos-Sarl (2018) utilises a postcolonial feminist approach to address the ways that existing foreign policy is racialised and gendered, and how this might be challenged. In a similar vein to this academic literature, work by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) provides an overview of what FFP has had as its focus so far, and what it should be addressing as it moves forward (Thompson and Clement, n.d.). Compared with this developing research, this article is less interested in the normative future of the policy agenda, but rather on what can be learnt about FFP from existing published discourse. Instead of asking what the agenda should be doing, it looks at what feminist ideas policy documents are working from. As such, this article is consciously limited to two initial documents on FFP by the original countries which adopted it – Sweden and Canada. It asks: what understanding of feminism is being forwarded by Canada and Sweden in these policies? How do these original documents conceive of feminism?

In doing so, the article extends current debates around feminism into the realm of foreign policy analysis, particularly drawing on the critical feminist literature around economic and international development. As such, the article does not work from a particular understanding of what feminism is or should be (and, in turn, what FFP is or should be); it is concerned rather with bringing to light the definitions of feminism which underpin these respective policies. Following a discussion of both government's initial policies, the article argues that Sweden understands FFP as a goal in and of itself, which it consciously links to both its domestic policy and international obligations. Contrastingly, Canada's commitment to FFP appears more focussed on an economic argument regarding women's empowerment. Its use of the term feminist relies less on its commitment to the liberal international order and more on a neoliberal understanding which is individualising and wishes to further integrate the private sector into development policy. These differing understandings of feminism and the ends to which it might be employed, which are present from the initial policy documents across these two pioneering countries, are important to acknowledge as this policy agenda develops. FFP across different contexts is not working from a fixed

understanding of what feminism is and this poses both opportunities and challenges as the agenda continues to develop.

Contemporary feminism: co-opted or resistant?

Gender equality discourse is now commonplace in the work of national, international and transnational organisations. From the EU, to the World Bank, to the UN, gender equality and mainstreaming have become increasingly central within global governance. Furthermore, moving beyond gender equality the term ‘feminist’ is now widely used by state and inter-state bodies. At an individual level, key state actors appear more comfortable using the language of feminism. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has frequently defined himself as a feminist, declaring at a UN summit in 2016 that he “would keep doing so...until it is met with a shrug.”ⁱⁱ In the United Kingdom, multiple Prime Ministers and party leaders have posed wearing the t-shirt of NGO Fawcett Society which campaigns on women’s political issues, which states simply that “This is what a feminist looks like.” Celebrities and public figures, such as Beyoncé, the Duchess of Sussex, businesswoman and author Sheryl Sandberg and actress Emma Watson have publicly and repeatedly declared themselves to be feminist. Such public assertions are interesting, given that feminist thought has often argued that explicitly labelling projects or personally identifying as feminist has largely fallen away. Writing only a decade ago, Angela McRobbie argued that the word feminist “conjure[s] up a monstrous ugliness which would send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today” (2009, 1; see also Walby, 2011, 2). Indeed, she argued that feminism had become so toxic that it was a “social movement of which there is little likelihood of it being revived or renewed.” (2009, 150) Yet the contemporary evidence described above suggests differently. As Catherine Rottenberg writes, “we are currently witnessing a historic moment in which it has finally become acceptable for highly visible Western women to identify publicly as feminists.” (2017, 329, 331) Furthermore, beyond this individual level of self-identification, and across cultural, policy and political realms, the term ‘feminist’ is undergoing a resurgence, of which FFP is one of the more noticeable examples.

This increased visibility to the public face of feminism is reflected in some feminist research which broadly sees state movements and the wider struggle for gender equality as gaining ground. Feminist work on governance often argues that the increasing institutionalisation of feminist practice and gender mainstreaming within governments and NGOs has had positive benefits, with feminists using political opportunity structures in new ways (Krook and Mackay; 2011; Stetson and Mazur; 1995; Walby, 2002, 2011). Beyond formal politics, Catherine Eschle and Bice Miguascha argue that there is an “unwanted pessimism” (2014, 634) about the health of feminism, and that it continues to hold key sway as a critical global force, including in the antiglobalisation movement (2010). Similarly, Susan Watkins notes that “countless varieties of feminism ... exist in the world today” (2018, 9) and are thriving, often in hostile climates – the #NiUnaMenos movement in Brazil and Argentina; huge protests across Poland against proposed restrictive abortion laws; a burgeoning movement in China; and #MeToo across the US and the West more generally.

Yet this positive portrayal sits alongside a wealth of literature in feminist political economy and development studies which argues differently. This work often posits that feminism has been co-opted for economic ends. Critical theorist Nancy Fraser contends that second-wave feminism “has unwittingly provided a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism” in that its “critique of the family wage now supplies a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and a moral point.” (2013, 220) As such, feminist discourse now acts to support neoliberal economic policymaking. Similarly, Angela McRobbie argues that although feminism continues to exist, it does so in a version that has been made to bend to neoliberal state and economic interests. Feminism’s absorption into state discourse and practice has robbed it of its ability to build female solidarity across difference, and has instead recast feminism as premised around women’s ability

to have wage-earning capacity (2009, 61). Catherine Rottenberg extends this argument about the intertwining of feminism and neoliberalism further, proposing that the neoliberal feminist is “mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair” (2018, 55), thus removing the necessity for action on the part of governments or institutions (see also Finlayson, 2016). Where feminism once encouraged female solidarity across difference, these theorists argue, it is now centred around the figure of the individual woman and her ability to take part in the workforce.

This critique is widely echoed in work on contemporary economic policy which focuses on gender. Much feminist work has focussed on the way in which a ‘business case’ is built for gender equality, which, in its proposals for women’s economic emancipation and the benefits this can bring corporations and economies, leaves structural gender inequality unrecognised. Adrienne Roberts’ (2015) describes the work of various state and non-state entities that pursue these policies as promoting a ‘transnational business feminism’. She argues that this leads to corporations using the language of gender equality in an “ahistorical and apolitical” (Ibid, 210-211) manner which helps to legitimise their power. Similarly, Jacqui True and Elisabeth Prügl argue that public-private partnerships that focus on gender equality are “ambiguous” (2014, 1159) in their outcomes, and that initiatives based in the private sector tend to lack an awareness of the role that global capital and economic structures play in gender inequality.

This is echoed in work which more explicitly focusses on the intersection of gender and economic development policies. In her work on the Nike Corporation’s social philanthropy, Kathryn Moeller argues that US-led development and philanthropic projects are a form of ‘corporatized development’ which see “girls and women as a new frontier for capitalist growth and accumulation” (2018, 38). She argues, akin to the above, that this corporate led development “invest[s] in, rather than transform[s], existing inequities across multiple axes of difference – gender, racial, class, religious, and geographic – even as they claim to be ameliorating them.” (Ibid, 37). Similarly, Sydney Calkin (2015a; 2015b; 2015c) argues that international development and transnational business initiatives around gender use language suggesting the empowerment of women and girls in an uncomfortable union with neoliberal economic policy. As a result, both authors illustrate the ways in which these economic policies may contribute to gender inequality, but also the ways in which corporations gain legitimacy through this gendered discourse of empowerment. Furthermore, the depoliticization of feminism in the turn to a market-based logic of development is often critiqued as removing the potential of feminist solidarity across borders (Calkin, 2015b), and as being based around “essentialised understandings” (Roberts, 2015, 226) of women and girls’ roles.

Work which addresses the ways that economic and development policy approach gendered inequality is therefore critical of the way in which this agenda has been co-opted by neoliberal business and economic agendas. It is highly sceptical of the ability that these policies have to enact actual structural change, rather than act as a means by which corporate and economic interests are furthered and gain credence. Whilst some literature moves beyond this idea of co-optation (Eschle and Manguashca suggest that there needs to be a move beyond the ‘good girls/bad girls’ dichotomy (2013, 640) that this debate has established; Prügl argues for a need to look at “select feminist movement ideas” and how they “are being integrated into neoliberal rationales and logics” (2015, 615)), the majority is critical of the ways in which gender equality policy is enacted in contemporary development and business policy.

Opinions therefore differ on what contemporary feminism is achieving, and the mechanisms that are being used in its name. Is the embeddedness of gender equality within national and international institutions creating more gender equitable policy making? Or has feminism now been so “colonised” (Rottenberg, 2018) by neoliberal interests that it can only be used to buttress other economic and business concerns? Acknowledging the importance of a political economic

perspective to foreign policy, this article situates itself in this literature on the role of feminist discourse and argument within international economic and development policy. It asks what understanding of feminism is forwarded in Canada and Sweden's foreign policies. It looks at the initial documents produced by both countries to ask: *what type of feminism is evoked by Canada and Sweden here?*

Again, it is the choice of the word feminism which is of particular interest here. As outlined above, the vast majority of policy formation in economic and development areas has been based around an understanding of gender, and has rarely (or not explicitly) used the language of feminism. The critical literature addressed above argues that in policies or initiatives that address gender equality structural issues often go overlooked, or, in fact, are validated and reinforced through policymaking. The use of the term feminist – a word often associated with a more radical type of politics – is therefore potentially more challenging. As these policies adopt this language, are they moving beyond a depoliticised understanding of gender inequality to one which challenges structural or systemic problems? In the concluding section, and in light of the limited data used here, the article points towards future directions for the further questions that a consideration of FFP raises.

Case selection

Although a relatively new phenomenon, FFP has clear connections to long-established practices around states' efforts to ensure policy making is more gender equitable. These include state feminist practices such as the establishment of women's ministries, gender mainstreaming within policy formation and the growth of gender quotas and affirmative action within political elections (Krook and Mackay, 2011). It also has clear links to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and its place in the international conversation around women's rights, as well as the role that individual states have in furthering this agenda within their own foreign policy through national action plans (NAPs). Sweden in particular has been a strong proponent of the WPS agenda and was one of the first states to produce a NAP.

Expanding out of these existing efforts, FFP is emerging as a policy agenda in its own right. As discussed in the introduction, FFP is undergoing a rapid evolution. Canada, Sweden and France now all adopt a type of FFP, although the extent to which each uses feminist language varies. France refers to its policy as feminist, although the written document itself makes little use of this language. This article conducts a discourse analysis of the two original documents which Sweden and Canada use to set out their FFP strategies – the 'Swedish Foreign Policy action plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2015-2018, including indicative measures for 2018', produced by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairsⁱⁱⁱ, and 'Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy: #hervoiceherchoice', produced by Global Affairs/Affaires Mondiale Canada.^{iv} Although Canada's more specifically relates to the realm of development, 'foreign policy' is used to refer to both documents, as they fall within these states' outward facing policies and the manner in which both have chosen to present themselves in the international arena. Whilst subsequent documents have also been produced, particularly by Sweden,^v this article consciously limits itself to focus here on the initial policy overviews so as to gain a clearer sense of the impetuses behind these policies. Focussing only on the initial documents produced reflects the article's intent in examining the original ideas underpinning the use and understanding of the word feminism, rather than the ways the policies have since been developed or implemented, or their influence on other states and transnational discourse.

Methodologically, the article draws on Carol Lee Bacchi's 'What's the problem?' (1999) structure for analysis. Bacchi proposes a deconstructionist framework which questions the ways in which policy is portrayed through language. We should not ask, she argues, how do we fix this problem, but rather how has the problem been constructed in political discourse: "what's the problem

represented to be?” (Ibid, 1) According to Bacchi, “we need to shift our analysis from policies as attempted ‘solutions’ to ‘problems’, to policies as constituting competing interpretations or representations of political issues” (Ibid, 2). In this sense, again this article is interested not in how the policies have been implemented or their practical effects on the ground, but rather the ideas that are furthered within them about feminism as a normative project. As such, the focus here is not the politics of these policies in terms of the success (or otherwise) of their execution; nor in the difficulties that have been posed in inter-state relations or domestic politics for both countries since they adopted these policies.^{vi} This article is not interested to address the policies’ relations to party politics within these two countries, nor the key actors or individuals involved in encouraging their adoption. It is interested instead in what initial understanding of feminism was forwarded in each.

Following this methodology, this article analyses the documents through two central questions, which form the structure of the below discussion – *what* is the problem that these states are trying to fix?, and *how* is it proposed that this problem is going to be solved? Following discussion of each country’s policy below, the article then returns to this analytical framework to assess where each country sits within it.

Analysing FFP

Although both Sweden and Canada adopt a feminist approach to their international policy, they have very different interpretations of what this means in terms of policy strategy. Furthermore, despite the common use of the term feminist, they have different ideas about what the central problem is that both are trying to address with this change to their foreign policy.

- *What is the nature of the problem?*

For Sweden, the central problem for foreign and development policy is systemic gender inequality. The all-encompassing aim or mission statement for the country’s foreign policy is to “ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives.” (3)^{vii} The Swedish document argues that the country sees “gender equality [as] an objective in itself” (1) in its foreign policy, and repeatedly references this as the overarching idea throughout the text (13, 15, 22). This goal is referred to in the domestic Swedish context as well, where again it is reiterated that “Sweden’s feminist government aims to ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This is a goal in itself.” (3) For Sweden therefore, their foreign policy is underpinned by a liberal feminist sensibility that sees global society as predicated on an imbalance between male and female power. Their FFP is an attempt to address this fundamental problem.

On the other hand, Canada’s description of the central problem is far broader. The central vision of Canada’s feminist international assistance policy is that:

Canada ... seeks to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world. Canada firmly believes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective approach to achieving this goal. (ii)^{viii}

This is a clear difference from the Swedish document, in that Canada pointedly does not see gender equality as an end in and of itself. Instead, its central mission is to ‘eradicate poverty’, and gender equality is a useful way in which to achieve this goal. Continuing in the same vein as this central mission statement, the Canadian document makes repeated reference to a more technocratic or “empowerment-as-efficiency” (Calkin, 665) type of feminism than the Swedish version. By empowering women and girls, the Canadian logic goes, the effects will ripple outwards to the rest of society:

By eliminating barriers to equality and helping to create better opportunities, women and girls can be powerful agents of change and improve their own lives and those of their families, communities and countries. This is a powerful way to reduce poverty for everyone. (vi)

This idea that empowering girls and women will in turn empower others is repeated elsewhere throughout the document on multiple occasions: “[the empowerment of women and girls] will benefit *families* as well as the economic growth of their *communities and countries*.” (ii, emphasis added) Elsewhere, the document stresses again the wider economic impact that female centered policy will have:

“...when women and girls are given equal opportunities to succeed, they can transform their *local economies* and generate growth that benefits their *entire communities and countries*.” (8, emphasis added)

Furthermore, in a section entitled ‘Women and girls can change the world’ (2), subheadings promise that women and girls can “deliver strong economic growth”, “lead to longer lasting peace”, “benefit entire families” and “empower all those who face discrimination”. In framing women and girls’ empowerment in this way, the Canadian document creates a picture of women and girls as “superwomen” (Shepherd, 2011). Women and girls are the key to social development, and they alone can unlock the future for their communities, economies and societies at large. Not only does this lay an enormous amount of responsibility for sustainable development at the feet of women and girls, it also means that they, their rights and their needs are not understood on their own terms, but in the apparent broader impact that their development will have on their wider context.

Paradoxically, this idea of women and girls’ potential and the way in which it extends beyond themselves continues even in spite of the depiction of their victimisation which the document presents. It states that “Canada has adopted a feminist approach because we firmly believe that women and girls have the ability to achieve real change in terms of sustainable development and peace, *even though they are often the most vulnerable to poverty, violence and climate change*.” (ii-iii, emphasis added) Elsewhere, the document reminds us that “in comparison to men and boys, women and girls face greater burdens of unpaid work, have fewer assets and resources, are exposed to higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence, and are more likely to be forced into early marriage.” (4) Women and girls are presented as being both more precarious but equally as having the power to transform society.

Gendered inequality as a problem in and of itself is therefore not as central to this vision of FFP as it is in the Swedish document. As the Canadian document reiterates throughout, “A feminist approach is much more than focusing on women and girls; rather it is the most effective way to address the root causes of poverty.” (vi) Instead of working from a fundamental understanding of gender inequality as the central ill of international society, Canada sees correcting inequality between men and women as a stepping stone to fixing poverty – which, in itself, is presented as a genderless concept throughout.

Across both documents therefore, Sweden sees systemic gender inequality as a problem and FFP as the solution, whereas Canada sees poverty as the problem and gender equality as the solution. Gender inequality thus plays a more fundamental role in the Swedish ontology of global inequality than the Canadian. The Canadian version has a far more instrumental view of women and girls – they are useful as a means to eradicate poverty so it is helpful to employ them in the context of their foreign policy.

- ***How is this problem to be solved?***

Sweden centres its vision for achieving its FFP around four Rs – Rights, Representation, and Resources.^{ix} In terms of Rights, the document focuses on the pre-existing commitment to international human rights treaties and membership of international/transnational organisations that the country has. In the six goals that the Swedish FFP sets, three of these are focused on rights – the full enjoyment of human rights; economic rights and empowerment; and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Moving beyond an overview of these goals, the document acknowledges that Swedish FFP is “based on binding commitments in international law and other agreements”, followed by a systematic list of these agreements, ranging from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and various conventions, to UNSCR 1325, the Geneva Conventions, the Treaty on the European Union and various EU action plans on gender equality. It also stresses the international organisations (the EU, the UN) of which Sweden is a part of and that it will use these bodies to advance its policies.

In terms of Representation, the document emphasises that the Foreign Service will encourage this at a descriptive level, by promoting “women’s participation and influence in decision-making at all levels.” (14) Substantively and symbolically, it highlights how the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Service will use their position to publicly “highlight gender equality issues” and use Swedish embassies abroad to “do the same in their respective areas and contexts” (18) including in events to promote Sweden as a country (20). It also anchors Sweden’s obligations in the “overall action for gender equality” that the Swedish government is also undertaking in its domestic work. It outlines the way that gender mainstreaming is being enmeshed within the Swedish government – “a gender perspective is to be incorporated into all decision-making, at all levels and all stages of the process” (13). It emphasises how this will be implemented through the “whole of the foreign service” (14), and in partnership with the EU, other associations of states and regions (such as the African Union) and multilateral and global actors (such as the World Bank, the WTO etc.)

In terms of Resources, the document highlights both the financial (“indicative funding on SEK 800 million to 1.2 billion in the period 2018-2022” (5)) and human resources that the FFP commits Sweden to. There is also a clear outline of methods that the country will use to capture its developing policy (11) as well as a commitment to working to create data where it doesn’t already exist (17), and a pledge to use Sweden’s influence at the international and transnational level to “collaborate actively with existing accountability mechanisms and work to ensure concrete progress for all women and girls” (18). The document closes with a clear sense of how this fits into managerial etc. responsibilities within the Swedish state. It therefore presents a clear structure, framework and methods through which it can achieve its goals. Sweden will work within existing national and international structures, in addition to using methods of data capture and measurement, to achieve its FFP goals.

The Canadian policy is less explicit in the ways in which it is going to accomplish its feminist policy aims. Like the Swedish document, the Canadian version is also centred around six key “action areas”: Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (defined as the ‘Core Area’ which will run through all 6), Human Dignity (Health and Nutrition, Education, Humanitarian Action), Growth that Works for Everyone, Environment and Climate Action, Inclusive Governance and Peace and Security. Yet, whilst in the Swedish document the six objectives are given specific actionable bullet points, in the Canadian document the commitments are far vaguer. For example, under the first action area, the document promises that Canada will address four key areas – “the unacceptably high rates of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women and girls”, “better support for local women’s organisations”, “help governments in developing countries address the differential needs of women and men through policies and services” and “step up its commitment to evidence-based decision making.” (19) Not only are these very broad areas in and of themselves, but the ways in which they are to be tackled are generally unclear. No specific geographical areas are mentioned as target regions in which these goals are to be met. The

commitment to support for local women’s groups is backed up with a promise of CA\$150 million over five years in financial support for these groups, but beyond that there is no sense of where responsibility lies for these aims within the Canadian Development Ministry, what specific policies might be enacted or how this links to the broader international and legal commitments the Canadian government has.

To be sure, the Swedish document is at times also vague in its aims, or in the ways in which goals are to be measured. Yet, as detailed above, these aims are largely given actionable points, as well as placing responsibility on specific bodies for particular policies and anchoring the overall policy in existing institutional and legal commitments. This specificity is generally lacking in the Canadian document. The document states that “by 2021-22 no less than 95 percent of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance initiatives will target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” (10) yet what this means exactly is never elucidated. Furthermore, although the document also calls for “the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls” (13), this is not centred in existing treaties and international organisations as is seen in the Swedish document.

The Canadian document also more clearly links gender equality and economic savings than the Swedish version – again, the “empowerment-as-efficiency” (Calkin, 2015, 665) argument. Alongside the feminist arguments made, the policy also outlines a new vision for development funding which “will increase and diversify the range of mechanisms for working with the private sector ... transforming the private sector’s current service-provider role into that of a partner investing in the achievement of development results.” (65) It also emphasises the need for “more innovative and cost-effective private- and voluntary-sector solutions” (65) as well as the impact that foreign assistance can have on the domestic economy:

As the economies of developing countries strengthen and become more stable, there is an opportunity for Canada to form new and mutually beneficial trading partnerships. (69)

The document is therefore more clearly aligned with economic savings and bringing in the involvement of the private sector. This section is the most focused of the document in terms of its clarity of planning and strategy moving forward, suggesting that this is its main impetus, with the normative feminist aims far less specific in comparison. Indeed, beyond a statement that this proposed greater involvement of the private sector will “maximize the effectiveness of [Canada’s] international assistance” (65) and thus leave more funding for initiatives focussing on women and girls, there is little explanation of how this new emphasis on the private sector links to the feminist aims of the policy.

In the Swedish document we therefore see a path to FFP which is anchored in existing legal and international commitments, based in rights and participation, and already existent domestic Swedish policy. FFP appears as a continuum of a bigger feminist picture within the Swedish state. The Canadian document on the other hand is largely absent of these legal and international commitments, and is based more around economic arguments around bringing in private sector forces into international policy and development work.

Discussion: what type of feminism are these foreign policies elucidating?

Table 1: FFP in Swedish and Canadian policy documents

What is the nature of the problem?		How is the problem to be solved?	
Sweden	Gender inequality	Sweden	Through legal and international treaties and obligations; through commitments from various branches of the Swedish

			government; through certain benchmarks and targets
Canada	Poverty	Canada	Through certain broad/poorly defined benchmarks; through greater involvement of the private sector in developing countries

How do these two documents therefore understand the term feminist? Both policies promote a vision of “empowerment-as-efficiency” (Calkin, 2015b, 665) in terms of the economic and wider social benefits which can be brought through policymaking focused on women and girls. This is far more the case in Canada’s foreign international assistance policy which anchors itself around a commitment to poverty eradication, and in which feminism is positioned, not as a ends in itself, but rather as the best means to achieve that goal. Women and girls are presented as “superwomen” (Shepherd, 2011) and gender equality as providing a ripple effect across societies such that when women are empowered “they can transform their *local economies* and generate growth that benefits their entire *communities and countries.*” (8, emphasis added) This understanding fits into broader developmental understandings of ‘gender economics as smart economics’ (Calkin, 2015a, 2015b; Moeller, 2018), particularly given the focus the Canadian document places on the greater role that the private sector can play in development. Furthermore, it relies on empowering individual women and girls ‘over there’, and pays little attention to gendered inequality as a structural force which crosses international boundaries. As a result, we see a feminism which is not only embedded in an economic argument, but is ignorant of the ways in which such corporate influenced policy may reinforce structural inequalities.

This utilitarian or ‘business-case’ feminism, although still present, is less dominant in the Swedish policy given the centrality that gender equality plays for the country’s policy (seeing it as “a goal in itself” (3)). There are moments when broader, non-specifically feminist implications of this agenda appear (the introduction states that FFP will help the country to achieve its “objectives of peace, security, human rights and sustainable development” (3), suggesting again an implicit belief that policy focussed on women has expansive qualities) yet, on the whole, there is far less of the ‘superwoman’ presentation of women and girls that the Canadian policy imbues them with. This is in part due to the fact that Sweden firmly links its foreign policy to its international memberships and treaty obligations. In this sense, the policy appears to be a continuum of existing commitments that the Swedish state has, rather than a completely novel policy. Sweden thus presents a feminism which is strategic, using existing structures and working within the liberal international system to achieve its goals.

Furthermore, in this evocation of international commitments and structures Sweden’s foreign policy also links this back to a feminist agenda at home as well as abroad. The document refers to a “feminist government” (3), not just with regards to foreign policy, but also to “national policy objectives” (12) and gender mainstreaming across government offices as a whole. Laura J. Shepherd, in the context of a discussion about various states’ National Action Plans for the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security argues that they “tend to produce a world in which problems occur ‘elsewhere’, but solutions can be found here” (2016, 325). To be sure, Sweden is also guilty of this, in that it is promoting the idea that it is singularly placed to create solutions from ‘here’ for problems out ‘there’. Yet the document also goes further, seeing feminist policy as part of the domestic state apparatus, and the workings of the Swedish state at home as part of this global feminist continuum. Feminist policy is domestic as well as foreign for Sweden, a viewpoint which is largely invisible in the Canadian document.

In this sense, the Swedish discourse presents both gender inequality as a global structure, present across national boundaries, and liberal international structures as part of the answer. It appears to

counteract the negative critiques of development policy focussed on gender which sees it as overly individualising, neoliberal and perpetuating structures of inequality. Yet, despite this positive interpretation, the Swedish policy still presents key issues. The power that the international bodies and treaties which Sweden evokes actually have is debatable, particularly in a context in which there is growing hostility to international institutions and legal obligations (the US' contemporary reticence regarding the WPS agenda and the UN more broadly is of key note here^x). Furthermore, Sweden's ability to challenge global structures of inequality in practice via FFP remains to be seen (one key example which has garnered much attention is Sweden's continuing role in the global arms trade, including to countries where women lack basic rights, such as Saudi Arabia – see note *vi* below). An understanding of the universality of gendered oppression, and faith in international bodies may still not be enough to counter the realpolitik of a militarised international system, and Sweden's role within it.

Beyond this, the desire on the part of both countries to use the term feminist has other ramifications, notably in terms of the norms and values that each state is becoming associated with. Both policies argue that they are fundamentally tied to ideas about who these nations are. The Canadian document argues that “We, as Canadians, have a great opportunity to help the people of the world's developing countries join the middle class and the multilateral system that supports it.” (i) It anchors the policy in “a long and proud tradition of working to improve living conditions for others around the world” (73) and declares that “Canada's FIAP is a reflection of who we are as Canadians” (75) Similarly, the introduction to the Swedish document declares that the country is “a leading actor for gender equality and human rights”(3). It goes on to say that the “Foreign Service will ... [stand up] for Sweden's values ... [by] presenting strong practical arguments and sound analysis” (19) and that it will “use its promotion work to achieve positive effects on gender equality”(9). In both documents we see a blending of national identity with feminist policy.

Following Jasbir Puar (2007) and Sara Farris (2017), this ‘feminist nationalism’ creates a particular brand for both countries that enmeshes their feminist policies with both the nation's sense of itself and the understanding of the country that it wishes to project in the international realm. In the work of Puar (2007) and Ann Towns (2010), we see how liberal ideas about sexuality and the role of women in the public sphere have become both fundamental to a nation's self-identity (Puar) and a way in which nations are ranked internationally (Towns) in the liberal order. In a different vein, Farris (2017) argues that women's rights are evoked in right-wing nationalist discourse as a means to legitimise it. In the ‘feminist nationalism’ present here in both state's employment of FFP, we are seeing something similar emerge here with regards to the melding of a liberal discourse around equality and two states' branding of themselves. Canada and Sweden are embedding liberal feminist ideas into national self-identity and self-promotion, and also using these ideas as a way to distinguish them from other nations, particularly to suggest that they are more progressive.^{xi} The potential international competitiveness inherent in FFP hinted at here cannot be fully explored in these two brief documents, but warrants future and broader attention.

Conclusion

Although Sweden and Canada are both now working with feminist foreign policies, what feminist means for both has distinct differences. For Sweden, gender inequality is the central problem which FFP must address. Its FFP is a continuation of domestic commitments, international treaty promises, and its membership of international and transnational bodies. Its policy works from systematically mainstreaming feminist understandings into the workings of state bodies, human rights discourse and political institutions. It presents a liberal feminist outlook on foreign policy, which can work within existing national and international structures to enact change.

The feminism of Canada's FFP does not conceive of gender inequality in such a central fashion as Sweden. Instead, poverty is understood as the key problem to be tackled in the international

assistance policy, and a feminist policy is the way to achieve this. The policy is less oriented in existing commitments – domestic or international – than the Swedish one, and the role that the private sector can play appears to be the key driving force behind the policy. Throughout the document women and girls are presented as “superwomen” (Shepherd, 2016) with the central message being that empowering them leads to a trickle up effect of economic growth for communities and entire countries.

The relatively positive portrayal that Sweden receives in this comparison must be couched in the limitations of this article, however. There has consciously been no consideration of future documents produced beyond the country’s initial action plan, nor of the practical iterations of these policies in action. There remains the distinct possibility that these policies, however well intentioned, may not be able to exert their understandings of feminism within the international system. Equally, the impact of these policies in diverse geographical regions and settings may be restricted. A change in government on the domestic level in either country may eradicate, or severely limit, this burgeoning agenda. Limited as this analysis consciously is, however, it does provide an important consideration of the initial impetus behind both policies and the types of feminism both are espousing. FFP is clearly a developing policy agenda – we have already seen it emerge in French foreign policy and it appears to be gaining ground in civil society discourse and transnational bodies. The analysis presented here shows that even across the two initial policy documents which have emerged from this agenda, we see very different understandings of the word feminism. As such, there exists space for both the academic and grey literature to intervene and steer this emerging policy area (Aggestam et al, 2019). With no clear understanding of feminism underpinning FFP, it might still be oriented in new directions.

This brief consideration of FFP throws up a host of questions which warrant future research. Both documents refer to the intersections of gender with other identity markers, but do little to explain how this will be embedded in policy practice. Further work might explore the ways in which an intersectional feminism is being taken up by this agenda, and to what extent this thin inclusion suggests a depoliticization of this language within the policies (Mügge *et al*, 2018). Finally, this article has been consciously limited to the level of discourse, and has not looked at how either states’ policies have worked in practice. What have both countries achieved so far in their feminist foreign policies? As this agenda develops, and we see its uptake in France and beyond, what happens when feminist intent clashes with other global norms or economic forces? Future empirical research is required in order to explore if these policy commitments are being followed up in practice and, if so, what effects they are having. Are these policies working to create a more just and equitable realm for women and girls – in other words, are they actually feminist?

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ⁱⁱ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-35836279/justin-trudeau-i-ll-keep-saying-i-m-a-feminist>. Accessed 14/06/18.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.government.se/495f60/contentassets/66afd4cf15ee472ba40e3d43393c843a/handlingsplan-feministisk-utrikespolitik-2018-enge.pdf>. Accessed 25/05/18.

^{iv} <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf>. Accessed 25/05/18.

^v Sweden produced a Handbook detailing its FFP in 2018 as well as a document detailing the achievements from the first three years of the policy: <https://www.government.se/reports/2018/08/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/> and <https://www.government.se/information-material/2017/10/swedens-feminist-foreign-policy--examples-from-three-years-of-implementation/>. Accessed 13/11/18.

^{vi} There have been critiques in both countries over the adoption of FFP and existing policy concerns. The Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström voiced opposition to Sweden’s continued arms trade with Saudi Arabia based, in part, on its position on women’s rights. Yet the uproar that this caused from the Swedish arms industry and senior figures within the Swedish government meant that there has been little real impact or change vis-à-vis the country’s trade with or relations towards Saudi Arabia. In Canada, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls found that there has been “a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, which especially targets women, and 2SLGBTQIA people” in the country. These two areas highlight the difficulties both states have in pursuing FFP when existing international and domestic policy concerns appear in stark contrast to any feminist policy framing. <https://www.una.org.uk/magazine/2017-2/sweden-and-saudi-arabia-lessons-uk> and https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Executive_Summary.pdf, Accessed 15/06/19.

^{vii} ‘Swedish Foreign Policy action plan for FFP 2015-2018, including indicative measures for 2018’, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, <https://www.government.se/495f60/contentassets/66afd4cf15ee472ba40e3d43393c843a/handlingsplan-feministisk-utrikespolitik-2018-enge.pdf>. Accessed 25/05/18. All further references are to this source.

^{viii} ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy: #hervoicetherchoice’, Global Affairs/Affaires Mondiales Canada <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf>. Accessed 25/05/18. All further references are to this source.

^{ix} A fourth r ‘Reality Check’ is also referred to in the document but as this refers to more base-line implementation and resourcing, this is not discussed here.

^x The US threatened to veto UNSCR 2467 on Women, Peace and Security, and previously attempted to have the word ‘gender’ removed from UN documents. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/apr/23/un-resolution-passes-trump-us-veto-threat-abortion-language-removed>. Accessed 15/07/19.

^{xi} Indeed, this is particularly evident in successive documents produced by Sweden - see pages 48-51 here: <https://www.government.se/4abf3b/contentassets/fc115607a4ad4bca913cd8d11c2339dc/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy>. Accessed 05/02/19.