

GBA+

Application

July 2020

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Unpacking the “Crisis” of the “Rules-Based International Order”: Competing Hero Narratives and Indo-Pacific Alternatives



Defence & Security Foresight
Group

About the Author



Maya Eichler is an Associate Professor in Political and Canadian Studies and Women's Studies at MSVU. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Social Innovation and Community Engagement and leads the Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs at MSVU. Dr. Eichler is interested in social change and citizen engagement in the military and security sphere, with a particular emphasis on the role of gender. Dr. Eichler currently conducts research on gender, sexual violence, and the armed forces, the transition from military to civilian life, and community stories of war and peace. She completed her Ph.D. at York University and held post-doctoral fellowships at the University of Southern California, the Harvard Kennedy School, and the University of Toronto. She was a 2013-2014 Lillian Robinson Scholar at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University.

GBA+ Application for: "Unpacking the 'Crisis' of the 'Rules-Based International Order': Competing Hero Narratives and Indo-Pacific Alternatives" by Stéphanie Martel

DSFG Thematic Team: Asia-Pacific

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

GBA+ is an analytical tool to advance gender equality and diversity outcomes of various policies, programs, and services. This strategy of gender mainstreaming is specific to the Government of Canada, and includes not only gender but also intersectional considerations, such as race and sexuality. In 2016, DND-CAF adopted GBA+ in response to United National Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions, which acknowledges the need for gender perspectives in conflict, post-conflict and peacebuilding processes, and women's participation in decision making. GBA+ training through the Status of Women Canada online course is mandated for most DND-CAF employees and is an important consideration in assessing the most pressing future defence and security issues.

The GBA+ team of the DSF Group has developed a GBA+ toolkit that supports authors of working papers to integrate gender and intersectional considerations in their work from the initial stages of their research to the development of evidence-based findings and recommendations. The GBA+ Toolkit provides a series of key questions for regional teams to consider, such as: "are your concepts conceived in broad and inclusive ways to account for the experiences and perspectives of those not well represented in research and power structures?" or "how does your foresight analysis reinforce or challenge existing power relations?" A gender-liaison from each regional team works in consultation with members of the GBA+ team to develop GBA+ for the working papers. This GA+ application complements the efforts of working paper authors to apply a GBA+ lens to their work.

GBA+ Considerations of the 'Rules-Based International Order'

Martel's paper argues that while there seems to be consensus that the Rules-Based International Order (RBIO) is in crisis, there is little agreement on what exactly constitutes the RBIO and its crisis. She argues that the crisis is best understood as a clash of narratives over what the RBIO should look like. She differentiates between two main types of narratives. Marvel narratives, including the dominant liberal Western view but also China's and Russia's positions on the RBIO, depict a crisis caused by radical 'Others'. Manga narratives, including the ones emerging from states of the 'Indo-Pacific' (e.g. Japan, Singapore) are built around self-responsibility and engagement. According to the author, understanding these different types of narratives is an important step towards building a new consensus around the RBIO.

Intersecting inequalities and the crisis of the RBIO

The first step in applying GBA+ is to recognize that the RBIO is a fundamentally gendered, classed, and racialized order. The dominant liberal version of the RBIO that was built by Western powers post-World War II relies on a particular set of gender and intersecting relations at home and abroad. Thus, the crisis of the RBIO is also a crisis of its gendered, racialized, and classed underpinnings. For example, continuing gender-based violence, the gender wage gap, the underrepresentation of women, growing income inequalities, and systemic racism across Western liberal democracies and internationally shows the cracks in the façade of the current RBIO.

While the RBIO may uphold the values of human rights and equality (such as through its international governance documents, e.g. the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women—CEDAW), inequalities and human rights violations persist within Western liberal democracies and in relations between the Global North and the Global South. Applying a GBA+ lens to this topic reveals that the Western version of the RBIO promotes progressive policies internationally while masking persistent inequalities in Western states and in relations with less powerful states of the Global South—especially when it comes to race, class, gender, and Indigeneity.

Gendered narratives and the construction of dangerous others

Western narratives of the crisis of the RBIO rely on gendered constructions of us versus them, often constructing masculinized Western heroes opposite racialized men from outside the West who are defined as the dangerous ‘Other’ (Russia, North Korea, Iran, as well as non-state actors such as ‘Islamist terrorists’ and ‘violent extremists’). From a GBA+ perspective, this type of narrative is problematic in that it reproduces gendered, racist, and colonial assumptions about Western progressiveness versus the backwardness of a host of ‘Others’. Martel outlines an alternative type of narratives from the ‘Indo-Pacific’, specifically Japan and Singapore, that emphasizes self-responsibility rather than ‘Othering’. While this alternative is not explicitly gendered, it emphasizes traits traditionally associated with femininity and thus undervalued in international relations, such as empathy, emotional vulnerability, and dialogue.

GBA+ of major trends

The author points to how GBA+ considerations factor into the likely future trends resulting from the clash of RBIO narratives. One scenario she forecasts is that Western state leaders will adjust their narratives by drawing on alternative narratives, including those put forward by Indo-Pacific states, and by recognizing some of their inherent flaws within their own states such as gender, class, and racial inequalities and failed reconciliation with Indigenous people. If these systemic problems are not addressed, the author predicts the intensification of radical expressions of dissent within the Western liberal order, and negative effects on the stability of relations between states in the international order. In this scenario, the impact will be disproportionately felt by disadvantaged groups, including women.

Recommendations

> Canada will be well served by reflecting on the gendered and other intersecting assumptions that underpin the liberal RBIO that it is promoting. This requires both being aware of and willing to address internal flaws such as gender, racialized, class inequalities and unequal settler-Indigenous relations and not reproducing unequal relations abroad—always, but especially when engaging in relations with the Global South.

> Canada's commitment to a Feminist Foreign Policy should make it uniquely interested in advancing a pluralist understanding of a RBIO that acknowledges diverse perspectives, as is suggested in this working paper. Recognizing our unique positionality in the world order and the ways in which Canada as a state actor has itself reproduced gendered, racist, colonial, and socio-economic relations of inequality at home and abroad is a key prerequisite to improving relations with those contesting the liberal RBIO.

> Canada's feminist-informed foreign and development policies are central components of its efforts to revitalize the RBIO. However, self-reflexivity on Canada's positionality is key to a successful implementation of its Feminist International Assistance Policy and broader Feminist Foreign Policy. It is important in this context that the Canadian government emphasize hearing the voices and needs of those that are targeted by these policies and by all means avoid paternalistically imposing its own Western liberal norms.