

---

Volume 19

Issue 1 *New Writings in Feminist Studies: Winning and Shortlisted Entries from the 2017 Feminist and Women's Studies Association's Annual Student Essay Competition*

Article 4

---

Jan-2018

# Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)

Columba Achilleos-Sarll

Follow this and additional works at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Achilleos-Sarll, Columba (2018). Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis). *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(1), 34-49.  
Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss1/4>

## **Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)**

By Columba Achilleos-Sarll<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

How can we theorise more effectively the relationship among gender, sexuality, race and foreign policy? To explore this question, and to contribute to the nascent field of feminist foreign policy (analysis), this paper brings together two bodies of international relations (IR) literature: postcolonial feminism and post-positivist foreign policy analysis (FPA). This paper contributes a fundamental critique of both 'conventional' and 'unconventional' (namely post-positivist) FPA to demonstrate the lack of attention paid to postcolonial and feminist theories within FPA. In turn, this exposes the ways in which FPA marginalises, and renders inconsequential, the gendered, sexualised and racialised dimensions underwriting foreign policy practice and discourse. While post-positivist FPA seeks to rectify the silences that characterise 'conventional' and 'unconventional' (namely constructivist) FPA, this literature remains blind to the ways that intersecting oppressions, operating through hierarchies of social categories made possible through their naturalisation, inform the process, the production and the resultant gendered consequences of foreign policy. Moreover, while there are limited country-specific examinations (residing outside of FPA) on gender and foreign policy that offer useful insights, they are theoretically limited. Like much post-positivist feminism, these examinations privilege gender as a social category, omitting race and other markers of difference. Rather than presenting 'gender', 'sexuality' and 'race' as concepts only for interdisciplinary inquiry, it is propounded here that they should be seen as vital to the study and practice of foreign policy. Advancing the untested promise of a postcolonial feminist approach to FPA that (re-) centres intersectionality, (re-)instates connected histories, and (re-)configures normative orders, this paper argues that foreign policy should be re-conceptualised *as* gendered, sexualised and racialised. It is hoped this intervention may offer a blueprint to seriously engage with the possibility of a postcolonial feminist foreign policy approach to FPA, and to think anew about how that may be translated beyond the discipline: advocating for a symbiotic and complimentary feminist foreign and domestic policy that fundamentally challenges rather than maintains the status quo.

*Keywords:* Postcolonial Feminist Theory, Foreign Policy (Analysis)

### **Introduction: Recasting Foreign Policy (Analysis)**

In October 2014, Sweden became the first state to publically adopt an explicitly feminist foreign policy. This sparked a number of timely studies, workshops, and conferences exploring the possibility of states attaining – and, in the case of Sweden, with states outwardly declaring – a

---

<sup>1</sup> Columba Achilleos-Sarll is a PhD ESRC funded student at the University of Warwick in the Politics and International Studies department. She previously gained an MPhil in International Relations from the University of Oxford. Her research lies at the intersection between feminist and postcolonial theory, UK foreign policy and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

feminist foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, ideas about gender and feminism have come to play an increasingly important role in state foreign policy, revitalising the nascent field of feminist foreign policy (analysis).<sup>3</sup> This can be traced back in part to the historic adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in October 2000.<sup>4</sup> Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 – a resolution that addresses the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict affected states – it has developed into a much broader framework that now encompasses resolutions to combat issues ranging from political participation, sexual violence in conflict to countering violent extremism (CVE). Alongside this legal framework, which places binding obligations and international commitments on states, its partner strategies ‘gender mainstreaming’ and ‘gender balancing’<sup>5</sup> are intended to offer practical solutions to gender inequality to be integrated throughout states foreign and domestic policies.

In spite of this, foreign policy analysis (FPA), the subfield of International Relations (IR) dedicated to the study and theorisation of foreign policy, has failed either to digest or to take heed of these developments. Indeed, theoretical literature on the relationship between gender, and its interlocking modalities of race and sexuality with foreign policy is scant, with FPA having comparatively little to say on the topic. The few studies that do exist have developed on the margins of FPA, and at the intersection of a number of different fields. In fact, FPA has been relatively immune to the critical turn that was experienced by the discipline of IR, which witnessed the development and intervention of postmodern theories including post-structuralism, post-positivist feminism, and post-colonialism, theories that have taken to task the founding tenants of IR theory (Derian and Shapiro, 1989; Doty, 1993; Sylvester, 1991). However, post positivist FPA has made a critical intervention into mainstream FPA challenging a discipline hitherto associated with canonical theories and positivist epistemologies. This intervention has highlighted the ways in which subjectivity underlies dominant claims to rationality, thus conditioning policy-making. Despite this intervention, the discipline as a whole remains silent on the ways that gendered, sexualised and racialised discourses and hierarchies unpin, and are reinforced by, the institutions and the practices of foreign policy.

To redress the balance, this paper seeks to bring together two bodies of IR literature: postcolonial feminism and post-positivist FPA. Forging a dialogue across these bodies of

---

2 Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom’s public announcement that Sweden would follow a feminist foreign policy was the first state declaration of its kind. Previously, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton (2009-2013) decided to make the political concerns of women central to US foreign policy, which remained a significant part of her 2016 presidential campaign. In June 2014, the former British Foreign Secretary William Hague launched the ‘Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict’ initiative (PSVI) as an extension of the UK’s foreign policy programme and commitment to the WPS agenda. In February 2016 Australia adopted a foreign policy gender strategy, and in October 2016 Norway adopted a foreign policy gender strategy. These foreign policy re-orientations encourage us to rethink the relationship between the gender, feminism and foreign policy.

3 In the title “feminist foreign policy (analysis)” which is used throughout this paper, ‘analysis’ is placed in brackets for two reasons. Firstly, to reiterate that there is currently no explicit feminist foreign policy approach within ‘conventional’ or ‘unconventional’ FPA and, secondly, it is used when I am referring both to “feminist foreign policy” as a practical policy orientation and “feminist foreign policy (analysis)” as theory and approach towards foreign policy.

4 The institutionalisation of the WPS agenda at the Security Council (SC), and the continued expansion of its remit, is used to highlight the increasing prominence given to ideas of gender and feminism within the structures of global governance, which is now becoming mainstreamed in the practice and discourse of state’s foreign policies. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a detailed assessment of the WPS agenda, it is occasionally used to help progress the argument.

5 ‘Gender mainstreaming’ aims to incorporate ‘gender’ into all policies and ‘gender balancing’ is concerned with increasing the number of women.

literature, this paper asks how gender, and its interlocking modalities with race and sexuality, can be theorised more effectively in FPA by offering important new insights into the study and conceptualisation of foreign policy. Arguably, we cannot study foreign policy without attending to and scrutinising colonial legacies, as well as intersectional oppressions that necessarily inform and are central to its formulation.

This paper makes two contributions. Firstly, working through a fundamental critique of both ‘conventional’ and ‘unconventional’ (namely post-positivist) FPA<sup>6</sup>, it highlights the lack of attention that has been paid to both feminism and postcolonialism, thus contributing to post-positivist feminist debates about the gendered nature of the discipline. Secondly, by challenging these erasures both in theory and in practice, this paper outlines the crucial importance of a postcolonial feminist approach, thus contributing to the nascent field of feminist foreign policy (analysis).

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part takes up two interrelated questions: Why is there no feminist or postcolonial foreign policy theory or approach within the field of FPA? And, how has this exclusion been made possible? To address these questions, part one proceeds by providing an overview and a critique of the distinct hallmarks of ‘conventional’ FPA. It not only highlights the way the subfield marginalises questions of gender and gender relations, but also how its constitutive assumptions are themselves profoundly gendered and gendering. To follow, the paper analyses and critiques ‘unconventional’ FPA, exploring in particular post-structuralist accounts. While post-structuralist FPA offers important insights and a bridging platform to take feminist theory seriously it remains, by-and-large, gender and race blind. Reflecting on the foregoing erasures, the last section of part one draws attention to post-positivist feminism, and specifically to country-specific examinations on gender and foreign policy, which offers useful insights. It will demonstrate how post-positivist feminism seeks to overcome the gendered blindness of existing scholarship in the field of IR more broadly to make evident the importance of studying gender. However, this section will simultaneously expose the problematic privileging of gender as a social category and, therefore, the need to go beyond post-positivist feminism.

To address the aforementioned silences and omissions, the second half of this paper will develop a postcolonial feminist approach to foreign policy (analysis). It will begin to answer the questions: What comprises a postcolonial feminist FP approach? How might it be operationalised? And, what is its ‘added value’? In so doing, this section advances a tripartite approach to FPA that (re-)centres intersectionality, (re-)instates connected histories, and (re-)configures normative orders. This paper concludes that we must subject foreign policy to a double critique in order to expose its imperialist and gendered underpinnings, as well as both its heterosexist structures and practices, which ultimately marginalise the relationship between gender, sexuality, and race in the process, the production and resultant consequences of foreign policy. It is hoped this intervention may offer a blueprint to seriously engage with the possibility of a complimentary feminist foreign and domestic policy practiced beyond the discipline that fundamentally challenges rather than maintains the status quo.

---

<sup>6</sup> This paper applies the demarcation Dan Bulley (2009) uses between ‘conventional’ FPA (which includes both US and British traditions of FPA) and ‘unconventional’ FPA (more commonly constructivist approaches, but also post-structuralist accounts of foreign policy).

## Mapping Foreign Policy (Analysis)

According to Dan Bulley, “traditional FPA failed to engage with the way its theorization of foreign policy had also been interpreting and perpetuating certain assumptions about foreign policy and the way it operated in world politics” (2014:5). In contrast, critical studies have sought to reconfigure traditional conceptualisations of foreign policy and the dominant approaches to FPA. These studies have adopted constructivist (Waeber, 1990) and poststructuralist approaches (Campbell, 1998; Doty, 1993; and Bulley, 2009) providing alternative epistemologies and methodologies.<sup>7</sup> Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the entry of post-structuralism into FPA has not been accompanied by a parallel move into the discipline of either feminist or postcolonial approaches, emphasising this disciplinary blind-spot. The first part of this paper will highlight that ‘conventional’ and ‘unconventional’ FPA has therefore rendered inconsequential the intersectional oppressions resulting from gendered, sexualised and racialised discourses and hierarchies, thus excluding potential avenues of research. It must be noted here that to progress the argument the brief literature reviews to follow are meant to be broadly representative rather than comprehensive in scope.

### *‘Conventional’ FPA*

The discipline of FPA has traditionally conceptualised foreign policy as “a state-based practice towards that which is beyond the state’s borders” (Bulley, 2014: 16). Epistemologically, most theories residing within ‘conventional’ FPA are concerned with explaining decision-making via a problem solving approach (Cox, 1991; Synder, 2003). Scholars either focus on the process of decision-making or they examine a constellation and/or sequence of individual or group decisions regarding a particular event, and with consequences for foreign entities and subjects (Hudson, 2005). According to Valerie Hudson “it is the explanans of FPA wherein we find its most noteworthy hallmarks. The explanans of FPA are those factors that influence foreign policy decision-making and foreign policy decision-makers” (2005:2). Hudson therefore isolates six distinct hallmarks of ‘conventional’ FPA. She posits explanations of foreign policy usually examine more than one variable (multifactorial) across multiple levels of analysis (multilevel). In addition, she states FPA draws from a range of disciplines (multidisciplinary) and is thus ‘integrative’ as it brings together “a variety of information across levels of analysis” (2005:2).<sup>8</sup> This brings us to FPA’s last two distinct hallmarks outlined by Hudson: “*agent-oriented*” and “*actor-specific*”. The former hallmark emphasises the centrality and agency of human decision-makers, which is related to the latter hallmark, the uniqueness of decision-makers and the need to uncover information about specific actors (2005:3). To summarise, Steve Smith expounds, “The dominant requirement of any theory of foreign policy is to explain...behaviour” with the central task to elucidate the ways in which policies are made in order to strengthen decision-making processes (1983:565; Sjlonder et al, 2003)

Reflecting on the above, there are four important, albeit relatively brief, points worth mentioning. Firstly, despite FPA’s interdisciplinary nature, it has managed to sidestep the now extensive feminist and postcolonial literature in IR, thus ignoring the ways in which the constitutive assumptions of FPA are implicitly gendered and gendering. Secondly, whilst FPA is

---

<sup>7</sup> Due to the scope of this paper I will not engage with constructivist accounts. To highlight how a postcolonial feminist approach could be made possible in FPA, it is more important to engage with poststructuralist accounts. Despite theoretical differences, this literature is more closely aligned to a postcolonial feminism.

<sup>8</sup> It is not necessary to outline in detail each of the six hallmarks Hudson highlights as characterising FPA, rather they are used to overview ‘conventional’ FPA in order to facilitate the critique made.

“agent-oriented” and “actor-specific” and is thus “unwilling to ‘black box’ human decision makers” as generic rational utility maximisers (Hudson, 2005:2), it has seldom felt the need to explore the gendered dynamics of the subject, despite IR being relationships between international, gendered entities (Shepherd, 2017).

Moreover, both the “agent-oriented” and “actor-specific” hallmarks place (usually male) political and military leaders at the centre of FPA – albeit, inadvertently – due to a reflection of the gender bias and the competing masculinities that defines the political landscape. Despite this, there appears to be little attempt to deconstruct the matter beyond treating ‘gender’ or ‘women’ as explanatory variables. Moreover, these studies fail to recognise how gendered discourses and gendered identities – intersecting with other identity markers – produce oppressions that inform the process, the production and the consequences of foreign policy. Relatedly, FPA ignores the ways either/or binaries, premised on violent separations between categories of masculinity/femininity, inside/outside, the Global North/ Global South, international/ national profoundly shape foreign policy by defining and legitimising social practices and agential interactions, meaning that ‘conventional’ FPA always remains partial.

Thirdly, there is both an implicit boundary, and temporal divide, set up between the ‘colonial’ and the ‘postcolonial’, through the erasure of connected histories. This subsequently denies the relevance of racialised discourses and hierarchies and the persisting ways “explicit connections of historical and contemporary racisms and classisms resulting from imperial and colonial projects” continue to dominate contemporary relations with foreign entities and subjects (Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2004:44).

Lastly, integral to the conceptualisation of foreign policy, decision-making is seen as resulting in outward-facing – *foreign* – policies representing, according to David Campbell, “the external deployment of instrumental reason on behalf of an unproblematic internal identity” (Campbell, 1998:69) in order to correct impediments in the international system or to foster market oriented interactions. This distinction often serves to (re-)inscribe a protector/protected dichotomy with some states, dictating both who, becomes the target of particular foreign policies and what representational practices produce subjectivities that can make them intelligible. This often results in liberal interventionist discourses essentialising women as victims and men as violent. Indeed, through interactions with some states, this dichotomy is both racialised and sexualised: “brown women” are often cast as victims while “brown males” are regarded as inherently violent – including perpetrating sexual violence, yet simultaneously positioned to control women’s sexuality. This is cast in direct opposition to the “‘white men’ as the international community responsible for protecting ‘brown women’” (Pratt, 2013:776; Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1988). Firstly, this notion underpins, and in some cases serves to legitimise, military forms of security usually prioritised by states as ‘high politics’ in foreign policy, whilst relegating social policy to the domain of ‘low’ – or ‘domestic’ – politics.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, this view directs attention away, and disconnects foreign policy, from the domestic context and the violent practices and discourses that are experienced therein thus producing a moral superiority. This reinforces a complete separation between domestic and foreign policies, in affect denying the continuum of violence.<sup>10</sup>

---

9 R.B.J Walker, *Inside/Outside* (1998) highlights that these dichotomies are embedded within the International Relations.

10 The continuum of violence highlights that violence against women and girls not only occurs in conflict and post-conflict settings as episodic or exceptional to such wartime contexts, but violence occurs in peacetime in an everyday context. These ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ instances of violence cannot be separated: gender power shapes linked dynamics that foster violence from the household to the international arena.

This brief overview is intended to highlight the lack of gender and postcolonial analyses in ‘conventional’ FPA, as well as the way its constitutive assumptions are profoundly gendered and gendering. It has been argued that these erasures and gendered assumptions contribute to the (re-) production of existing relations of power. The following section will address ‘unconventional’ FPA focusing particularly on poststructuralist rather than constructivist studies. While this paper is situated broadly within post-positivist FPA, due to its natural affinity with feminism, it also departs from it and seeks to extend it in important ways. The section will endeavour to extrapolate that despite promising critical engagement with feminist postcolonialism, ‘unconventional’ FPA continues to marginalise the gendered, racialised and sexualised dimensions of foreign policy.

### *‘Unconventional’ FPA*

Roxanne Doty (1993:299) posits that conventional approaches to FPA have been concerned with ‘*why-questions*’ (why a particular policy was pursued or adopted?). Doty asserts that this “presuppose[s] a particular subjectivity (i.e., a mode of being) a background of social/discursive practices which make possible the practices as well as the social actors themselves” (1993:298). To redress this theoretical omission, Doty highlights the importance of posing “*how-possible*” questions: how are the subjects of FPA socially constructed? And, how does that make a particular decision possible and intelligible? Indeed, when exploring decision-making, Doty contends that “it is the deciding that meanings, identities, structures, foundational centres get constructed though always in very contingent, fragile and ultimately unstable ways” (1999:389). *How-possible* questions help to elucidate the imbrication of social categories with power in the construction of foreign policy, neglected in conventional analyses. Problematising rather than naturalising these categories opens up a space to think critically about the salience of social categories, fundamental to a postcolonial feminist approach.

David Campbell’s seminal post-structuralist text, *Writing Security* (1998), also advances a critical approach to FPA, positing that foreign policy is the politics of identity. According to Campbell, foreign policy is a set of discursive practices through which the ‘state’ and the ‘international system’, as well as the relationship between the two are constituted through a process of ‘othering’. Campbell seeks to collapse the artificial distinction set up in conventional analyses between the ‘foreign’ and the ‘domestic’ by posing the question: “*How* was it that we...came to understand foreign policy as the external deployment of instrumental reason on behalf of an unproblematic internal identity situated in an anarchic realm of necessity?” (1998:69). Posing this question, Campbell departs from analyses of decision-making processes by problematising the *production*, and configuration, of foreign policy. Moreover, crucial to feminist theory, by drawing attention to the projection in conventional analyses of “an *unproblematic* internal identity” reiterates the well-established axiom ‘the personal is political’, as well as inadvertently problematising the continuum of violence between the domestic and foreign spheres. The shift of focus away from analysing the *process* of decision-making to the *production* of foreign policy marks a critical departure in the field of FPA – beyond that which was attempted by constructivist accounts.

Dan Bulley (2009) has since developed Campbell’s thesis in order to shine a light on the ways in which ‘ethics’ and ‘foreign policy’ are co-constituted. Bulley demonstrates that ‘conventional’ and ‘unconventional’ accounts of FPA completely ignore and marginalise questions of ethics, and thus applies post-structuralism to draw attention to the interconnectedness, and relevance, of ‘ethics’ and ‘foreign policy’. Pertinently, the process by which FPA (both conventional and unconventional) marginalises ethics is similar to the process by which FPA also

marginalises gender. What Bulley does not take into account, however, is the way that ethics is profoundly gendered, as is its marginalisation.

Despite this, it would be incorrect to postulate that these studies entirely marginalise issues of gender. For example, while Campbell's and Doty's studies do not explicitly engage with feminist theory, or write specifically about gender relations, it is worth highlighting that Campbell acknowledges, albeit partially, the role of gender, and gendered norms, in the production of foreign policy: "gender norms have...helped constitute the norms of statecraft" (1998:11). Campbell observes "foreign policy is likely to be inscribed with prior codes of gender which will, in turn, operate norms by which future conduct is judged and threats calculated" (1998:10). Indeed, Campbell's analysis contends that "codes of gender" (ibid.) influence and legitimise ideas of danger and difference, which are productive in our understanding of the 'Self' and the 'Other'. While there is a partial recognition of "codes of gender", there is an erasure of the ways gender, sexuality and race intersect and produce intersecting oppressions when exploring the production of foreign policy premised on the interplay between the domestic and the foreign. Doty's work on the other hand engages postcolonial theory, providing important insights regarding the relevance of postcolonial encounters to subject formation.

Therefore, while there are obvious omissions, Campbell, Doty and Bull's reconceptualisation(s) of foreign policy are particularly significant as a point of theoretical departure in the field of FPA, and collectively offer a bridging platform for postcolonial feminist engagement. However, if our contemporary theorisations of foreign policy are to deal effectively with gender and its interlocking modalities, it is imperative to go beyond an uncritical reading of 'gender' as an explanatory variable. Exploring foreign policy as a practice that is socially produced means that it is necessary to cast a light on the ways foreign policy, both as a concept and when it is performed, is produced by ideas and logics of gender, sexuality and race residing in particular spatio-temporal contexts.

### *Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)*

Thus far, this paper has focused on the erasure of questions of gender, sexuality and race in 'conventional' and 'unconventional' FPA; however, to confront these erasures, it is not enough to simply utilise post-positivist feminism. While post-positivist feminism has brought attention to the gendered blindness of existing scholarship in IR, it has been much more reluctant, and slow, to confront the exclusion of race (Chowdry and Nair, 2002).

It is important to note that western, first world feminist discourse has a troubled relationship with colonialism. Originally defined and articulated by white, Euro-American, middle-class women it posited a western model of sisterhood – denying multiple oppressions and thus advocated for a liberal, and universalised, model of emancipation (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). Indeed, the discourses attached to this first world feminist voice have universalised and naturalised certain categories related to 'First World' and 'Third World' women, in effect centralising the position of the white women and failing to acknowledge global feminisms relationship to race, class and sexuality (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). While post-positivist feminism has to a large extent adopted an alternative research agenda, there remains a tendency in this literature to privilege gender as a social category, which to a degree reinforces the whitewashing of the discipline (Hobson, 2015).

Furthermore, there is a small body of country-specific examinations specifically addressing gender and foreign policy that has developed outside of FPA, and which offer important post-positivist feminist insights (Sjolonder et al, 2003; Garner, 2013; Stienstra, 1995; Hudson and Leidl, 2015; Aggestam and Rossamond, 2016). Scholars including Deborah Stienstra (1995) have



analysed the gendered assumptions and dichotomies that underpin and frame foreign policy practice and discourse. Stienstra propounds that a critical feminist analysis of foreign policy “ask[s] how gender has shaped our language of and about foreign policy, our foreign policy practices, and the institution of foreign policy, as well as how these institutions, practices, and ideas restrict or perpetuate certain gendered assumptions” (1995:117). Discussing in particular Canadian foreign policy, Stienstra asserts that “asking how institutions perpetuate gender relations forces us to go beyond the existing analyses of decision-making process... to look to broader structures” which shape the development and practice of foreign policy (1995:106). Stienstra concludes that Canadian foreign policy embodies and valorises militarism (which has been used as a synonym for masculinity), in opposition to the assumed – and socially constructed – role of women in society and politics: “as the wives and mothers of diplomats, soldiers and merchants; domestic servants and prostitutes” (1995:106; Enloe, 1989).

As previously mentioned, the analytic focus on ‘gender’ is elevated above and beyond either a discussion or a critique of the structural inequalities which are the basis of other strands of feminist theorising – notably, postcolonial and post-Marxist feminisms (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011). Indeed, many post-positivist feminist scholars “prioritize gender as a relation of power” (Pratt, 2013:772). These approaches extend beyond the confines of academia, and arguably have implications for the institutionalised take up of feminist ideas, as well as the espousal and normative content of a feminist foreign policy. Arguably, when governments engage with feminist theory, it is liberal feminist ideas that are most compatible with the ideas of neoliberal state institutions and market ideologies, and are therefore more likely to become embodied in foreign policy practice and discourse.

Discussing women solely in gendered terms can also be exposed in specific policies, notably the WPS agenda<sup>11</sup>, and the latter’s related foreign policy outputs, which have been criticised for sexual essentialism as the agenda focuses on ‘women’ rather than ‘gender’. Moreover, Sweden has based its feminist foreign policy on the so-called three ‘Rs’, which have the distinct stamp of liberal feminism: rights, representation and resources (Government of Sweden, 2016). These examples of normative reorientation in the realm of foreign policy discourse and practice, however, raise important questions about what a distinctly feminist foreign policy might (does) look like, and what type of feminism(s) will find a space in such foreign policies. It is therefore propounded that postcolonial feminist FPA offers a potentially radical and transformative approach to understanding foreign policy that could provide a potential blueprint for an ethical alternative to *realpolitik* beyond liberal feminism, which is finding its home both in the rhetoric and reality of states foreign policies.

### **Bringing Gender, Sexuality and Race Back into the Study of Foreign Policy (Analysis)**

Widening the remit of post-positivist FPA in order to contribute to the nascent field of feminist foreign policy (analysis), the second half of this paper explores an alternative approach to traditional ways of studying, and conceptualising, foreign policy. It argues that the gendered, sexualised and racialised dimensions of foreign policy require a more thoroughgoing analysis than that which has been attempted by post-positivist FPA, particularly prescient as feminism is being increasingly articulated alongside foreign policy. As demonstrated, an analysis of gender alone is

---

<sup>11</sup> While sexual essentialism has partially been acknowledged by successive resolutions, there remains little analysis in the resolutions and related policy documents regarding the importance of exploring the intersection of gender with other social categories.

insufficient to the task. Rather, it is proposed that gender operates through a series of complex relationships with other social categories. These relationships are neither frozen in time nor are they peripheral to foreign policy, rather they are context specific, hierarchical, and rely on and are sustained by structures of both domination and oppression. Instead of presenting ‘gender’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘race’ as concepts only for interdisciplinary inquiry, it is proposed here that they should be seen as vital when conceptualising foreign policy – a process, which is, to all intents and purposes, a process of othering. Building on the critique and analysis outlined in the first half of this paper, where the research agenda proposed here has already started to take shape; this part sets out a distinctly postcolonial feminist approach. Thus it is intended to borrow and expound on key analytical concepts and ways of seeing from postcolonial feminists in order to present a tripartite approach to foreign policy (analysis) that: (re-)centers intersectionality, (re-)instates connected histories, and (re-)configures normative orders. This reorientation is applied to (re-)conceptualise foreign policy in order to think differently about how these concepts might inform an alternative, and more inclusive, complimentary feminist and domestic foreign policy (analysis) both in theory and in practice.

### *Beyond ‘Gender’: (Re-)Centering Intersectionality*

The analytic value of intersectionality, which has its origin in Black Feminist thought but has now found a place in feminist theory more broadly, is particularly relevant when seeking to widen the remit of post-positivist FPA. Intersectionality moves beyond universalist or group accounts of a feminist ‘standpoint’ to posit that gender cannot be understood in isolation from, or privileged before, other social categories including race, ethnicity, class and sexuality, in order to elucidate intra-, rather than inter-group oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1989; Nagel, 2003). Postcolonial – and intersectional – feminist Anne McClintock argues that gender “come[s] into existence *in and through* relation to each other [race, class and sexuality] – if in contradictory and conflictual ways” (1995:5). These social categories intersect differently for different individuals or groups and within different historical, social, political, economic and geographical contexts. It is not the intention to provide an exhaustive account of social categories relevant to foreign policy, to privilege some social categories over others, or to add up social categories as a means to cumulatively isolate effects, and nor would this be desirable: “Power is seldom adjudicated evenly, different social situations are over-determined for race, for gender, for class, or for each in turn” (McClintock, 1995:9). Rather the (re-)centering of intersectionality as analytical approach, and a focus on race, gender and sexuality, is used to highlight the major omissions of FPA: FPA’s focus on powerful institutions to scrutinise decision-making processes at the expense of focusing on the ways these social categories are placed in hierarchies and naturalised to inform the construction of foreign policy, and the intersectional effects of foreign policy for the most marginalised.

Indeed, “gender never stands alone as a factor structuring society, but rather is inflected through, and co-constituting of, other hierarchical forms of structuring power” (McClintock, 1995:5). Moreover, postcolonial feminists argue that these social markers are not only produced in relation to one another but the state is complicit in regulating and “polic[ing] gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity for national interests” (Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2004:45; Alexander, 1994). Therefore linking gender to other identity markers through a gender-relational approach and according them analytic centrality, allows power relations to be analysed in a more dynamic way than that offered by post-positivist FPA. The intersections of these social categories – which in turn creates gendered, sexualised, and racialised hierarchies – structure relationships between

states and between peoples, remaking the content of foreign policies and conditioning how foreign policy issues are framed, prioritised and perceived.

It is therefore not sufficient to ask why, and through what process, was a policy adopted? Rather we must ask how gender – and its interlocking modalities of race and sexuality – conditions the process of policy-making as well as the production of policies? How do these categories of identity become naturalised in these policies? And, what are the often unforeseen gendered, racialised and sexualised consequences of policies that are themselves implicitly gendered? Reflecting on the latter, a continual failure to attempt to at least to think through what might be the gendered consequences of certain policies will forever disadvantage certain groups of people.

### *Overcoming Geographical Segregations: (Re-)instating Connected Histories*

Postcolonial feminists Agathangelou and Turcotte (2004:37) draw attention to “geographical segregations”, which can be used to extend the distinction Campbell makes between states’ “unproblematic internal identities” in contrast to the “anarchic realm of necessity” (1998:69). They argue, “homogenous or static constructions of geography...rely on histories of segregation to reconstruct the world” (Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2004:37). Geographical segregations are therefore projected as “naturalized” as a “means to solidify the conditions of power that regulate, control and exploit bodies as central to imperial reformations ... The subjects of IR and IR subjects themselves are negotiated through their divided geographies of power” (2004:10). These spatial hierarchies – which are implicitly gendered and racialised, are produced by a failure to acknowledge connected histories, and Western complicity, thus reinstating a distinct spatiality (Bhambra, 2010).

Indeed, foreign policy – seeking to institutionalise feminism and ideas of gender, is predicated on gendered, sexualised, racialised hierarchies and thus spatialised configurations due to the asymmetries of power of states, nations and groups. Post-colonialists therefore draw attention to the colonial amnesia that accompanies an attempt to superficially foster a temporal divide between the end of colonialism and the postcolonial world order, as well as the artificial, and racialised, distinction set up between the ‘foreign’ and the ‘domestic’, which ignores the ways in which both spatial domains are intimately connected. These distinctions are themselves profoundly gendered and often posited in terms of the binary opposites of masculinity/femininity that privileges and affirms the heroic man (coded ‘white’) in relation to the dependent, infantilised and victimised female (coded ‘brown’ or ‘other’) (Pratt, 2013). Therefore “whether at the local level (in the household) or at the national level (of the state), protection as a concept relies upon particular gendered, [sexualised] and racialised logics of security, authority and submission” (Hall and Shepherd, 2013:62).

To ground this in present day realities, the activist organisation Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) based in Europe recently wrote a public letter to explain their decision to close down after 20 years of activism. The letter highlights the growing challenges and pushbacks to feminist activism, which they claim led them to be unable to operate, and to retain the feminist ethos of their organisation. They articulate a challenge, particularly relevant to this discussion: the way in which “civil society’s mandate in ‘the North’ is too often framed around helping to build ‘the capacity of the South’, instead of women activists in the North having the space to critically reflect and address the many issues in their own backyard and the spill-over effects on the rest of the world”. The letter continues: “we do not believe in fitting ourselves into narrow security paradigms that frame conflict and war as something that needs fixing elsewhere, leaving hardly

any room for addressing its drivers and root causes, including those in our own backyard” (WPP, 2017).

Therefore, instead of ignoring the salience of colonial legacies, postcolonialism highlights that the organising logics borne out of colonialism continue to reverberate, determining contemporary relations between states, and other actors, that operate through postcolonial encounters, which in many cases represents imperialism-without-borders. It is therefore crucial to draw attention to the “continuing colonial legacies of the colonizer’s relations with the colonized, showing the relevance of the past not only for the present but also for its implications for the future” (Agathangelou and Ling, 2009:5).

### *Challenging Liberal Feminism and the Decoy of Representation: (Re-)Configuring Normative Orders*

Postcolonial feminists situate themselves in contrast with normative, or constructivist, theorists. On the one hand, normative and constructivist theorists expounding liberal ideas associate some norms with progress and development and define norms as “moral-political imperatives that inspire more just political orders” (Dhawan et al, 2016:16). However, on the other hand, postcolonial theorists are sceptical of universal norms and “alternatively associate ideas of progress, development and rationality with Eurocentric imperialism” which, as a consequence, denies difference and diversity, thus fuelling neo-imperial practices (Dhawan et al, 2016:7). The formalisation of human rights-based approaches attending to women, and women’s rights, represent the ways in which First World feminism(s) (cultural, liberal, and radical) have, to a degree, successfully moved across global, national or regional spaces. These multiple and more mainstream feminism(s) inform different projects, with states becoming the conduit for, and authority governing, those projects. Arguably, these projects and their conceptual underpinnings are then translated, negotiated and re-negotiated in the process of state-led engagement and, by extension, deployed in foreign policy. However, the pervasiveness of liberal feminism does little to disrupt business-as-usual politics – offering an integrative rather than transformative approach to foreign policy.

Postcolonial feminists have argued that the construction of a liberal human rights discourse embodies particular suppositions about Third World ‘Others’. So, while liberal critiques shine a light on human rights violations for example, they simultaneously fail – as previously mentioned – to acknowledge Western complicity, and colonial legacies, in those very same violations (Chowdhry and Nair, 2005). Postcolonial feminists, parting company with liberal feminists, may caution against analysing the extent to which foreign policy embodies, or projects, a global ‘gender-friendly’ discourse. Instead, postcolonial feminists would question the gendered, sexualised and racialised discourses that are embedded within the “neoliberal imperium”<sup>12</sup> determining the process of foreign policy-making (Agathangelou and Ling, 2009), and thus opening up a space to investigate the underlying assumptions, narratives, and discourses that guide foreign policy decision-making.

To expound, of course postcolonial feminists would not disagree with the worthwhile aim of increasing the representation of women and other marginalised groups in institutional sites of decision-making. Arguably, however, this will do little to alter power structures and the highly masculinised realm of foreign policy. Indeed, Zillah Eisenstein warns, “inclusion allows the partial

---

<sup>12</sup> Agathangelou and Ling (2009: 2) argue that the neoliberal imperium is an overarching project that includes states, governments, classes and ideologies and functions to establish itself as the only legitimate system or ‘World’ thus denying the possibilities of other “Worlds”.

renegotiation of the gendering and racing of power, but not a power shift. Exclusions expose the need for a power shift” (2007:94). Women, she continues, often act as a “gender decoy...although the sex often changes, the gendered politics can and do remain the same” (ibid.). Mapping sex directly onto gender so that gender not only equates to the either/or binary of male/female but also is frequently used as a synonym for ‘women’ reduces the transformative potential of ‘gender’ as an analytical feminist concept. Indeed, gendered and sexualised binaries are regularly inflected with each other: “*Gender* does not only encompass a binary concept of gender, but are closely related to [sexuality] and sexual orientation: gender designates the naturalised (and therefore unquestioned) binary male-female differentiation” (Winker and Degele, 2011:55).

It follows that biological foundationalism and determinism contributes to a simplified narrative that universalises and homogenises the category of ‘women’ around shared experiences, interests and oppressions; thus leading to the assumption that policies increasing women in decision-making will lead to more ‘women-friendly’ policies. However, these long-established tropes obscure harmful discourses. While it is important to acknowledge the historical underrepresentation of women in the realm of foreign policy-making, it is not adequate to simply take *elite* women as a subject in foreign policy and ‘stir’ – or to assume that increased representation may over time alter policy-making – without drawing attention to the underlying gendered, sexualised and racialised assumptions that exist within the institutions, practices and ideas of foreign policy prior to decision-making (Stienstra, 1994/5:105).

## Conclusion

The synthesis of postcolonial feminism and post-positivist FPA has considerable potential to enhance our understanding and analysis of the process, the production and the consequences of foreign policy. Working through a fundamental critique of ‘conventional’ FPA, this paper began by examining the distinct hallmarks of this literature. It highlighted that its constitutive assumptions are not only blind to the intersections, dynamics, discourses and hierarchies of gender, sexuality and race, but they are themselves profoundly gendered and gendering. This review went on to demonstrate that although post-positivist, ‘unconventional’ FPA (namely poststructuralist studies) provide a theoretical starting point to take seriously postcolonial feminism, through a re-conceptualisation of foreign policy as a process of othering, it also remains gender and race blind. This is problematic; not just because of the way in which foreign policy is researched, but also in terms of how we understand the decision-making process, the ideas influencing foreign policy as well as the gendered implications of foreign policy for those who are its target. To follow, this paper acknowledged the country-specific examinations on gender and foreign policy. However, it was found that these studies prioritise gender as a relation of power, thus obscuring structural inequalities and intersectional oppressions.

Mustering the aforementioned critiques, the second part of this paper offered an alternative postcolonial feminist approach to FPA by drawing on, and analysing the applicability of, concepts including: intersectionality, normative orders and connected histories. In doing so this paper offered a tripartite approach to FPA focused on: (re-)centering intersectionality, (re-)instating connected histories, and (re-)configuring normative orders. To this end, this paper has contributed to the nascent field of feminist foreign policy analysis by highlighting that foreign policy should be re-conceptualised *as* gendered, sexualised and racialised.

Following recent events such as Brexit<sup>13</sup> and the election of Donald Trump to the office of US President, it might seem a utopian – and indeed naive – notion to suppose that a distinctly postcolonial – and *ethical* – feminist foreign policy might be complimented by a feminist domestic policy practiced beyond the discipline. However, if we begin in the academic space and call on the discipline of FPA, which establishes covert and overt linkages with the policy world to take the insights of postcolonial feminism seriously, we can begin to dismantle our theorisations of foreign policy as acts of refusal so our analyses are less partial, in a hope to expose the gendered, sexualised and racialised discourses and hierarchies which characterise so much of the discourse and practice of foreign policy. In so doing, we can begin to reconstruct the notion of a potentially transformative, and symbiotic, feminist foreign and domestic policy by repeatedly asking, and challenging policymakers to answer: what type of ‘feminist’ foreign and domestic policy, and with what consequences? While neoliberal institutions, market-oriented ideologies and the rise of rightwing populism continue to both temper and curtail feminist incursions into policy debates, perhaps it is not so foolhardy to hope, and to call on policy-makers to take an initial step forward and bring intersectionality to bear on all their decision-making.

A postcolonial feminist foreign policy can provide the impetus to drive forwards a more inclusive world, whilst looking backwards to acknowledge colonial legacies when foreign policy is produced; to guard against the potential gendered consequences of policies so often ignored. Indeed, “it is only through engaging with humility, persistence, and hope that we might contribute in some small way to the construction of a different world” (Shepherd, 2017:170).

### **Acknowledgements**

This research is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

---

13 Brexit is the prospective withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

## Bibliography

- Agathangelou, A. M., and Ling L. H. M. (2009). *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds*, (London & New York: Routledge).
- Agathangelou, A. M., and Turcotte H. M. (2015). "Postcolonial Theories and Challenges to 'First World-ism'", in *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*, Laura J. Shepherd (ed.), (London: Routledge).
- Alexander, J. (1994). "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas", *Feminist Review*, 48, 5-23.
- Bhambra, G. K. (2010). "Sociology after Postcolonialism: Provincialized Cosmopolitanisms and Connected Sociologies. In: Rodriguez, Encarnación Gutiérrez and Boatcă, Manuela and Costa, Sérgio, (eds.) *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches. Global Connections*. (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate).
- Bulley, D. (2014). "Foreign Policy as Ethics: Towards a Re-Evaluation of Values", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 10:2, 1-29.
- Bulley, D. (2009). *Ethics as Foreign Policy: Britain, the EU and the Other*, (Taylor and Francis).
- Campbell, D. (1998). *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (University of Minnesota Press).
- Chowdhry, G. and Nair, S. (2002). (eds.), *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*, (London and New York).
- Collins, P. L. (1989). 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought', *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14:4, 745-773.
- Cox, R. (1991). "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory", *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 10:126, 126-155.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6, 1241-1299.
- D'Aoust, A. M. (2012). 'Feminist Perspectives on Foreign Policy.' In *The International Studies Encyclopaedia*, Robert Denemark (ed.), (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd).
- Derian, J. D., and Shapiro M. J (eds.). (1989). *International/ Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, (Lexington MA: Lexington Books).
- Dhawan, N., Fink, E, Leinius, and Megeza-Barthel, R. (2016). "Normative Legitimacy and Normative Dilemmas: Postcolonial Interventions." In *Negotiating Normativity: Postcolonial Appropriations, Contestations, and Transformations*, Dhawan N, Fink E, Leinius J, Megeza-Barthel R (eds.), (Springer International Publishing, Switzerland).
- Doty, R. L. (1993). "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency in the Philippines", *International Studies Quarterly*, 37:3, 297-320.
- Doty, R. L. (1993). "The Bounds of 'Race' in International Relations", *Millennium*, 3:22, (Winter 1993), 443-461.
- Eisenstein, Z. (2007). *Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy*, (London & New York: Zed Books).
- Enloe, C. (1989). *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (London: Pandora).
- Garner, K. (2013). *Gender and Foreign Policy in the Clinton Administration*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner).
- Grewal, I., and Kaplan, C., (1994). *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London).

- Hobson, J. M. (2015). "Re-Embedding the Global Colour Line within post-1945 International Theory." In Alexander Anievas, Niva Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (eds.), *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, (London and New York: Routledge).
- Hudson, V. M., and Leidl, P. (2015). *The Hilary Doctrine: Sex and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Hudson, V. (2005). 'Foreign policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1, 1-30.
- Hudson, V. (2007). *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, (Rowman and Littlefield).
- McIntock, A. (1995). "Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest", (Routledge: New York London).
- Mohanty, C. (1984). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", *Boundary 2*, 12:3-13:1, 333-358.
- Nagel, J. (2003). *Race, Ethnicity and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*, (Oxford University Press).
- Pratt, N. (2013). "Reconceptualizing Gender, Reinscribing Racial-Sexual Boundaries in International Security: The Case of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security'", *International Studies Quarterly*, 57, 772-783.
- Pratt, N., and Devroe, S.R. (2011). "Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 489-503.
- Shepherd, L. J. (2017). *Gender, UN Peacebuilding, and the Politics of Space: Locating Legitimacy*, (Oxford University Press).
- Sjolander, C.T., Smith, H.A., and Stienstra, D. (2003). (eds.). *Feminist Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Oxford University Press).
- Smith, H. A. (2003). "Disrupting Internationalism and Finding the Others." In Claire T. Sjolander, Heather A. Smith and Deborah Stienstra (eds), *Feminist Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Oxford University Press).
- Smith, S. (1983). "Foreign Policy Analysis: British and American Orientations and Methodologies", *Political Studies*, 31:4, 556-565.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (University of Illinois Press)
- Stienstra, D. (1994/5). "Can the Silence be Broken? Gender and Canadian Foreign Policy", *International Journal*, 50:1.103-127.
- Synder, R. C., Bruck, H. W., Burton, S. (2003). *Foreign Policy Decisionmaking, Revisited*, (Palgrave Macmillan)
- Sylvester, C. (Fall 1991/ Winter, 1992). "Feminist Theory and Gender Studies in International Relations", *International Studies Notes* 16-17.
- Towns, A. and Niklasson, B. (2017). "Gender, International Status and Ambassador Appointments", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13, 521-540.
- Waever, Ole. (1990). "Review Essay: The Language of Foreign Policy", *Journal of Peace Research*, 27, 335-343.
- Winker, G. and Degele, N. (2011). "Intersectionality as multi-level analysis: Dealing with social inequality", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 18:1, 51-66.



Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) website. “After 20 years, WPP closes its doors, a letter from the WPP team” 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017:  
[https://www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/news/after-20-years-wpp-closes-its-doors/?utm\\_content=buffer975dd&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/news/after-20-years-wpp-closes-its-doors/?utm_content=buffer975dd&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer). Last accessed: 12/12/2017.