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United Nations, Women, Peace, and Security Image

GBA+ Application: *The WPS Agenda in the Asia-Pacific: An Emerging Field of Discourse and Practice*

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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 GBA+ application

GBA+ CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE WPS AGENDA IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

The authors of this working paper argue that the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is emerging as a field of both convergence and contestation in the Asia-Pacific region. Their analysis of National Action Plans (NAPs) across six countries in the region (the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Timor Leste, and Bangladesh) shows the diversity of approaches to interpreting and implementing this international set of norms regarding the protection of women and girls during armed conflict and their participation in peacekeeping, conflict resolution, prevention of conflict, and post-conflict recovery. The authors highlight emerging approaches to NAPs in Asia, providing a significant contribution to the research of regional approaches to WPS. The authors also make an important contribution to the study of whether feminist goals can be achieved in cooperation with state-led military actors; several of the NAPs they examine suggest cause for concern.

LOOKING INWARD RATHER THAN AT *WOMENOVERTHERE*

As the authors point out, there is a key difference between the NAPs of countries in the global North and those in other regions of the world with regard to their focus and geographic framing of *the problem*. Countries in the global North (including Canada) tend to focus on gender inequality and gender-based violence as it exists *outside* their borders. They tend to paint themselves as champions of gender equality, and gender equality as something to be *brought to* countries of the global South. This is what one critic has called the WPS agenda's obsession with *womenoverthere* as the archetypal racialized, ethnicized, and feminized victims of armed conflict (Henry 2021). When the NAPs of Asia-Pacific countries mention gender inequalities, they tend to look inward as much as outward. While

there is a great deal of variation among the NAPs of Asia-Pacific countries, they have tended to be more attentive to gender inequalities *within* their borders than thas been the case for the countries in the global North (Miller et al 2014; Shepherd 2016). In this respect, Canada can learn from the example of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Over the past decade, Canada has been pushed by advocates to consider its domestic WPS Agenda. While the current Canadian National Action Plan (CNAP) shows more attention to how WPS issues within Canada need to be tackled, the domestic WPS agenda is once again being raised as an issue that deserves more attention in the development of a new CNAP to replace the current one in 2023 (Breeck and St. Pierre 2021).

INTERSECTIONALITY AND WPS

The authors note the limitations of WPS scholarship and practice in terms of *intersectionality*. Intersectionality underscores the importance of examining how sex and gender intersect with each other and with other factors, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, geographic location, socio-economic status, and more. Intersectionality also underscores the overlapping systemic forms of marginalization and subordination inherent in sexism, misogyny, racism, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity. WPS work has generally prioritized women as subjects as well as gender as a category of analysis over intersecting factors such as race, religion, sexuality, etc. The NAPs in the Asia-Pacific region also suffer from this limitation, and vary in their recognition of intersectionality as a consideration in gendered experiences of armed conflict. Critiques of WPS have emerged that emphasize the need to go beyond "women" and "gender" by, for example, paying more attention to LGBTQ issues or race issues. Queer International Relations scholar, Jamie Hagan (2016) advocates for a queering of the WPS Agenda. This would mean including LGBTQ people in WPS work, paying attention to indicators such as sexual orientation and gender identity, and collecting data about LGBTQ individuals in conflict, among other things. Moreover, critical race feminist Marsha Henry (2021) has recently argued for more attention to how "whiteness is central to the operation of WPS as a normative and political practice" (1). These important and timely critiques underscore the need to advance intersectionality within the WPS Agenda, in terms of both the consideration of intersectional identity factors and intersecting structures of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression. This calls for a more intersectional lens on WPS and especially the inclusion of LGTBQ issues will, admittedly, lead to resistance in the Asia-Pacific region, which poses a challenge for the future of international collaboration on the WPS agenda.

STATE-LED WPS AGENDA

The authors note a potential disconnect between the primarily top-down WPS agenda and regional feminist work occurring in the Asia-Pacific region. The NAPs in the discussed countries often paint women as victims of gendered insecurity, essentialize women's peacefulness, or downplay women's agency in peace and security work. Moreover, states in the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere, use the WPS Agenda to position themselves vis-à-vis other states and perform a particular state identity. In many ways, the WPS Agenda reinscribes the state as central and primary actor in national and international security, even as the WPS Agenda originated out of women's advocacy and a desire to challenge state-centric and gender-blind conceptions of security. The dichotomy of states as agents versus women as victims reinforces unequal power dynamics between women activists and the

political elite. The authors urge the consideration and inclusion of regional perspectives from women activists who have been working on the ground in their communities. It is important to remember that this bottom-up advocacy work is occurring whether or not there is any crossover with the formal WPS work that states or international organizations are engaged in.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In light of existing limitations to the WPS agenda, and as evidenced by the example of NAPs in the Asia-Pacific Region, Canada should seek to become an active *innovator* of the WPS Agenda domestically and internationally. This means promoting a more intersectional perspective on WPS, and specifically developing a critical race-informed feminist and queer lens on WPS.

- At the same time, Canada will be well served to reflect on its own role in potentially reproducing neocolonial relations, white and Global North privilege, and heteronormativity in its WPS Agenda. Learning from the advancements and limitations of WPS Agenda implementation in the Asia-Pacific region, Canada can reflect on its own *positionality* in WPS relations internationally.

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- The above two recommendations create tensions and challenges for Canada that need to be addressed creatively and diplomatically. Being an international innovator of the WPS agenda without reproducing an image of Canada as a white, liberal, and paternalist Western country will require ongoing critical self-reflection and frank engagement with regional players.

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- Following the example of NAPs in the Asia-Pacific region, Canada should continue to *deepen its domestic WPS Agenda* as civil society groups and advocates have been calling for. Canada's NAP ought to look at, if not focus on, how gendered and other intersecting insecurities are perpetuated within Canada, especially considering the crisis around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women or of sexual misconduct in federal government departments and institutions.

- Finally, Canada should go beyond state-to-state engagement on WPS in the Asia-Pacific Region, as established communities of practice (i.e., women activists, community leaders, and peacemakers) exist whom Canada can support, collaborate with, and *learn from*.

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