



THE UNIVERSITY
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What is a feminist approach to foreign policy? And what could it look like in Scottish Government Policy and Practice?

Workshop Report

25 August 2022, 10am – 4pm,
Godfrey Thomson Hall, Moray House, University of Edinburgh

Welcome and Introduction

Everyone was welcomed to the workshop by Claire Duncanson, Senior Lecturer in International Relations at University of Edinburgh, and co-organiser of the event with Dr Annika Bergman Rosamond (Lund) and Professor Caron Gentry (Northumbria).

Claire started by stating that the Scottish Government’s commitment to develop a feminist approach to foreign policy in its Programme for Government 21-22 is a hugely exciting development. It is exciting because, if you’re someone who cares about the impacts of ongoing armed conflict on the most marginalised, including women; gross and growing inequality (with the 252 richest men owning more wealth than all the women in Africa, Latin American and Caribbean¹); and ever more apparent and acute climate and biodiversity crises, the world can look pretty bleak right now, but feminism is an approach that is full of hope. It is – for the co-organisers at least – a “passionate politics”² of transformation. Feminism offers resources for tackling the marginalizations, inequalities and destruction that make many women’s lives unliveable and the dynamics that drive them. The co-organisers were thus pleased to be able to put down on paper some initial thoughts about what a feminist approach to foreign policy could look like in Scotland in an Opinion Paper, as a prompt for discussion in the workshop.

Of course, Claire observed, the paper will have missed things and got things wrong. It is brief and written with the intention of provoking debate and discussion. Indeed, the purpose of the workshop is to enter into a collaborative process of developing a feminist approach to foreign policy in Scotland, and beyond. The aim is to construct, collectively, a feminist approach that really makes a difference. One that can, in other words, make things better for women and other marginalized groups around the world by tackling the structures that drive insecurity, inequality, and ecological collapse.

Claire acknowledged the generous support from the Scottish Council for Global Affairs (SCGA) hosts of the workshop. The SCGA was recently launched by the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and St Andrews, with support from the Scottish and UK Governments, with a mission to:

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills>

² Hooks, Bell. *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press, 2000.

- facilitate and promote policy-relevant research on global affairs and link this expertise to policy stakeholders in Scotland, the UK, and beyond;
- promote informed debate and discourse on international affairs
- and forge partnerships with cognate civil society and research institutes outside of academia

The workshop is an example of precisely the sort of thing SCGA seeks to do and achieve: draw on researchers from across Scottish universities and civil society to conduct activities that deepen knowledge and inform policy, on matters of significance in global affairs.

Presentation of Opinion Paper: Scotland the Brave? An Authentic, Ambitious, and Accountable Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy

Annika and Caron then presented the key ideas in the Opinion Paper *Scotland the Brave? An Authentic, Ambitious, and Accountable Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy* – available here: <https://scga.scot/2022/07/25/opinion-paper-feminist-foreign-policy/>

The paper draws on the rich feminist scholarship, practice and activism of the 20th and 21st centuries to present some of the central feminist ideas, concepts and principles that the co-authors think should inform the idea of a feminist approach to foreign policy. It briefly considers the ideas and ambitions of the FFPs adopted to date, with a focus on Sweden as the pioneer of the concept. It argues that rather than repeating the Swedish focus – often encapsulated as the “3Rs”, rights, representation and resources – the Scottish Government could aim to be bolder and braver, replacing the 3Rs with 3As: authenticity, ambition, and accountability.

Views from Women Peacebuilders from the Global South

The workshop proceeded with four reflections from four women peacebuilders, who are active in building peace in their communities and beyond, who were in Scotland as a result of having been selected to participate in the Beyond Borders Women in Conflict Fellowship:

- Houda Abadi, Executive Director of Transformative Peace, a consulting firm which specialises in inclusive peace processes. Houda has more than 15 years intensive experience designing and implementing peacebuilding programmes. She has worked on the Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, as well as others across the MENA region, and has won worldwide recognition for her contribution to building peace.
- Marwa Baabbad, a researcher and development consultant with over nine years of experience in community engagement, gender, peace and security and youth political inclusion, with a focus on Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Syria. She has a Masters degree in Post-war Recovery Studies and has been a visiting fellow at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security.
- Salma Yusuf, a lawyer, human rights advocate, peace activist and mediator from Sri Lanka. Salma has worked as a public official in government, researcher, journalist and activist, receiving leadership awards from the US Department of State, French Foreign Ministry and the EU. She specialises in policy and process development and strategic advocacy
- Aicha Madi, the feminist peace project officer at Peace Track Initiative, a women-led Yemeni NGO that promotes women’s participation in the peace and political process in Yemen. She has a Masters degree in public and international affairs with a specialization in political communication and journalism and has led several peace initiatives across the MENA region, including working with survivors of sexual violence and mothers of victims of torture.

The women peacebuilders were asked to reflect on the question: “**What would you like to see in a feminist approach to foreign policy from a small state or sub-state in the global north, such as Scotland?**”

Their reflections will appear in full on the SCGA website imminently, but key points included:

1. FFPs should be **inclusive**, involving the meaningful participation and representation of women.
 - a. FFPs should be guided by women on the ground, with attention to diversity. (e.g, including the oft-excluded women from rural, conservative, and marginalized communities.)
 - b. FFPs should encourage more women in foreign affairs as diplomats, mediators, special envoys and UN special rapporteurs
2. FFPs should adopt a more complex and **comprehensive definition of security**, one that includes the cessation of all forms of violence. They should develop a grounded understanding of how conflict and violence manifest in the local and global context and be attentive to intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.
3. FFPs should not be restricted to issues traditionally seen as “women’s issues,” but include a **focus on economic rights and security**.
4. FFPs should **recognise women as strategic partners and active agents of peace**. They should provide technical assistance and resources to women’s organisations to e.g. develop National Action Plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (and its sister resolutions). Women’s analyses of conflict, insecurity and inequality should be taken seriously
5. FFPs should empower women through concrete support to work for justice, peace and security based on **local capacities, resources, knowledge, and realities**. When engaging with Muslim-majority countries, FFPs should not privilege patriarchal interpretations of Islam but support Muslim women to challenge patriarchal values themselves. Likewise, FFPs must not instrumentalize women’s rights. (When claims to save and liberate women from their culture and religion have been deployed to justify foreign invasions, this harms women and makes it extremely difficult for women to advocate for their rights and dignity internally.)
6. As well as empowering women, interventions in other countries should focus on **transforming men and boys** into partners and active agents of peace.
7. FFPs should have **accountability** measures in place. It should not become a tick-box exercise or be tokenistic, but achieve measurable differences in reducing inequalities and insecurities.
8. FFPs should acknowledge the **impact of colonialism**. They should facilitate transfers of power and wealth to the global south and forge genuine partnerships with the most marginalized.
9. FFPs should show **policy coherence** between domestic and foreign policy. They should include measures to end arms sales, for example, given the impact of weapons on women’s lives, and to welcome refugees. They should also avoid privileging some conflicts over others e.g. Paying attention to Ukraine but not Yemen.

Breakout groups I

Workshop participants were then invited to split into small groups to address the questions “What’s missing from the Opinion Paper? What has it got wrong? What would it mean *to you* for Scotland to set out an Ambitious, Authentic and Accountable FFP?”

The responses were rich, insightful and extensive, and representative of a variety of different perspectives and positions. As such, rather than list them all or attempt to summarise, we have collated some key themes:³

Things to add or amend, to build a better feminist approach to foreign policy:

- Add more regarding **trade**: can we link what we do in Scotland around procurement to feminist goals? What can the Scottish Government do to understand and transform the impact of current trade regime/agreements on women and girls?
- Increasing the **participation of women** is absolutely crucial, from the development of the policy and ongoing throughout. This is part of what it means for a policy to be authentic and accountable. We need to think carefully about *how* to do this – not just consult with women, or provide them with help, but ensure they can actually steer policy. Eg. Women participating in the Beyond Borders Fellowship, and Human Rights Defenders Scheme should be invited to inform policy. The advocacy role of women is important and could be a 4th “A”.
- **Accountability has a number of elements**. As well as the SG being accountable to the women its foreign policies impact upon, on an ongoing basis, as per above, it involves Scotland coming to terms with its past role in empire, and developing mechanisms to recompense, materially as well as symbolically. Scottish courts, for example, should be open for redress, justice and remedy for those overseas affected by Scottish actors.
- More concrete policies regarding **demilitarization**: what can the Scottish Government do to cut arms manufacturing and progress nuclear disarmament?
- Re. **wars, such as in Ukraine**. Either spell out in more detail what a feminist approach would entail, or do not attempt to address. The brief mention in the OP raises more questions than answers.
- **Policy coherence** is important. E.g. pursue a “Just Transition” within Scotland and make climate reparations to countries in global south, ensuring both attentive to women and girls. E.g. the Scottish government should incorporate CEDAW and Istanbul Convention into Scots law.
- More **measurable goals**, and more detail on **monitoring and evaluation**. How will success be measured? We need goals and outcomes to be listed, as this is more useful than overarching themes. The 3 As do not mean anything: all 3 are to do with ambition, and, unlike rights, representation and resources, too vague to be measured.
- Need to foreground the **transformation of patriarchal norms**

There were also several critical reflections on the entire endeavour of trying to create a feminist approach to foreign policy, with participants asking: Is it possible to have a feminist foreign policy? Doesn’t the very idea of foreign policy reinforce structures that have been and continue to be damaging for women and the most marginalized (nation states, borders, Self/Other constructions, defensive, militaristic or neo-colonial approaches to other states)? Can an FP be anything other than colonial (and, therefore, problematic for feminists)? Can you do FP in a non-colonial way?

³ A full list of bullet points and pictures of flipchart paper are available – contact c.p.duncanson@ed.ac.uk

Breakout groups II

After lunch, we broke out into different groups to consider the questions: “How could the Scottish Government actually achieve these feminist goals? What are the opportunities and constraints?”

All groups agreed that there are many challenges and constraints facing the Scottish Government in its efforts to develop and implement a feminist approach to foreign policy, but many opportunities too. Many groups commented that it is often the constraints themselves that provide windows of opportunity. As such, it is perhaps useful to present the constraints and opportunities together in a table⁴:

Constraints	Opportunities
<p>Scotland is not an independent state with full powers. It is a sub-state which has external relations, but not a Foreign Policy as such. It is also relatively small, 5 million people, and has limited global influence.</p>	<p>Scotland is not alone in developing a feminist approach to FP and can partner with others. The SG already has a good record at creating partnerships around progressive policies, eg with Nordic countries, NZ, Malawi. (Developing more partnerships with countries in the global south can help the SG avoid charges of neo-colonialism.)</p> <p>The SG needs to think creatively to overcome this constraint, so can come up with more imaginative and effective ways to operate.</p> <p>The SG possibly has more room to manoeuvre, as there are lower expectations of it. It’s seen as neutral, a ‘good global citizen.’</p> <p>“Lack of baggage” means that the SG can try new things, test the water, with new approaches.</p> <p>The SG can learn from other sub-states, who have managed to meaningfully contribute to global peace and security, justice, etc. Indeed, it already has good external relations with other states and substates upon which to build to develop FFP. Eg the under 2 coalition.</p> <p>It also has developed expertise domestically which could inform its FFP, eg gender budgeting.</p> <p>Small and compact population that talks to each other, so can develop coherent policy that all can get behind. Young people are politically aware and there is a vivid civic</p>

⁴ NB This is not what participants were asked to do, so there is an element of editorial input here in the organisation of points.

	culture.
The UK Government has different goals and approaches to the Scottish Government on many issues, and is much less inclined to support a feminism which is focused on tackling the drivers of inequality, insecurity and ecological collapse. It might seek to stymie the development of a feminist approach to FP.	FFP is an opportunity for the SG to demonstrate its difference, in values, approach and achievements. It can build legitimacy, through demonstrating benefits of its approach.
Scotland faces a “cost of living crisis” (or, as some put it, a “cost of greed crisis”), so government and citizens may be more reluctant to support “distant others.”	As a result of the crisis, many in Scotland are perhaps willing to conceive of more radical policies now. More people are making the connections between insecurity, inequality and ecological collapse, so open to the transformation of the systemic drivers e.g. the current trade regime.
The Scottish Government might lack the courage and conviction to implement a feminist approach. It might be too cautious, given wider political issues and priorities. It also might lack the expertise, capacity and knowledge to consult widely, and then develop and implement an effective FFP. There’s also the short-termism of all governments.	The SG can build on its good record partnering with Scottish civil society/women’s organisations, women parliamentarians, and feminist academics, who can play a key role in ensuring that the policy is developed inclusively, implemented and monitored, leading to better policy and practice. The SG could identify key strengths and focus there.
The self-delusion and complacency sometimes evident in Scotland – we think we’re “the good guys”	The participative element of a feminist approach to FP offers an opportunity to learn from others (on e.g. just, inclusive and sustainable economic models, peaceful politics, and environmental justice) and make our policies even more effective. The SG can use a feminist approach to foreign policy to build coherence and make gains on domestic equalities agenda.
Few understand feminism, and many fear it, so there’s risk of backlash.	Opportunity to learn lessons from the independence debate in 2014, widely acknowledged to have played a role in educating, informing and energising the public, resulting in a relatively high quality of debate.
Many vested interests – corporations and those who lead them – would resist a feminist approach that focuses on tackling root causes of inequality, insecurity, ecological collapse.	

Plenary

The day ended with Monika Baczyk-Olszewska, from the Directorate for External Affairs, outlining the Government's next steps for developing its policy, and a general discussion.

Scottish Government Update:

Since the announcement of the commitment to develop a feminist approach to foreign policy in the Programme for Government, 21-22, the SG has:

- Learned from other nations' experience, interviews with feminists from academic and civil society
- Committed to a bottom-up approach

Future plans include

- holding more workshops, with more participation from women in Scotland and global south, more feminist expertise, to consider what approach should be – these should be towards end of 2022, start of 2023
- consulting with National Advisory Council on Women and Girls
- producing a Policy Statement later in 2023

Key Points in the general discussion included:

- The importance of consultation in getting a feminist policy right. Need feminist expertise from within and beyond Scotland. The SG already is consulting more than Swedish Government did in 2014. It was suggested that everyone in this workshop could think about key voices that seem to be missing and that should be brought into this discussion, so SG can take advantage of Scotland's relatively well-connected feminist community as well as its links overseas. An Amnesty International report, *Developing a Human Rights Defender Strategy*, was suggested as good practice for consultation, as were several different *National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security*.
- The importance of developing a strategy to respond to vested interests, resistance and backlash. This is perhaps a bigger challenge than the challenge of consulting widely enough.
- The importance of using already-existing accountability frameworks, such as the National Performance Framework, in order to ensure that any feminist approach to foreign policy is more likely to be implemented. Is there potential to have some measures in the National Outcomes relate to key elements of a feminist approach to FP?
- The importance of integrating a feminist approach to foreign policy with already-existing policies and legislation, such as the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill,⁵ again, to ensure that a feminist approach is more likely to be implemented, effective, and to ensure policy coherence across domestic and international aims.
- The potential to take advantage of the SG's commitment to incorporate four human rights conventions, including CEDAW and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into Scots law, in the form of a new human rights bill.⁶ If extended to include rights to a healthy environment and generally taking the opportunity to go beyond the conventions, as recommended by the Task Force,⁷ this could align nicely with FFP goals.

⁵ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/news/new-human-rights-bill>.

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-taskforce-human-rights-leadership-report>

- The potential for the Scottish Government to do a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on Women, Peace and Security (as it did for the Sustainable Development Goals), and create its own National Action Plan on WPS
- The potential of the forthcoming National Advisory Council on Women and Girls' audit of all government departments to be used to further a feminist approach to foreign policy, or at least to raise gender expertise across government.
- The importance of working closely with the NACWG and the Gender Equality team at the SG.