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Adam Chapnick. "The Origins of Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy." *International Journal* 74:2 (2019): 191-205. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0020702019850827>.

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Among the favourite pastimes of Canadian foreign policy scholars is deconstructing myths about Canada's international engagement propagated by the government of the day. In his 2019 *International Journal* article, "The Origins of Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy," Adam Chapnick continues in this vein by dissecting arguments proposing a causal relationship between the Canadian Prime Minister and Canada's feminist foreign policy brand. Citing the Trudeau government's various 'feminist' commitments from 2017 to 2019, Chapnick accepts the assessment by the now-defunct *Open Canada* blog that the government's embrace of feminist foreign policy is "indisputable" (191-192) but argues that the Prime Minister was not responsible for the policy.

Despite its title, the article is not about Canada's "feminist foreign policy" but rather the sausage-making of foreign policy. Building on the literature on the drivers of global politics and specifically the influence of the head of government, Chapnick deftly explains how his findings contradict theories that emphasize prime ministerial authority over foreign policy making.¹ This response to Chapnick's engaging article focuses on two proposals. It contests that the embrace was "indisputable;" I argue that, as Chapnick implies, the embrace was part of a broader shift to instrumentalize feminist rhetoric for strategic political ends. I also present alternative theses regarding the origins of the policy that merit further consideration, particularly those that highlight the role of cabinet members such as former minister of foreign affairs Chrystia Freeland.

Chapnick's question as to whether Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's self-identification as a feminist indicates that he himself directed the 'transformation' of Canada's foreign policy invokes two further queries: first, was there indeed a 'transformation' of Canada's global posture and second, was the evolution directed by Trudeau? While Chapnick accepts the sincerity of Trudeau's feminist principles, he argues that there is scant evidence that he drove the policy shift, thereby also arguing that there was a metamorphosis. While Chapnick acknowledges that much of the Liberals' messaging in the run-up to the 2015 election was centralized in the Prime Minister's Office, he argues that others, a group which is not further identified, had more influence on the development of Canada's feminist international agenda than the Prime Minister. Additionally, by citing the literature suggesting that much of Canadian foreign policy flows from the political centre, but rejecting the idea that Trudeau was at the nexus of Canada's embrace of a feminist foreign policy, Chapnick may also be questioning the quality of Trudeau's leadership.

¹ Paul Gecelovsky, "The Prime Minister and the Parable: Stephen Harper and Personal Responsibility Internationalism," in Heather Smith and Claire Turenne Sjolander, eds., *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2013): 108-124; Philippe Lagassé, "Parliamentary and Judicial Ambivalence toward Executive Prerogative Powers in Canada," *Canadian Public Administration* 55:2 (2012): 157-180, here 168, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2012.00222.x>. Kim Richard Nossal, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin. *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2015): 184-200.

Chapnick explores the relationship between the Prime Minister's Office and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He notes that former foreign minister Stéphane Dion's theory of 'responsible conviction' failed to gain much traction in the centre; although, since Justin Trudeau's international experience was limited when he took office in 2015, it is not surprising that his engagement in foreign policy making was removed – particularly since the Minister was a political rival from a different era in the Liberal Party of Canada who would soon be on his way to political obscurity. Thus, an alternative explanation suggests that it was not that Trudeau did not effect Canada's feminist foreign policy, but rather that he did not pay much attention to global affairs at all. Chapnick's finding that former international development minister Marie-Claude Bibeau's own feminist principles aligned with Canada's feminist commitments further supports this theory. Chapnick comments that when Chrystia Freeland was appointed Minister of Global Affairs, her mandate letter did not mention feminism. It did, however, mention women and gender, as did her prominent June 2017 address to the House of Commons outlining the government's international priorities. Chapnick also argues that Ministers Freeland and Bibeau were "personally invested in both the [feminist] brand and the ideas behind it" (204) but does not address the question of whether they were personally invested only as women.

Considering that, as Chapnick explains, parliamentary committees generally do not influence foreign policy making in Canada, his suggestion that scholars should look to the legislative branch of government rather than the executive to better understand the inputs of Canada's feminist foreign policy is a particular contribution. Chapnick traces Global Affairs Canada's feminist rhetoric to a fairly anodyne report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) on Women, Peace, and Security. Many of the Committee's recommendations echo in the government's agenda, especially in that it advocates for women's participation in peace processes as a means to societal change, rather than in the context of ending gender oppression and misogyny. The committee's sole woman in a group of ten members of parliament, Hélène Laverdière of the left-of-centre New Democratic Party, tabled the motion to pursue the study, rather than one of the six Liberal members.²

Canada is not the only country to adopt a feminist foreign policy. Sweden launched its policy in 2014 and feminist scholars have largely evaluated it more favourably than that of Canada.³ Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) is the fulcrum of its broader policy. The FIAP commits to focusing 95 percent of Canada's development assistance on gender equality by 2021–22 but does not allocate any new funding. Canada's feminist foreign policy also includes its work on the Elsie Initiative to increase women's participation in peace operations, spearheading a new G7 gender advisory council, and a new ambassador for Women, Peace, and Security. In February 2020, Canada's Foreign Minister, François-Philippe Champagne, promised a feminist foreign policy white paper, noting in a subsequent FAAE committee meeting that feminist foreign policy is "more than a slogan."⁴ This commitment followed 2019 announcements from France, Luxembourg, and Mexico that they too would each pursue a feminist foreign policy.

Scholars and practitioners employing the phrase 'feminist foreign policy' often struggle to define it, with limited consensus among those who do. Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond outline four normative pillars of feminist foreign policy: rights, representation, economic resources, and reality checks and research about women's everyday lives.⁵ Rebecca

² Marie-Danielle Smith, "Huge Irony in Male-Dominated Study of Women, Peace and Security, Says MP," *Hill Times* 6 April 2016, <https://www.hilltimes.com/2016/04/06/huge-irony-in-male-dominated-study-of-women-peace-and-security-says-mp/57008>.

³ Jennifer Thomson, "What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas," *International Studies Perspectives* (online publication: January 2020): 2, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekz032>; Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond, "Feminist Foreign Policy 3.0: Advancing Ethics and Gender Equality in Global Politics," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 39:1 (2019): 37-48, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2019.0003>.

⁴ François-Philippe Champagne, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 43rd Parliament, 1st session (12 March 2020).

⁵ Aggestam and Rosamond, "Feminist Foreign Policy 3.0."

Tiessen and Emma Swan conceptualize their discussion around feminism itself, human rights, and gender equity.⁶ Scholars of feminist International Relations have produced a vast literature exploring what these concepts of gender equity and equality entail, some of whom criticize associating feminist foreign policy with the promotion of economic opportunities for women.⁷ Jennifer Thomson, for instance, explains that Canada's feminist foreign policy does not position the needs and rights of women as a worthy end unto themselves, but rather as a means to achieve broader economic and social effects.⁸ Chapnick's lack of conceptual clarity perhaps allows him to applaud the Trudeau government more enthusiastically than is merited. Government phrases that Chapnick cites, including "women's [or female] empowerment" or "gender equality," emphasize a small-l liberal approach to feminism absent structural challenges to entrenched gender-based oppression (196, 199, 201, 204). Moreover, the dearth of feminist literature in the article marginalizes the contributions feminist scholars have made to the foreign policy and international relations questions that Chapnick's article explores.

Feminist rhetoric matters. It reverberates at home and abroad. Representation also matters. Although Canada's feminist foreign policy bolsters the normative legitimacy of feminist rhetoric and encourages women's increased representation in global politics, the Trudeau government's feminist foreign policy fails to acknowledge the structural impediments to gender equity. While the literature is clear that government rhetoric is a powerful marker, assessments of Canada's feminist foreign policy generally challenge the depth of the government's commitment and the policy's capacity to spur meaningful change.⁹ Many of the outcomes associated with Canada's feminist foreign policy also demand that women accept the labour of undermining gender oppression and strip men of their agency as feminist actors. There is considerable literature exploring performative feminism and other mechanisms of instrumentalization, none of which is cited in the article.¹⁰ The question then is perhaps not whether the feminist brand originated with the Prime Minister, but the consequences of leaders performing and instrumentalizing feminism.

Although not explicitly, Chapnick makes the case that the Liberals' 'feminist foreign policy' instrumentalizes calls for gender equity by linking the policy to the government's brand. He summarizes the Prime Minister's interest in feminist foreign policy as emerging only after the political centre had recognized the "marketing opportunities" (204). The feminist branding not only allows the Liberal government to mark itself as progressive, it also provides a clear juxtaposition with U.S. President Donald Trump's misogyny. As Chapnick notes, several international publications have commented fulsomely on Canada's policies (192) – and contrasted Trump and Trudeau.¹¹ The Trudeau government was eager to distinguish itself

⁶ Rebecca Tiessen and Emma Swan, "Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy Promises: An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality, Human Rights, Peace, and Security," in Norman Hillmer and Philippe Lagassé (eds) *Justin Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy. Canada and International Affairs* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 189.

⁷ Laura Parisi, "Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy: Business as Usual?" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16:2 (2020): 163-180, DOI: <https://doi-org/10.1093/fpa/orz027>.

⁸ Thomson, "What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy?"

⁹ Tiessen and Swan, "Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy Promises," 191-193; Thomson, "What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy?"; Parisi, "Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy."

¹⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2014); Stephen Baranyi and Rebecca Tiessen, eds., *Obligations and Omissions: Canada's Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); Rebecca Tiessen, "What's New About Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy: The Problem and Possibilities of 'More of the Same,'" *Canadian Institute of Global Affairs* (December 2019): <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Canadas-Feminist-Tiessen.pdf>. Parisi, "Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy." Thomson, "What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy?" Berit von der Lippe and Tarja Väyrynen, "Co-opting Feminist Voices for the War on Terror: Laura Bush Meets Nordic Feminism," *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 18:1 (2011): 19-33, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350506810386082>.

¹¹ Lyric Thompson and Christina Asquith, "One Small Step for Feminist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* (20 September 2018), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/20/one-small-step-for-feminist-foreign-policy-women-canada/>; Emily Rauhala, "Trump has Cut

from the previous Conservative government and the Trump administration in a way that did not directly antagonize Washington. Thus, an alternative theory that Chapnick does not explore suggests that Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy was essentially beta strategy – a testing ground for the government's new messaging to determine if Trudeau's constituency would appreciate the idea.

Trudeau's experience in international affairs prior to becoming prime minister in 2015 was at best limited.¹² It is not necessarily surprising that he and his team were more focused on overall messaging and glossed over foreign policy. Former prime minister Stephen Harper certainly did not require a firm grasp of global politics to win the 2006 general election. By focusing on the origin of Canada's feminist foreign policy, Chapnick's article effectively undermines theories and assumptions about prime ministerial authority over foreign policy and contributes to the broader literature about the relationship between individual leaders and international affairs. The article successfully conveys the partisan calculations and strategic machinations of governing and bolsters arguments that Canadian foreign policy is largely driven by domestic inputs, and particularly strategic electoral calculations.¹³ However, regardless of whether Trudeau drove the reduction of feminist imperatives to electoral strategy, the centre is complicit in the outcomes of Canada's feminist bromides.

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U.S. Support for Abortions Abroad. Canada's Trudeau is Now Doubling Down on that Aid." *The Washington Post*, 4 June 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/the-us-under-trump-has-cut-support-for-abortions-abroad-canada-just-doubled-down-to-help-fill-the-gap/2019/06/04/8e86b55c-86df-11e9-b1a8-716c9f3332ce_story.html.

¹² Norman Hillmer and Philippe Lagassé, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2017: Justin Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹³ Laron K. Williams, "Flexible Election Timing and International Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 57:3 (September 2013): 449–461, DOI: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/10.1111/isqu.12054>. Kim Richard Nossal and Leah Sarson, "About Face: Explaining Changes in Canada's China Policy, 2006–2012," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 20:2 (2014): 146–162, DOI: 10.1080/11926422.2014.934864. Krystel Carrier and Rebecca Tiessen, "Women and Children First: Maternal Health and the Silence of Gender in Canadian Foreign Policy," in Heather Smith and Claire Turenne-Sjolander, eds., *Canada in the World: Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2012):183–200. However, in a 2019 blog post, Nossal argues that the Canadian government's feminist foreign policy does "not appear to be driven by a political/electoral calculus" (<https://nossalk.org/2019/01/31/the-organic-nature-of-trudeaus-feminist-foreign-policy/>).