North America needs Youth, Peace and Security: young people shifting tides for positive peace

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Abstract

The United Nations' Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda ensures and demands the protection and recognition of young people's roles in peace and security. This article focuses on why domestic YPS implementation is needed with the rise of social justice activism by young people in North America.The rise of youth activism and youth leadership in social justice movements has given a space for the global political agenda to challenge traditional approaches to "peace and security" frameworks. This includes challenging pre-conceived notions of YPS - and its policy frameworks - as a 'foreign' agenda by North American countries. We argue that this global shift in youth social justice activism demonstrates the need for critical domestic implementation and policy priorities for the YPS agenda within traditional donor- or Western- States, using Canada and the United States as case studies.

Keywords: Youth, Peace and Security; youth activism; structural violence; social justice; peace and security; United States; Canada

Résumé

L'agenda des Nations Unies sur la jeunesse, la paix et la sécurité (YPS) assure et exige la protection et la reconnaissance des rôles des jeunes dans la paix et la sécurité. Cet article se concentre sur les raisons pour lesquelles la mise en œuvre nationale de l'agenda YPS est nécessaire avec la montée de l'activisme de la justice sociale par les jeunes en Amérique du Nord.La montée de l'activisme des jeunes et du leadership des jeunes dans les mouvements de justice sociale a donné un espace pour l'agenda politique mondial pour remettre en question les approches traditionnelles des cadres de "paix et de sécurité". La montée de l'activisme des jeunes et du leadership des jeunes dans les mouvements de justice sociale a donné à l'agenda politique mondial un espace pour remettre en question les approches traditionnelles des cadres de " paix et de sécurité ". Nous soutenons que ce changement mondial dans l'activisme pour la justice sociale des jeunes démontre la nécessité d'une mise en œuvre nationale

critique et de priorités politiques pour l'agenda du SPJ au sein des États donateurs traditionnels ou occidentaux, en utilisant le Canada et les États-Unis comme études de cas.

Mots-clés : Jeunesse, paix et sécurité ; militantisme des jeunes; violence structurelle; justice sociale; paix et sécurité; États-Unis; Canada.

Introduction

The number of youth-led social justice movements has been rising in recent years. Although the involvement of youth in movements is not a new phenomenon, developments in technology and the changing political sphere and landscape have been noted as particular catalysts for this dramatic rise in youth activism (Braxton, 2016). Young people around the world have been taking a stand for their rights and demanding recognition and participation in decisions that directly impact them and their communities (Taft, 2011).

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of youth activism increased as the world shifted into a more digital one. The pandemic has brought to light various systemic injustices that could no longer be hidden as they were in a pre-COVID world (Chang, 2020). The pandemic has seen a dramatic shift towards the digital as many cities, regions, and countries went into lockdowns. The use of social media platforms, which already had high rates of youth engagement prior to the pandemic, only increased. The use of resources such as social media provided youth the perfect avenue to raise awareness and continue to expand social justice movements and advocacy to wider communities (Sobowale, et al., 2020).

In this article, we argue that North America needs to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) domestically in order to address barriers and protect young people. With the increasing rate of youth-led social justice movements and activism, young people have pushed for increased awareness of the dangers faced by today's youth and for the need for measures to protect young people across North America. Grassroots actors are instrumental to the success of peacebuilding and social justice movements, as having the communities directly involved allows for a more sustainable solution to be achieved. The current analysis uses two case studies, Canada and the United States, who have both seen significant increases in youth-led social justice movement and activism, particularly since 2010.

Social justice literature

The concept of justice is one that has developed and adapted over centuries with changes in political and societal needs, values, and interests. Early understandings of justice included natural rights, which were popular prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century before falling out of favour. Natural rights would remain relatively unpopular, with the exception of Islam, until the end of the Second World War with the rise of the human rights movement (Fløistad, 2015).

The concept of justice was developed by philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant during the European Enlightenment, a contractarian mode of thinking that has influenced much of what is understood today as justice and, in turn, social justice. This theory, first brought forward by Hobbes, focused on a social contract centered around what Sen (2009) noted as "transcendental identification of the ideal institutions" (p. 6). This approach consisted of arrangements not only with institutions but also what was deemed as the right behaviour between people (Sen, 2009).

During the twentieth century, theories on justice and social justice were split again, much as they were during the European Enlightenment. Hayek (as cited in Parvin, 2018) deemed social justice a mirage that would lead to the destruction of personal freedoms. He used the term liberal justice to describe an approach that would protect individual freedoms through the establishment of free markets and minimal states.

Conversely, John Rawls (as cited in Parvin, 2018) defined social justice as a matter of redistribution, where the State should treat everyone fairly, and injustices should not be prescribed to individuals and groups based on factors such as gender and ethnicity. Rawls and his egalitarian theory describe a just society as one consisting of "a fair system of cooperation," where everyone has equal moral worth (Patton & Moss, 2019, p. 9). The work of Rawls has formed much of the basis of what is considered the traditional, pre-globalization understanding of social justice (Israel & Frenkel, 2020).

Theorists classified as communitarians were generally critics of the approach outlined by Rawls. One such critic was Thomas Walzer (Meyer & Sanklecha, 2016). Walzer's *The Spheres of Justice* (1983) argued that the concept of justice is undermined by diverse sets of social norms in addition to various goods within society (Bellamy, 1998). Walzer proposed a pluralistic theory of justice, consisting of spheres of justice. Some examples of different spheres of justice are work, education, and personal relations (Walzer, 1983; Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Based on his argument, an individual or a group can obtain various resources allowing them to have different ranks in different spheres. He argued for the variations of fairness rules depending on various factors such as the institution, nationality, culture, and goods being distributed (Konow & Schwettmann, 2016).

The present definition and understanding of social justice was developed further from the works of philosophers considering the effects of globalization. In its simplest form, the current definition of a socially just society is one where all people, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or identity can enjoy and benefit from human rights (Craig, 2018). The concept of justice, as noted by Fløistad (2015), is related to equality. The traditional association of social justice as a part of the centre-left agenda has been challenged as more individuals and groups that are not associated or identify under leftist politics or values speak up in its favour (Craig, 2018).

Social justice at the present maintains the complexity of earlier schools of thought. Fraser (2009a; 2009b) proposes that social justice, as it is understood in the current societal and global contexts, is split between ideas of redistribution and recognition. These two concepts are a battle between the practical and intellectual seeking to undermine one another. Increasingly, the current social justice model has seen a domination of the recognition approach in recent years as compared to redistribution. The earlier norms of needing to assimilate to the dominant culture is no longer the model for achieving equal respect and recognition within society, as the aim now is to be

recognized as individuals with unique needs and experiences (Fraser, 2009a).

Based on this idea of recognition, Patton and Moss (2019) noted the use of 'historic injustice' which focuses on past wrongs experienced by individuals and groups. This idea focuses on the use of 'balanced reciprocity' with three main outcomes: reparation, restitution, and compensation (p. 11). This approach to social justice has been common in North America. For example, restitution has applied in the case of returning seized land to Indigenous peoples or honouring various treaties across Canada (Patton & Moss, 2019).

Sayer (2018) noted that equality and enjoyment of rights should not depend on a lottery at birth (pp. 35-37). Although he was referencing economic rights, this is true for all rights and being able to live in a just society as explored in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971). The democratic model, on which Canadian and American political systems are built, is meant to ensure a certain level of social justice within the political sphere in addition to providing a remedy for economic and societal injustices (Beetham, 2018). Parvin (2018) posed the questions: What does one want to see their political systems do? What is the purpose of the political system? Individuals and groups were encouraged to ask these questions of their own political systems and potentially identify areas of injustice.

Contextualizing YPS policy

Parallel to the decades of social justice literature, socially oriented movements in North America and around the globe have been growing steadfast and garnering international attention. This significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic given the vast turn to the online space. But have young people always been at the forefront of global movements and the fight for social justice? Some would argue that young people are the catalyst for social change across generations (Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Security Council, 2020). With over 1.85 billion young people around the world,

it is clear that they have the potential for political, social and economic power - but is this power being grasped and recognized?

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted the first thematic resolution on youth and peace and security (Berents and Prelis, 2020). Resolution 2250 set the framework for the protection of young people in conflict; demanded their participation as equal actors in peace and security; ensured their role in the prevention of conflicts; paved the way for meaningful partnerships with young people; and outlined the need for disengagement and reintegration (Security Council, 2015). The adoption of the resolution, and two subsequent resolutions in 2018 and 2020, are instrumental to the recognition of young people's roles in conflict and post-conflict recovery (Leclerc, 2020).

Berents and Prelis (2020) point out that the first workshops on youth and peacebuilding, including growing attention by academics on the topic of young people, began in early 2000 (p. 7). Fifteen years of vested interest, numerous coalitions and even the appointment of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in 2013 supported the adoption of what became the Youth, Peace and Security agenda (Berents and Prelis, 2020, 7). Although Resolution 2250 has been celebrated by many, the policy also has certain limitations. Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) argue that the resolution does not address social justice enough and provides an un-nuanced image (p. 860). They argue that the consistent concern of preventing violent extremism and the radicalization of young people provides no distinction between the forms of violence addressed by the resolution (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015, p. 860). Furthermore, Anderson (2019) states that this is no surprise as the security agendas were largely shaped by global attention on violent extremism, especially following the attacks of September 11th, 2001 in New York. However, Anderson (2019) also highlights that the resolution was intended to change this perception of young people as prone to violence or extremism (p. 71). This continues to be a highly contentious area with regard to YPS – a question to further explore in the context of radicalization and ongoing terrorist attacks in the United States and Canada.

Further criticism has arisen, especially in recent years, as state and non-state actors continue to view youth leadership in peace and security as exclusive to conflict zones, where overt violence was or had occurred (Leclerc and Wong, 2021). Given the rise of social justice movements in the United States and Canada, peacebuilding actors founded the US YPS Coalition in 2019 followed by the creation of the Canadian Coalition for YPS in late 2020. Both networks engage in international YPS advocacy, including the introduction of the US YPS Act in Congress in 2020; but they also collaborate to promote and uphold YPS priorities domestically (Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2021; Leclerc and Wong, 2021).

The catalytic events following the adoption of Resolution 2250, the growing racial and social tensions in both countries, and the increasing interest in social equity in the region paved the way for much of the inwards-facing priorities of peacebuilding actors based in Canada and the United States. Before moving further on YPS implementation within a domestic context, and the growing social justice movements largely championed by young people, we must first recognize that young people have been working in their communities long before any of these international policies were introduced (Berents, 2018). Social justice movements led by young people and resistance to injustices have been raised and priorities for younger generations for decades. These policy frameworks and rise in recognition of young people's work within the United Nations now paves the way for strong intersectional, more efficient, regional collaboration for such causes.

In peace studies, everyday peace offers an alternative look to traditional liberal peace (Richmond, 2011). Everyday peace recognizes that peace is political – that all actors in peacebuilding are also political in their being. Thus, authors, such as Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015), Richmond (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015), Mac Ginty (2010, 2013) and Mitchell (2011a, 2011b) argue that focusing on everyday peace is to ensure the needs of community, local people, and daily experiences are addressed, which is often dismissed or disregarded by liberal peace approaches (Berents, 2018). We argue

that Youth, Peace and Security priorities and domestic policies are frameworks which follow everyday peace principles – thus, that North America needs YPS to ensure the needs of communities and daily experiences are addressed. Therefore, social justice is the system that holds the aspirations, YPS is the framework that paves the way, and everyday peace is the approach.

Structural Violence

In addition to the everyday peace theory, structural violence also plays a role in this discussion. In 1969, Galtung introduced the concept of structural violence and defined the terms of *negative* and *positive peace*. He defined negative peace as the absence of personal violence and positive peace as the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1969, 183; Galtung and Fischer, 2013, 173). He largely equated the latter with social justice as he claimed that the concept was ever-changing and sought to positively define conditions for peace (Galtung, 1969; Hansen, 2016). This conceptualization of positive peace is the fundamental argument for the need for inwards-looking YPS policies in Canada and the United States. This demonstrates the need for YPS to go beyond traditional security approaches, and to address structural violence as a key threat to peace. The following Canadian and US examples will demonstrate this argument.

Examples from Canada Indigenous Youth-Led Movements

At the beginning of 2020, an environmental movement swept across Canada garnering widespread attention. The Wet'suwet'en solidarity movement was in opposition to the approval and commencement of construction on the Trans-Mountain Pipeline in British Columbia (BC). This pipeline would have crossed over unceded Indigenous lands of the Wet'suwet'en peoples and lacked the proper approval from hereditary chiefs (Powell, 2020). The pipeline and subsequent land defense movement opened the eyes of not only Canada but the international community to issues concerning the

environment and injustice, rights violations, and inequality of Indigenous peoples (Gobby & Gareau, 2019).

The solidarity movement was largely spearheaded by Indigenous youth who played, and continue to play, a major role in the fight against the pipeline and in defense of the environment and traditional Indigenous lands. Young Indigenous land defenders organized various events such as protests and sit-ins while also organizing a series of barricades including more than six railway blockades across Canada (Adby, 2020). Many young people chose to take a stand against what was noted as the latest injustice and disregard for Indigenous sovereignty in a long history of oppression (Sayers, 2020). During the course of the movement, there were various arrests made, including of Indigenous leaders, activists, and youth. Many of the arrests have led to no charges being laid, further enforcing the belief that the police and provincial BC authorities have employed force and arrests as a mechanism of fear and intimidation. However, these tactics have had a reverse effect, mobilizing more Indigenous youth, activists, and community leaders to stand in solidarity with the movement (Powell, 2020).

In addition to the environmental and sovereignty issues raised with the Trans-Mountain pipeline, it also has links to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2+ persons crisis (MMIWG2S). As Gandbhir (2020) noted, resource extraction projects lead to increased rates of violence against Indigenous women, children, and LGBTQ2+ individuals. The 'man-camps' or 'work camps' where pipeline construction workers live have a history of being dangerous environments for Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals both inside the camps and in neighboring communities, with acts of violence being commonplace (Shi, 2020; Gandbhir, 2020).

The MMIWG2S crisis and disproportionate levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2+ individuals are issues that date back generations in Canada, rooted in colonialism and systemic racism (Wong, 2021). Indigenous women, girls, and

LGBTQ2+ individuals have been speaking up about the disproportionate levels of violence and the MMIWG2S crisis for years (Johnstone & Lee, 2021). The launch of the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S brought to the forefront what Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2+ individuals had been fighting against for generations. *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG* (2019) outlined 231 Calls to Justice with actions to be taken in various arenas, such as all levels of government, police forces and the RCMP, and within society (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019; Wong, 2021).

Movements such as these have worked to challenge the legacies and deeply embedded systemic racism and structural violence within Canada. The United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security outline five pillars, two of which - *protection* and *participation* - are central to the movements. Member States, such as Canada, have the obligation to protect young people as civilians. Young Indigenous land defenders, in the case of Wet'suwet'en, face dangers associated not only with other civilians perpetrating acts of violence and discrimination against them but there is also the fear of violence, arrest and further persecution from authorities such as the police (Sayers, 2020). The MMIWG2S crisis has been described as a Canadian genocide which continues to affect Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2+ individuals. Particularly, youth are highly affected by the crisis and remain a vulnerable community that still lack the adequate *protection* they require (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019). Additionally, addressing issues and barriers experienced by the Indigenous peoples in Canada such as land disputes, violence, and the MMIWG2S crisis requires the *participation* of those directly affected by the decisions being made, in this case Indigenous peoples (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019; Powell, 2020; Wong, 2021).

LGBTQ+ and Public Safety in Canada

Within Canada, LGBQT2+ young people are overrepresented in youth homelessness. The Canadian Mortgage and

Housing Corporation (2019) estimated nearly one out of three young people in Canada experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ2+. In addition to this, they frequently face unsafe shelters and emergency housing programs, exacerbating their already vulnerable status (Abramovich, 2016). The current COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the vulnerabilities and barriers faced by LGBTQ2+ youth in Canada.

Statistics Canada (2020) noted that, during the pandemic, LGBTQ2+ youth faced inadequate and unaffordable housing. Some young people were forced to have repeated exposure to homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic relatives during periods of isolation. Family rejection is frequently linked to the high rate of homelessness among LGBTQ2+ youth in Canada (Wheeler, et al., 2017). Lack of acceptance within close social circles, such as family, have long since been associated with the high rates of homelessness among LGBTQ2+ youth (Wheeler et al., 2017).

Shelters across Canada often prove to be dangerous environments for LGBTQ2+ youth. Barriers faced by youth include a lack of knowledge and training for staff, invisibility of LGBTQ2+ youth within the system, normalized homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia, and problematic rules that can be inadequate in scope and invasive (Abramovich, 2014). The fight for recognition and inclusion of LGBTQ2+ voices has been a long one. It took decades for key decision-makers to bring the issues faced by the community, such as *protection*, to the table and recognize the unique and distinct needs they have (Abramovich, 2016). However, issues for LGBTQ2+ youth persist in Canada.

The *protection* of LGBTQ2+ youth in Canada is an area that requires further improvement. Resolution 2250, similarly to the case of Indigenous youth, notes the obligation of Member States to protect young people as civilians. The insecurity and dangers faced by LGBTQ2+ youth in terms of homelessness and the lack of available or willing support has made these youth more vulnerable (Abramovich, 2012; Abramovich & Kimura, 2019). Additionally, the issue of

LGBTQ2+ youth homelessness and other issues faced by the community further exacerbate the issue of *protection*. The implementation of the YPS agenda in Canada could bring these challenges to light where they have otherwise been invisible in Canadian society.

Examples from USA

Mass shootings – March for Our Lives

Between 1970 and 2019, there have been 1,316 school shootings in the United States (Zimmerman et al., 2019). From 2009 to 2018, at least 288 school shootings took place (Grabow and Rose, 2018), leaving more than 228,000 students traumatized and affected by this senseless violence (Cox et al., 2019). Eighteen percent of school shootings have occurred since the high-profile tragedy that took place in December 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School (Zimmerman et al., 2019). The 2018 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida sparked national and international outrage. Following the seventeen lives taken in Parkland, and the culmination of several other mass shootings in the United States, young people quickly mobilized (Bent, 2019). Youth activists took to the streets to denounce gun violence and demand strict gun reform (Bent, 2019; Applegarth, 2020).

Parkland students, including Cameron Kasky, Jaclyn Corin, David Hogg, Alex Wind, Sophie Whitney, and Emma González – days after the shooting at their high school – strategically garnered media attention to generate a sense of common urgency among people all over the country (Bent, 2019, p. 58; Braun, 2019). This is also what led to the founding of the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement. MFOL (2021) was founded to "harness the power of young people across the country to fight for sensible gun violence prevention policies that save lives."

We argue that this demonstrates Galtung's (1969) approach to structural violence: the MFOL movement continues to challenge the current structural violence endured by young people through the lack

of gun control which directly leads to increased school shootings – and thus, young people in the United States live in a constant state of fear from the threat of violence. MFOL's direct and concrete policy demands also support this argument as they demonstrate that these young people are actively challenging the structural violence imposed on them – this is highlighted under the *protection* pillar outlined in Resolution 2250. The *protection* pillar of the Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security specifically reaffirms the need and obligation of Member States – in this case the United States – to protect young people, as civilians, from violence (Quintilla, 2016). The school shootings, and lack of immediate attention to gun reform in the United States, therefore, violates one of the five key pillars of the YPS agenda. This overt, consistent and systematic violence consequently targeted against young people demonstrates the increasing need for YPS policy to have a domestic focus.

Legacy of Racism – Black Lives Matter

Another example of systemic and structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Galtung and Fischer, 2013) is seen through the legacy of slavery and racial inequality in the United States. It is widely known that the United States was founded and built on the backs of Black women and men; the movements in the South led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the sixties shed light on the continued racial disparities in the country. In 2013, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, shooter of 17-year-old Black male Trayvon Martin, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was born (Rim, 2020). Further violence against Black people at the hands of law enforcement continued in 2014 in Ferguson and Baltimore (Heath, 2018). The BLM organization "whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (BLM, n.d.) saw international attention following the grossly unjust and public murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in mid-2020 (Rim, 2020). Floyd's murder ignited thousands of BLM protests and activism – largely led by young people across the entirety of the United States (Honwana, 2019). Young people were met with tear gas, brute force by police officers, and serious personal security

threats by alt-right, white supremacist groups opposing their protests, categorizing their activism as riots and looting.

The Black Lives Matter protests have galvanized young people to demand structural changes and to, once again, stand up against systemic racial injustice in the United States (Honwana, 2019). This movement largely equates social justice with the need for racial equity in a country plagued by the unfair and critically under-resourced public education system, particularly in Black communities, and widespread unemployment and over-incarceration of Black youth (Honwana, 2019; Cobb, 2016).

The lack of a substantive response by the United States Government and other decision-making bodies to the violence perpetrated against BLM protesters, and the catalytic incident of the murder of George Floyd (among others who have been killed due to racism, including Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and Dion Johnson) all demonstrate the immense structural violence that is caused by racism in the United States (Zaid, 2020). Both the *protection* of young activists, falling directly under the YPS pillar and the overall principles of peace and security challenge these inequalities.

Racial profiling of young Black men (Schwartz, 2020) – i.e., assuming that they are inherently violent – is challenged by YPS discourse. Stereotypes of young Black women and their over-sexualization (Rosenthal and Lobel, 2016) also demonstrates underlying biases and harmful assumptions. YPS principles call for the integration and recognition of young people as agents of peace – rather than agents of war. This needs to be reflected internally in the United States also. These examples clearly demonstrate the need to embrace the notions that *protection* and *participation* of young people – as outlined by the YPS Resolutions – contribute to advancing social justice and positive peace in their communities. Thus, young Black activists ought to be awarded the same protections by YPS frameworks as others who live in conflict-affected and war-torn regions.

Relation to overall peace and security

Defining Feminist Security

With these examples comes the question of what constitutes security. Traditional security studies, as defined by international relations and defence scholarship, view security as the military-based, state-level security and sovereignty of governance. Security is considered the maintenance of order and removal of threats to a state. Feminist scholarship, however, defines security differently. Feminist security, defined by Reardon and Snauwaert (2015), requires a "broad, holistic definition to assure that all interrelated and relevant factors affecting world security are taken into consideration. It would aim to protect life and to enhance its quality, providing equal attention to both fundamental requirements of human security" (p. 67). Reardon (2010) insists on the shift from state security to human security, where general needs of human populations and their quality of life is ensured – as outlined by Burton (1990)'s human needs theory. According to Reardon (2010), human security requires two main principles: 1) that individuals be protected from threats or attacks; and 2) that their needs be fulfilled (p. 66). This approach to feminist security theory challenges traditional security assumptions which are typically military- and defence-focused – usually equating security with military expenditure and power (Reardon, 2010).

Jackson (2020) adds that security was not initially defined through the consideration of individual deaths, but rather the "destruction of a collectivity: the (nation) state by another (nation) state" (Bigo, 2016, 1071). Williams (2013) emphasizes that the state of literature around security studies has, for a long time, defined itself through a framework of 'four Ss' – the states, strategy, sciences, and the status quo (Jackson, 2020, 22). There have been significant advances in security studies research over the past few decades. Weaver (2004) claims that security considerations are now defined "by labelling something a security issue [means] it becomes one" (p. 13). This demonstrates the porous parameters of security studies as its frameworks continue to grow and adapt to current geopolitical

dynamics – much like the ever-evolving YPS discourse as argued in this piece. The emergence of human security within international policy and the spill over in scholarship has added multiple facets to the traditionally narrowly defined parameters of security, including "epidemics, trafficking, criminality, famine, political alienation and ethnic tension" (Jackson, 2020, p. 26; Paris, 2001).

New feminist security scholarship has begun considering inter- and intra-state dynamics as security issues (Shepherd, 2009). For example, through the North attempt[ing] to fundamentally […] transform developing, and especially African, societies through state-building to create security and stability, in a policy characterized as 'enlightened self-interest' (Jackson, 2020, 26). This demonstrates a recent shift with security studies discourse, further analyzing power imbalances among key actors seeking to tackle security issues outside of the traditional militaristic and globalized approach (Shepherd, 2009; Waller-Carr, 2020).

Grassroots Peacebuilding

In addition to challenging traditional understandings of security, the concept of peace has become highly debated. This includes the YPS space which heavily emphasizes the concept of peacebuilding. This fairly recent concept among conflict studies – emerging in the early 1990s with the UN Agenda for Peace by then Secretary General Boutros-Ghali (1992) – was a turning point for the United Nations and many international actors who had largely focused their peace efforts on development and the maintenance of peace. Many peace efforts were limited to peacekeeping operations. Boutros-Ghali (1992)'s Agenda for Peace integrated Galtung (1969)'s positive and negative peace theory and coined the term *peacebuilding* as the process of achieving said desired positive peace. Today, peacebuilding is understood by international actors as a process – a series of actions – to achieve sustainable peace once a conflict has ceased. According to UN Peacebuilding (2010), peacebuilding has three main phases: 1) conflict prevention (Ackermann, 2003); 2) conflict resolution (Byrne and Senehi, 2009); 3) post-conflict reconstruction (True, 2013).

Paffenholz (2010) and Lederach (2005) prioritize the need for change and transformation required by peacebuilding processes. Lederach (2005)'s moral imagination theory demands the transformation of the possible; he argues that to achieve sustainable peace, one must imagine beyond the traditional barriers and constraints of a circumstance to be successful. Paffenholz (2010) offers a four-tiered approach to peacebuilding, insisting that civil society – grassroots – is the key to ensuring peacebuilding initiatives in the long term. She insists on the role of civil society in ensuring sustainable and proper peacebuilding methodologies; she argues that peace can never be achieved without local ownership (Paffenholz, 2010). Schirch (2004) also offers an applicable peacebuilding map theory – waging conflict nonviolently; reducing direct violence; transforming relationships; and building capacity – as a cyclical tool to achieve positive peace (Galtung, 1969). These theories-to-practice scholars are part of modern-day theorists who emphasize the need for praxis among scholarship. Praxis is the application of theory into practice, where the goal is to challenge social norms and discourses and to influence outcomes (Sandole and Staroste, 2015, p. 131). Other scholars go further into the concept of praxis, such as Freire (1970) and Lutfy and Toffolo (2018) who emphasize that praxis requires "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 51), much like Lederach (2005)'s moral imagination.

Another important component of peacebuilding research is coined as the local turn (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Heathershaw, 2013). Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) claim that the local turn is "seen as an affront to the liberal peace, a betrayal of Marxist-derived understandings of social justice, and certainly a rejection of the 'natural' right of the North to intervene in the political formations of the South" (p. 764). These scholars argue that no foreign intervention or Western organization truly knows or understands what is needed on the ground without adequate and meaningful collaboration and respectful dialogue with local people (Campbell, 2018; Cortright et al., 2017). The locals, working tirelessly to keep their families and communities safe, are the only ones who know how to relieve their situation. Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) define 'local'

as "the range of community-based agencies present within a conflict and post-conflict environment, some of which are aimed at identifying and creating the necessary processes for peace" (p. 769). Additionally, Autesserre (2017) defines 'local' as "the individuals, the family, the clan, the district, the province, and the ethnic group when it is not a national one" (p. 116).

Autesserre (2017) adds that for peacebuilding to be successful, local actors are crucial to the solution. However, there is also consensus that international support leads to more sustainable peacebuilding; that both the local and the international actors must work together for true peacebuilding (p.114). She argues that "the contributions of foreign actors to [peacebuilding] processes, and the elements that shape effective international action at the grassroots level is necessary to build the credible alternatives that are so sorely needed," (Autesserre, 2017, p. 126) thus showcasing the need for strong and equal participation from both the 'local' and the 'top-down' actors for successful peacebuilding.

These theories and nuances in peace and security approaches demonstrate the need for grassroots peacebuilding interventions in the North American context. They recognize that peacebuilding goes further than the simple peace and war dichotomy, but rather emphasize notions of negative peace and structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Galtung and Fischer, 2013). The unjust treatment and continued violence faced by citizens of the United States and Canada as outlined above are but a few of many injustices which are experienced in North America today. It is incorrect to assume that YPS and other peace and security agendas should not apply to these contexts.

Conclusion

Social justice has developed and adapted over generations. The current understanding has been undeniably influenced by globalization, with an emphasis on the concept of equality. The current model does not believe in privilege or luck being granted to certain

groups and individuals based on their circumstances and the life they were born into. People are encouraged to question the systems that construct society and the environments in which they live. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the world and its status quo. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a significant rise in youth-led social justice movements and activism has been witnessed around the world. In North America specifically, the large shift to online platforms and as systemic injustices became more apparent, youth mobilized across the continent.

Security is not exclusively concerned with the security of the State and protection from exterior threats but must also be concerned with the security and the safety of people within their borders. The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 calls for the equal *participation* of young people in peacebuilding. Youth engagement within YPS is not an exclusively active conflict zone issue or concern. As outlined in Galtung's (1969) concepts of negative and positive peace, peace in addition to security are instrumental to a domestic implementation of YPS in North America.

Examples such as Indigenous-led movements in Canada or the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States demonstrate the ongoing need for domestic implementations of YPS to ensure the full active *participation* and *protection* of young people. The inclusion of everyday, grassroots actors is key to peacebuilding, and this includes young people. The involvement of those directly impacted by decisions is instrumental to the success and achievement of peace. Without the *participation* and *protection* of local everyday actors, particularly youth, sustainable peace is not attainable.

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