CENTRE *for* GENDER *in* POLITICS

POLICY BRIEF

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If interested in the full MSc thesis, *Investigating the Exclusion of SGMs in Current Peacebuilding Frameworks: Queer Theory's Potential for Creating A Substantively Inclusive Youth, Peace and Security Agenda,* please contact me at Dennis.aveta@gmail.com.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Opportunities for Queering the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda

The Youth, Peace and Security Agenda was created with the adoption of UN resolution 2250 in 2015, formally initiating a pathway for young peacebuilders to showcase their agency and capacity as changemakers while highlighting the specific challenges that young people face in times of conflict. However, regardless of such ambitions the YPS Agenda and subsequent programming have routinely come up short in their endeavours to adequately include young LGBTQ+ peacebuilders and their peacebuilding and security concerns.

Centering the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ peace and security experts and youth activists, this policy brief serves as a foundational resource for civil society actors to better understand the experiences of young LGBTQ+ peacebuilders. Moreover, concluding with highlighted areas for action, this brief provides recommendations for how CSOs can take initial steps towards 'queering' the YPS agenda and better supporting LGBTQ+ peacebuilders moving forward.

The Centre for Gender in Politics serves the growing community of feminist scholars and activists in international studies who apply a gendered lens to understand challenges in global politics. Research conducted at the Centre investigates the centrality of gender, in intersection with other categories such as race, class, sexuality and ability, in shaping local, national and global dynamics.

Greater Inclusion and Substantive Success in Future Peace and Security Programming Through YPS

Drawing on the experience and knowledge of LGBTQ+ academics, peace and security professionals, and youth activists through semi-structured interviews, the following findings are broken into three sections. First, the peace and security concerns of LGBTQ+ communities; Second, LGBTQ+ engagement in WPS; and finally, LGBTQ+ engagement in YPS.

Peace and Security Concerns of LGBTQ+ Communities

- **Protection**: LGBTQ+ communities face persecution and violence both in times of conflict and in times of 'peace', so it is no surprise protection is a central concern for many. While these concerns must be taken seriously, they should not be the only lens through which queer people are viewed in discussions of peace and security. Additionally, better protection measures must be employed when LGBTQ+ peacebuilders are brought into advocacy and policy spaces.

- **Context matters**: All interviewees emphasized the importance of understanding the context in which queer communities live, highlighting the reality that SGM communities around the world are not all the same and that varying levels of acceptance within societies motivate diverse security concerns and peacebuilding priorities.

- **Meaningful participation**: While it is important for LGBTQ+ communities to talk about how they face specific forms of targeted violence, we are not simply sources of lived experience to be examined and then forgotten about. Queer people have agency and the capacity to be leaders in peace and security spaces. LGBTQ+ peacebuilders need to be afforded opportunities for more substantive roles in the creation of programming and policy.

- **Fear of tokenization:** Worries of tokenistic inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities, especially of queer youth, were raised by multiple interviewees. Clarifying how some engagement efforts play out, one interviewee explained that queer youth are sometimes brought in for the sake of *"we need a non-binary person so that we have better gender diversity that we can then prove and then check a box to say we engage with young people of more than two genders"*.

- **Economic concerns at the individual and institutional level:** At the individual level, LGBTQ+ community members face various obstacles when trying to find employment due to stigmatization by prospective employers, co-workers, and customers. Discussing the difficulties of locating and accessing funding on an institutional level, one interviewee explained, "*there's already such limited resources for YPS... there's literally nothing reserved for efforts of queer youth peacebuilders and activists in this field*".

- **New conceptions of "peace" and "security":** Several interviewees emphasized the need to reflect on and reconstruct current approaches to peace and security programming and policymaking, criticizing what traditional peace and security actors consider relevant to the sector. As one interviewee explained, **"***we are not only aiming for the lack of violence but for the institutions and structures that promote peace"*. Moreover, LGBTQ+ communities face violence in times of conflict as well as in times of 'peace'. This necessitates rethinking what 'peace' really means.

- **Queer Joy:** Ensuring LGBTQ+ communities do not face physical forms of violence in their daily lives is a critical goal for peacebuilding programming, however it is incorrect to believe this is where efforts should stop. As one interviewee stated, *"It's so important for queer people to find joy and be able to celebrate"*, emphasizing that such acts are radical in contexts in which society is not generally accepting of queer communities. Oppression in any form is violence and must be comprehensively deconstructed.

LGBTQ+ Engagement in WPS

As the agenda focused on creating a gender-inclusive peacebuilding movement, WPS was often viewed as the best (and only) place for queer peacebuilders to go with their issues and concerns prior to the establishment of YPS in 2015.

While some interviewees acknowledged that there has recently been a refreshing increase in interest amongst WPS actors to engage with queer communities and to address the issues they face, historically there has been little substantive progress. Key findings regarding the engagement of LGBTQ+ communities and the WPS agenda include the following:

- Some interviewees identified a newfound willingness to engage in LGBTQ+ topics in WPS spaces due to greater levels of acceptance of LGBTQ+ populations within various countries around the world as well as the fact that *"more people doing this work are out"*, emphasizing the importance of having queer workers in various organizations and institutions.

- While concerns of transphobic actors within WPS spaces used to be seen as one of the primary reasons for opposition, one expert explained that after years of conducting research on the intersections of the WPS Agenda and LGBTQ+ communities, it was instead usually a lack of capacity due to organizations being stretched too thin. However, tensions remain.

- Multiple interviewees explained that gerontocracy in WPS spaces has prevented support of innovative conceptions of peace and security as well as greater inclusion of both young women and LGBTQ+ peacebuilders.

- Most interviewees explained that they feel as if WPS actors have co-opted the term "gender", preventing more substantive allyship towards and inclusion of LGBTQ+ peacebuilders and their concerns**.**

- Concerns of performative inclusion or 'pink washing' were raised by several interviewees, citing concerns of organizations to appear progressive by checking off a diversity box.

- A 'hierarchy of needs' was identified by several interviewees with experience in WPS spaces, with one interviewee explaining that "*the comment of … this (LGBTQ+ populations) is such a small percentage of people is one that I've hear too many times honestly, which has been quite hurtful"*. Such thinking allows WPS actors to push off queer-inclusive efforts citing a lack of data, and thus inability to secure funding for programming.

- Tied to the issue above, even when there is a willingness to better engage with LGBTQ+ topics,

interviewees explained that a lack of data and expertise on queer subjects makes some WPS actors hesitant to move forward. Nonetheless, as one expert explained *"there's no luxury in movement building like this to wait until you know and become the expert on it, you have to show up and have the conversations"*.

LGBTQ+ Engagement in YPS

While there were various challenges identified to queering YPS, overall, there was a sense that the YPS Agenda was the best hope for reshaping conventional approaches to LGBTQ+ engagement and to conceptions of peace and security more broadly. Comparing their efforts to engage with concerns of SGM communities in both WPS and YPS settings, one interviewee explained that when she discovered the YPS Agenda, "it seemed much more inclusive, so I decided to make that transition from the agenda that was supposedly focused on people of different genders [WPS] to the YPS agenda which is, I would say more inclusive…" Key findings regarding the engagement of LGBTQ+ communities and the YPS agenda include the following:

- Overall, interviewees identified greater willingness to engage with LGBTQ+ communities in YPS spaces than in WPS spaces.

- While lived experience is recognized as important in both WPS and YPS spaces, interviewees explained that given the issues of the hierarchy of needs and lack of quantitative data on the experiences of LGBTQ+ communities, YPS actors are more willing to act solely based on the statements and sentiments of LGBTQ+ peacebuilders than WPS actors.

- Interviewees identified more frequent and more substantive programming on the intersections of YPS and LGBTQ+ communities than in WPS spaces.

- While YPS experts and activists are motivated to engage LGBTQ+ peacebuilders and community concerns, a lack of willingness on behalf of states and funding institutions to engage queer topics is preventing more substantive inclusion and programming.

- A major issue facing attempts to better engage and include LGBTQ+ peacebuilders is that it is difficult to locate them. Whether in countries that are "good" on LGBTQ+ issues, or in more repressive societal environments, queer peacebuilders are not always comfortable identifying themselves for fear of discrimination, tokenization, or violence.

- Another issue preventing more comprehensive inclusion of LGBTQ+ peacebuilders is this incorrect and harmful siloing of queer issues into the human rights field. As one interviewee explained, *"It's a very difficult conceptual argument for funding organizations or governments to really wrap their heads around of why when we're doing peace and security work, they should also be funding LGBTI organizations to be doing this work because in their minds its siloed off as a human rights issue."*

- In countries that are seen as "better" on LGBTQ+ issues, there is a misconception amongst donors and programming actors that inclusion has already been achieved. This presents obstacles both for initiating new programming focused on queer issues as well as maintaining existing efforts.

- Some interviewees identified paternalistic perceptions of the YPS agenda from WPS actors who claim that YPS is the "little sibling" and that "if it wasn't for women and women peacebuilders, YPS would not be a thing today". While competition over limited resources is certainly a source of tension, the claim that YPS would not exist without WPS denies the agency of young people and the intensive work youth peacebuilders put into the development and eventual adoption of the YPS Agenda.

Areas for Action

The following areas for action are highlighted based on the findings of the research and speak to steps that civil society organizations can take to help queer the YPS Agenda and the greater peace and security field:

1. **Conduct further research on the intersections of violence, conflict, and LGBTQ+ communities**. Having more quantitative data strengthens claims of legitimacy for efforts to queer peace and security, however any such efforts must be undertaken with an intersectional lens that explicitly engages all queer identities and breaks down the homogenization of queer communities.

2. **Create more safe spaces for LGBTQ+ peacebuilders and communities to connect professionally.** Creating more opportunities for queer peacebuidlers to connect professionally would help create a more centralized effort, strengthening the overall mission to create a more genuinely inclusive YPS movement.

3. **Develop training guidelines for LGBTQ+ peacebuilders.** CSOs well-versed in the peace and security field should organize technical training opportunities for queer peacebuilders as well as LGBTQ+ focused organizations to increase capacity and develop the necessary policy language to meaningfully engage in peacebuilding spaces.

4. **Strengthen allyship amongst WPS, YPS and LGBTQ+ organizations**. To create truly comprehensive strategies to break down patriarchal systems of oppression, feminist, youth, and queer organizations must recognize their common struggles and unite for intersectional, collaborative efforts.

5. **Elevating LGBTQ+ Voices.** Queer peacebuilders must be better supported by allies in policy spaces and given greater opportunities to break into leadership and other decision-making positions to help mainstream efforts to create a better-inclusive movement.

6. **Develop indicators of meaningful engagement**: More intersectional indicators must be created and mainstreamed in program monitoring efforts to ensure more comprehensive evaluation capacity regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity and engagement.

7. **For Donors: Develop funding opportunities for queer-focused projects.** Donors must create more sustainable funding opportunities explicitly intended for LGBTQ+ peacebuilders with limited restrictions on programming so that queer organizations have autonomy and agency in the creation of programming.

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