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**‘Seeing’ the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Exploring the
Visual (Re)production of WPS through UK Government National
Action Plans**

October 2020 will mark the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace and Security’. Founded on civil society activity and leadership, 1325 was lauded a significant achievement for women’s/feminist peace activism.¹ To date, there are a total of ten resolutions, which make up the crosscutting WPS ‘agenda’.² Each resolution clarifies and expands the provisions and thematic rights underpinning 1325, and guides implementation throughout the UN system. The resolutions address priority areas across – what is commonly referred to as – the four WPS ‘pillars’: the *protection* of both the rights and bodies of women in conflict; the *prevention* of violence; and the *participation* of women in peace and security governance. The last pillar, *relief and recovery*, is concerned primarily with conflict survivors, particularly those who survive sexual violence. In 2004, to facilitate implementation of WPS at national and regional levels, the UN Secretary-General called on member states to develop National Action Plans (NAPs). There are now 83 NAPs/NAP-like documents, outlining priority areas for action under the broad auspices of WPS.³

After two decades of WPS, there is a significant volume of scholarship on the agenda. This literature draws attention to three distinct (though interrelated) ways through which WPS is reproduced: colonial, institutional, and epistemological, culminating in different WPS forms and/or products. The visual politics of WPS,

¹ See, amongst others, Felicity Hill, Mikele Aboitiz, and Sara Poehlman-Doumbouya, ‘Nongovernmental Organizations’ Role in the Buildup and Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28: 4, (2003), pp. 1255–69; Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella, and Sherri Gibbings, ‘Women, Peace and Security, Resolution 1325’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6:1, (2004), pp. 130–40; Elisabeth Porter, *Peacebuilding: Women in International Perspective*, (London: Routledge, 2007); Torunn L. Tryggstad, ‘Trick or Treat? The UN and the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security’, *Global Governance* 15:4, (2009), pp. 539-557

² The ten WPS resolutions are UNSCR 1325 (2000); UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009); UNSCR 1889 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2103 (2013); UNSCR 2122 (2013); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2467 (2019); and UNSCR 2493 (2019).

³ For an up-to-date database of NAPs, see <https://www.wpsnaps.org/>, (unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 18 may 2020).

however, which affects both how the agenda is enacted and how it is encountered, has been largely understudied. Despite being an intrinsic part of political communication, there have only been a few, tentative nods towards the visual,⁴ meaning that little is currently known about the visual politics of WPS. Taking instruction from the burgeoning scholarship on visual politics, I argue the visual is a vector of power in the reproduction of the agenda, and thus propose a fourth dimension of scholarly investigation into the reproduction of the agenda.

To explore the visual politics of WPS, this article engages in an in-depth visual analysis of United Kingdom NAPs and corresponding Annual Reports to Parliament.⁵ NAPs and Annual Reports – communicated through language and visuals (photographs, graphics, charts, and graphs) – are understood as a collection of representational practices.⁶ Examining the photographs that illustrate NAPs and Annual Reports, this article identifies the production of four subject-positions, which I place on a visibility spectrum: the ‘agential women-in-conflict’ (hypervisible), the women-as-victim (absent presence), the ‘international community’ (visibility), and the (invisibility) of men and boys. By theorising ‘seeing’ and visibility as mutually constituted, and marked by forms of structural power, each subject-position reveals the gendered, racialised, and colonial logics and hierarchies that underpin the visual reproduction of WPS.

⁴ Only two studies examine the WPS visibility, though neither study advances the visual as a new research agenda for WPS, nor proposes a new theoretical/methodological approach to examine visual reproduction: Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Making war safe for women? National Action Plans and the militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,’ *International Political Science Review* 37:3, (2016), pp. 324-335, p. 328; Toni Haastrup and Jamie J. Hagen, ‘Global hierarchies and the limits of localization via National Action Plans’ in *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security*, edited by Soumia Basu, Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, (Bristol University Press, 2020).

⁵ All images that are referred to can be found in the UK NAPs and Annual Reports to Parliament, which are available in the above dataset, but can also be found on the FCO website.

⁶ Roxanne Doty, *Imperial encounters: The politics of representation in North-South relations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

There are political implications to this reading. The representational practices that reproduce WPS, including its visual politics, assign meanings to subjects.⁷ For example, whether women are represented as passive victims (of war or sexual violence) or as agents (in building peace and guaranteeing security in war-torn communities post-conflict). The meanings that construct the subject-positions that the article outlines, and their wider discursive positioning within the documents, are part of discourses that enables certain possibilities for WPS policy, whilst proscribing others.⁸ The policies that emanate from these meanings, which reiterate gendered, racialised and colonial logics, will limit the agenda's transformative potential. Rather than transforming dominant structures of power, the visual politics of WPS contributes to reproducing them.

The argument develops in four stages. The following section explores the existing literature on WPS, outlining the colonial, institutional, and epistemological ways the agenda is reproduced. I thereby demonstrate that the visual has been overlooked, and thus propose a fourth dimension of scholarly investigation. Building on the scholarship on visual politics, as well as feminist and postcolonial scholarship, I then elaborate on the analytical framework that guides the research, developing a visibility spectrum. I follow with a discussion of case selection and methods. The fourth substantive section, subdivided to focus on each subject-position, presents the analysis and discusses the findings.

Reproducing the WPS Agenda

⁷ See, Laura J. Shepherd, 'Power and authority in the production of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325', *International Studies Quarterly* 52:2, 2008, pp. 383-404.

⁸ Laura J. Shepherd, 'Sex, security and superher(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and beyond', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 2011, pp. 504-521; Sam Cook, 'The women-in-conflict'.

The first mode of reproduction relates to the imperialist nature of the WPS agenda.⁹ Some, mostly postcolonial feminist scholars, have observed the colonial origins, intent, and language of SCRs on WPS,¹⁰ while others have explored the production of different subjects.¹¹ Tasked with implementing the provisions of WPS in so-called ‘fragile and post-conflict affected states’, Laura J. Shepherd found that most global North NAPs are oriented outwards, reproducing a world in which ‘conflict is to be found elsewhere and where solutions can be found here’.¹² Exporting WPS to states seen to be lacking in gender progressive norms¹³ Shepherd describes as a practice of “neo-colonial knowledge-transfer”.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it would be misleading to suggest the Global South is a “passive recipient” of WPS policies.¹⁵ At the same time, however, most European states emphatically reject the domestic implementation of WPS. In this sense, most Global North NAPs can be interpreted as colonial products, where only certain ‘women’ are considered in need of interventions like WPS, and those are predominantly women that reside in the global South.¹⁶ This follows Nicola Pratt who reads 1325 against Gayatri Spivak’s oft-cited observation about colonialism: ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’.¹⁷ As this literature

⁹ See, Gina Heathcote, ‘Naming and Shaming: Human Rights Accountability in Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) on Women, Peace and Security’, *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 4:1 (2012), pp. 82-105; Nicola Pratt, ‘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: 4, 2013, pp. 772-783; Maria Martin de Almagro, ‘Producing participants: gender, race, class, and Women, Peace and Security’, *Global Society* 32:4, 2017, pp. 395-414; Swati Parashar, ‘The WPS ‘agenda’: a postcolonial critique.’ In *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, by Sara E. Davies, Jacqui True (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Hasstrup and Hagen, ‘Global hierarchies’.

¹⁰ See, for example, Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender’; Heathcote, ‘Security Council 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: progressive gains or dangerous development?’ *Global Society* 32:4 (2018), pp. 374-394

¹¹ See, for example, Almagro, ‘Producing participants’; Parashar, ‘The WPS ‘Agenda’: a postcolonial critique’; Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender’.

¹² Shepherd, ‘Making war safe for women?’, p. 327.

¹³ Parashar, ‘The WPS ‘agenda’: a postcolonial critique.’

¹⁴ Shepherd, ‘Making war safe for women?’, p. 332.

¹⁵ Soumita Basu, ‘The Global South writes 1325 (too)’, *International Political Science Review* 37:3, (2016), pp. 362-374, 364.

¹⁶ Hasstrup and Hagen, ‘Global hierarchies’.

¹⁷ Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender’.

demonstrates, WPS is reproduced in accordance with old/new colonial/racial structures and hierarchies.

A second mode of reproduction concerns the bureaucratic institutionalisation of WPS. Scholars have investigated different institutions and processes of institutionalisation, including the adoption of NAPs, mainstreaming protocols, and gender training.¹⁸ Jennifer Thomson argues that feminist institutionalism, which examines the process by which gender reforms negotiate institutional settings governed by formal/informal gender regimes, offers productive openings for the study of WPS.¹⁹ Although NAPs provide the illusion of successful WPS take-up, it has been shown that this sometimes mask a top-down process that institutionalizes WPS in line with bureaucratic norms that buttress national security interests.²⁰ Guided by government agencies and international organisations (IOs), WPS is often co-opted, or stripped of the feminist intent of those NGOs pushing the adoption of 1325. That is, the potential for civil society and so-called (feminist) ‘insiders’ to harness – and institutionalise – WPS in order to advance a feminist, anti-militarist, and anti-racist approach to international peace and security.²¹

¹⁸ See, inter alia, Katherine AM Wright, ‘NATO’s adoption of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: Making the agenda a reality’, *International Political Science Review* 37:3, (2016), pp. 350-361; Roberta Guerrina, Katherine AM Wright, ‘Gendering normative power Europe: Lessons of the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Affairs* 92:2, (2016), pp. 293-312.

¹⁹ Jennifer Thomson, ‘The Women, Peace, and Security agenda and feminist institutionalism: a research agenda’, *International Studies Review* 21:4, (2019), pp. 598-613.

²⁰ Soumita Basu, ‘Gender as national interest at the UN Security Council’, *International Affairs* 92:2, 2016, pp. 255-273; Helen Basini, ‘UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans in post-conflict states: implications for policy and practice.’ In *Rethinking National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security* edited by Sahla Aroussi, (IO Press, 2017).

²¹ See, inter alia, Cora Weiss, ‘We must not make war safe for women’, *Open Democracy*, 2011. Online at, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/we-must-not-make-war-safe-for-women/>, (date accessed 25 April 2020); Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, and Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. (New York: UN Women, 2015), {http://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf}, (accessed 18 February 2019), p. 304.

Lastly, by asking: “*What is WPS, and how can we know it?*”²² the WPS community who write, work, and advocate in the field of WPS reproduce the agenda in epistemological ways.²³ That is the way in which WPS is reproduced as a tangible, knowable set of policies derivative of, though far exceeding, the foundational Resolution, 1325. The emergence of WPS as a ‘thing’ – or the idea of a “WPS episteme”²⁴ – coalesces around a number of knowledge claims, truths, and stories told about ‘women’, ‘peace’, and ‘security’. Producing knowledge about WPS promulgates particular assumptions about women’s roles both within the state and in relation to international peace and security governance (broadly understood), which have constitutive political effects.²⁵ According to Kirby and Shepherd, this “policy ecosystem” is a “complex field of ongoing activity with defined but porous boundaries”.²⁶

The majority of the aforementioned literature has concerned itself with linguistic modes of communication including the language of Security Council Resolutions (SCRs), the Council, NAPs, and advocacy material. Mainly poststructural, scholars have focused on the discursive construction of WPS, examining in particular articulations of gender, or the imbrication of gender with that of other power relations. Methodologically, WPS has therefore been investigated

²² Shepherd, ‘Knowing Women, Peace and Security’.

²³ Though understudied, recent studies include, Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Knowing Women, Peace and Security: new issues and new modes of encounter’, Introduction to a special collection for *International Feminist Journal of Politics*; Laura J. Shepherd, *Narrating the women, peace and security agenda: logics of global governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Women, Peace and Security: mapping the (re)production of a policy ecosystem’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, (forthcoming 2020).

²⁴ Shepherd, ‘Knowing Women, Peace and Security’.

²⁵ Basini, ‘UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans’; Caitlin Ryan and Helen Basini, ‘UNSCR Resolution 1325 National Action Plans in Liberia and Sierra Leone: an analysis of gendered power relations in hybrid peacebuilding’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11:2, 2017, pp. 186-206.

²⁶ Kirby and Shepherd, ‘Mapping the (re)production of a policy ecosystem’.

through discourse analysis,²⁷ interviewing,²⁸ and more recently, narrative analysis,²⁹ and sometimes through a combination thereof. Although recent scholarship has brought attention to new areas of practice, the visual aspect of WPS communication remains largely understudied, despite the visual being a distinct form of communication deserving scholarly investigation.

Indeed, the scholarship on visual politics demonstrates that although images and words are linked systems of meaning-making they are also politically significant in their own right. Nicholas Mirzoeff claims that this distinctiveness lies in the ‘sensory immediacy’ of the visual.³⁰ That is, its ‘undeniable impact on first sight that a written text cannot replicate’.³¹ Moreover, the unprecedented explosion of images since the Internet, the speed at which they are disseminated, and their ability to circulate far and wide in real-time, contributes to the specificity of the image. The visual, in all its myriad forms, is a fundamental part of the ways in which our political worlds are (re)produced, a portal through which we both encounter, and try to make sense of, these worlds. Having established the importance of paying attention to the visual site of WPS, I turn to the theoretical and methodological framework that guides the visual analysis.

Ways of ‘Seeing’: A Visibility Spectrum

²⁷ See, amongst many others, Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, violence and security: discourse as practice*, (Zed Books, London & New York, 2008); Jamie J. Hagen, ‘Queering Women, Peace and Security’, *International Affairs* 92:2, (2016), pp. 313-332.

²⁸ See, amongst many others, Almagro, ‘Producing participants’; Wright, ‘A masculinities perspective’.

²⁹ Recent studies include, Catriona Standfield, ‘Caught between art and science’ the women, peace and security agenda in United Nations mediation, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (2020); Shepherd, *Narrating the women, peace and security agenda*.

³⁰ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An introduction to visual culture*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p 15.

³¹ Mirzoeff, *An introduction to visual culture*, p 15.

What we ‘see’ is dependent on ‘visuality’: the notion that there is something or someone to be seen.³² ‘Seeing’ and ‘visuality’ are thereby understood as mutually constituted. Beyond sensory recognition of shape and colour, it is through established (though mutable) discourses that we are able to locate, categorise, and decode subjects/objects, as well as the relations between them. Visuality and ‘seeing’ are ‘socially constructed and culturally located’,³³ bound within ‘conditions of visibility’.³⁴ ‘Seeing’ is therefore not a matter of direct perception, but exists at the intersection between the gaze and the subject/object of representation.³⁵

‘Seeing’ is predicated on a gaze always inflected through, and co-constituting of, relations of structural power including (though not limited to) gender, race, and class.³⁶ For example, the photographic iconography of imperial Western powers, especially in the form of development-like images, remains marked by legacies of colonialism.³⁷ So, if we understand that development represents “a continuity of the

³² There is a vast literature that deals with the concept of ‘visuality’, see John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, (Penguin, 1972); Chris Jenks (eds.), *Visual culture*, (Routledge, 1995); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*, (Routledge, 2013).

³³ Julia Welland, ‘Violence and the contemporary soldiering body’, *Security Dialogue* 48:6, 2017, pp. 524-540, p. 528.

³⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, cited in Pidduck J, *The visible and the sayable: The moment and conditions of hypervisibility*. In: Grandena, F and Johnston, C (eds) *Cinematic queerness: gay and lesbian hypervisibility in contemporary francophone feature films*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p.12.

³⁵ Mirzoeff, ‘Introduction to plug-in theory’, p 122.

³⁶ ‘This analysis proceeds from the assumption that ‘race’ and gender are politically salient categories of analysis, as shown in many decades of feminist/decolonial scholarship. See, inter alia, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practising solidarity*, (Durham; London; Duke University Press, 2003); *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Mohanty. I deploy the concepts race, gender, and coloniality in the following ways. ‘Race’ is understood as a relation of power: socially constructed, historically, and spatially contingent system of categorisation, rather than a fixed biological essence. See, Roxanne Doty, ‘The Bounds of Race in International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22:3, (1993), pp. 443-461; Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.5. I also follow Patrick Wolfe in that race is a “trace of history”, in other words, “colonialism speaking”. *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, (London and New York: Verso, 2016), pp. 4, 10. Similarly, following critical and postcolonial feminism, gender is theorised as a relation of power inflected through multiple forms of structuring power. References to ‘brown’ and ‘white’ follow Spivak’s description of colonial relations and hierarchies: “white men saving brown women from brown men”, Spivak 1988, p. 92

³⁷ See, inter alia, Stephen Chan, Colonialism’ in *Visualising global politics*; Kennedy and Patrick, *Violence of the image*. However, I am not suggesting that all development images establish racial stereotypes through markers of superiority/inferiority.

work of their precursors, the missionaries and voluntary organizations that cooperated in Europe's colonization",³⁸ then the images that accompany development will also be marked by those structures, as well as contemporary relations and hierarchies.³⁹ Thus, we can better comprehend how imperial states might 'see' the world, but also how they might want themselves and their subjects to be 'seen'. As Edward Said seminally argued, the ways in which we construct the 'other' reflects the reproduction of colonial power and the conceptualisation of the 'self'.⁴⁰

What/who is rendered visible I argue exists on a visibility spectrum from hypervisibility to invisibility, which reflects the prevalence and/or strength of a particular representation.⁴¹ Julianne Pidduck explains that hypervisibility is the constant reiteration of something/someone. That is, the 'epistemological, cultural, political and economic regimes governing the re/production and dissemination of images [whereby] the prefix "hyper" suggests 'an excess or even frenzy of visibility'.⁴² The effect of this is 'more a mark of desire and fantasy than [an] anchor of "realness" or corrective to stereotype'.⁴³ The hypervisible subject circulates often 'without origin or reality'.⁴⁴

Through an excess of visibility a 'constitutive outside' is simultaneously produced in which there is a relative, or even complete absence, of images of something/someone. Invisible subjects/objects do not fit with idealised or accepted forms of representation.⁴⁵ Invisibility creates a representational vacuum, placing the

³⁸ Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coill, 'The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa', *International Affairs* 78:3, (2002), pp. 567-583, p. 201-245.568.

³⁹ Alexander and Mohanty, In *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*, p. xxi.

⁴⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: western conceptions of the Orient*, (New York: Vintage, 1978).

⁴¹ My use of the concept 'hypervisibility' draws from, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*; Pidduck, 'The Visible and the Sayable' as well as Welland, 'Violence and the contemporary soldiering body'.

⁴² Pidduck, 'The visible and the sayable', p. 9-10.

⁴³ Pidduck, 'The visible and the sayable', p. 10.

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, translated by P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman, (New York: Semiotexte(e), 1983), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Welland, 'Violence and the contemporary soldiering body', p. 527.

viewer in a position to (subconsciously) fill that vacuum in line with structures of power. Considering what might be invisible is to infer that the ‘knowledge’ being presented is partial and incomplete, meaning that invisibility (and hypervisibility) can represent forms of structural violence. Lastly, those representations coded ‘visible’ is understood as a third visual scale, existing somewhere between hypervisibility and invisibility. These mutually constituted motifs are used to locate dominant subject-positions, interrogate why those representations might prevail, and with what political implications.

To analyse the visual content of NAPs and Annual Reports, I propose a methodological framework that asks: what/who is represented, how are they represented, and the prevalence of particular representations. I develop this framework drawing initially from Lene Hansen who proposes we study ‘the image itself, its immediate intertext, the wider policy discourse, and the texts subscribing meaning to the image’.⁴⁶ The image is not subordinate to the text, but it is also not a standalone artefact, as it interacts with both texts (intertextuality), as well as other visuals (inter-visibility).⁴⁷ Following, I first examine the image alone, subjecting each photograph to a descriptive reading, by asking what bodies/actions are depicted, and how. Attention is then focussed on composition, movement, and colour. Second, I read each photograph intertextually/inter-visually, by analysing the captions, surrounding text, wider discourses, whilst also considering other important documents. Lastly, I develop this framework by examining how frequently different representations appear, coding each photograph in accordance with an initial typology of three motifs: visibility, hypervisibility, and invisibility.

⁴⁶ Lene Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for security studies: visual securitization and the Muhammed cartoon crisis’, *European Journal of International Relations* 17:1, (2011), pp. 5174, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image’.

Having outlined the theoretical and methodological framework, there are some preliminary observations I wish to make about the findings detailed in superseding sections. All images are polysemic, open to multiple interpretations, and constituted performatively through practice.⁴⁸ As Ariella Azoulay cogently writes, ‘the photographic act, which is said to reach its end when incarnated in a final product...is in fact a new beginning that lacks any predictable end’.⁴⁹ Moreover, my positionality affects how I interpret these photographs in ways that I am both aware and unaware of: what I am able (and not able) to ‘see’, the questions I ask, and the conclusions I draw. As a white, middle class, cisgender, woman located in the global North, and educated at Western universities, my gaze is neither neutral nor objective. I follow feminist theories and a feminist research ethic meaning that so-called knowledge production is always situated and partial; inescapable from, and bound up with, (gendered) bodies that are culturally and historically produced.⁵⁰ Thus, my position of relative privilege means that my engagement with these photographs, and those variously depicted, will always be structured by various power (im)balances. Perhaps my gaze reinforces a Eurocentric focus on the UK less able to comprehend the lives and experiences of those targeted by UK WPS policies.⁵¹ Simply recognising my positionality, however, does not remedy the limitations of my reading. Indeed, ‘power, privilege and perspective [are not] dissolved by inserting one’s self into the

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘The rhetoric of the image.’ In *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath, (1964; rpt. London: Wm. Collins Sons and Co), pp. 32-51, p. 156

⁴⁹ Ariella Azoulay, *The civil contract of photography*, (Zone Books, 2012), p.137.

⁵⁰ J. A. Tickner, ‘Feminism Meets International Relations: Some Methodological Issues’. In *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, edited by Brooke Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 19–41, p. 20.

⁵¹ See, Meera Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention: International Statebuilding in Mozambique*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice'.⁵² Rather, I want to draw attention to the 'god trick' 'of seeing everything from nowhere'.⁵³

Case Selection and Methods: UK NAPs and Annual Reports to Parliament

This article explores the visual reproduction of WPS by examining the photographs that illustrate UK NAPs and Annual Reports. Although there is ongoing debate about whether or not NAPs are the most appropriate vehicle for guiding state action on WPS,⁵⁴ they are (generally) regarded as the authorial WPS document produced at state-level.⁵⁵ NAPs translate, institutionalise, and implement the agenda into both foreign and domestic policy, making them prime targets for civil society advocacy.

The UK published its first NAP on 8 March 2006, after Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. As an early mover, and quickly recognising that WPS could be mobilised as part of its soft power, the UK committed itself (at least rhetorically) to the agenda. In the dialect of international governance, the UK sought to establish a position on WPS, and construct an image of itself, as a global 'leader' and 'expert'. In the ensuing years the Government would rearticulate this primacy in numerous statements, speeches, NAP iterations, and Annual Reports. When launching the 2014 NAP, for example, William Hague (then Foreign Secretary) emphasised the UK's

⁵² Beverly Skeggs, 'Techniques for Telling the Reflexive Self,' in *Qualitative Research in Action*, edited by Tim May (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 303-324, p. 312.

⁵³ Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective,' *Feminist Studies* 14:2, (1988), pp. 575-599, p. 587.

⁵⁴ See, Aisling Swaine, 'Assessing the potential of National Action Plans to advance implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325', *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law* 12, (2009) pp. 403-33; Jan Marie Fritz, Doering, S. and Gumru, F.B, 'Women, Peace, Security and the National Action Plans', *Journal of Applied Social Science* 5:1, (2011) 1-23; Aroussi. *Rethinking National Action Plans*.

⁵⁵ See, Barbara Miller, Milad Pournik, and Aisling Swaine, 'Women in Peace and Security through United Nations Security Resolution 1325: Literature Review, Content Analysis of National Action Plans, and Implementation', *Working Paper 13/GGP WP*, 9 May, (Washington, DC: Institute for Global and International Studies, The George Washington University, 2014).

“strong global reputation” on WPS reiterating, “The UK was one of the first countries to publish a national action plan”.⁵⁶

Reflecting this commitment, since 2006 the UK has produced multiple NAP iterations: in 2006, in 2010 (revised in 2012), in 2014, and the latest NAP published in 2018. From the adoption of the second NAP photographs were incorporated, increasing the total number from none in the first NAP (2006), which was no more than a brief, technical two-page note, to a total of nine images in the most recent iteration (2018), making successive NAPs visually rich. This mirrors the development of NAPs into comprehensive documents in line with the agenda’s expansion through the growing architecture of resolutions. UK NAPs are reviewed annually in the Reports to Parliament, which also include photographs, and are included in the data set. The 2014 NAP is accompanied by an implementation plan, and the 2018 NAP accompanied by a series of guidance notes, both of which include photographs and are also included in the data corpus. As the authorial state document, however, the UK NAPs constitute the primary site of analysis. My decision to focus on the UK also follows Roxanne Doty who explains that the narratives of Great Britain “exemplify the representational practices that continue to frame our understanding and knowledge of the ‘third world’”.⁵⁷

The photographs in UK NAPs are sourced mostly from DFID’s flickr account, although some are sourced from the UN photo archive. DFID is one of three government departments that own the agenda. The other departments are the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The Stabilisation Unit (SU) provides cross-governmental support. The flickr account is a

⁵⁶ House of Commons statements, UK NAP 2014-2017. Online at, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2014-06-16/debates/1406169000011/UKNationalActionPlanOnWomenPeaceAndSecurity2014-17>, (date accessed 25 March 2020).

⁵⁷ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, p.13.

repository of development-like images, which are used by various government departments for different projects, policies, and campaigns. The website states, ‘This flickr photostream features images that illustrate some of the kinds of work that we do and the challenges that we face’.⁵⁸ Hundreds of albums of overseas work are listed, and are variously titled, ‘Girls Education’ or ‘UK aid in 2019’.⁵⁹ One of the webpage tabs is labelled ‘Faves’, presumably these are the photographs judged to be the most visually pleasing according to some subjective criteria. Most of the photographs under ‘Faves’, and across the images more broadly, are agential images of women and/or children from the global South.

The photographs illustrating NAPs are not ‘WPS’ images per se, in so far as they do not necessarily depict ‘WPS’ activities, which are anyway not proscribed. Yet, photographs are chosen from the flickr account, which reproduces them as a constitutive part of ‘WPS’, themselves the site from which the visual (re)production of the agenda is analysed. During an interview for a related project, I was told that the role of choosing NAP photographs is often designated to a low-grade civil servant on the WPS portfolio, and that not much thought goes into the selection process. However, photographs that a civil servant can choose from includes mostly positive images of development, making it more likely that what gets included is a variation of the same theme. Another government official explained, ‘A report to Parliament of what we have achieved in the NAP is meant to be positive so we are not going to show negative images, and we are not writing much negative in the report’.

Primarily, NAPs are produced for, and read by, policymakers working in the field of WPS, as well as civil society actors who scrutinise these documents so to hold the Government to account. That said these photographs (and similar photographs)

⁵⁸ Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/people/dfid/>.

⁵⁹ Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157713145468838;>
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157712244471067>

are also disseminated beyond NAPs and Annual Reports. For example, they are posted online via DFID's flickr account, or are circulated using the social media accounts of different government departments, or CSOs. Crucially, therefore, the prominence of WPS visualisation holds greater significance, embedded and nestled within a wider hegemonic scopic regime.

From Victimhood to Agency

Representations of the 'agential women-in-conflict' across UK NAPs and Annual Reports represents the visual shift away from victimhood towards agency. Scholars trace this shift in development iconography back to the period following the Ethiopian famine (1984-85), which was characterised by a tide of charity images that depicted people in 'Third World' countries as passive victims in need of protection.⁶⁰ The suffering bodies of women, women with children, the elderly and, most commonly, lone children came to be regarded as the ideal image for development.⁶¹ The images embodied racist paternalism, however, which sparked concern among development institutions (and NGOs in particular), which was pivotal in this visual shift.⁶² This was formalised in the 1989 'Code of Conduct for Images and Messages related to the Third World' (since updated to 'Code of Conduct for Images and Messages'), adopted by the General Assembly of European NGOs:

⁶⁰ Kaplana Wilson, "'Race', Gender and Neoliberalism: Changing Visual Representations in Development,' *Third World Quarterly* 32:2, 2011, p. 316.

⁶¹ See, for example, Katrina Lee-Koo, 'Children'. In *Visual global politics*; Susan D. Moeller, 'A hierarchy of innocence: The media's use of children in the telling of international news', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 7:1, 2002, pp. 36-56.

⁶² Wilson, "'Race', Gender and Neoliberalism'; P. Coulter, 'Pretty as a picture', *New Internationalist*, 194, 1989; J. Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, (London: IB Tauris, 1993); Nandita Dogra, 'Reading NGOs visually'— Implications of Visual Images for NGO Management', *Journal of International Development* 19, 2007, pp. 161–171.

The image of our Third World partners as dependent, poor and powerless is most often applied to women who are invariably portrayed as victims, or worse still, simply do not figure in the picture. An improvement in the images used in education material on the Third World evidently requires positive change in the images projected of Southern women.⁶³

This shift is textually reiterated in UK NAPs regarding the expansion of SCRs. For example, the 2014 NAP states that, in 2013, the UK led the UNSC to adopt Resolution 2122 on WPS, which helped ‘move the debate away from the clichéd image of women as merely victims of violence.’⁶⁴ Resolutions 1889 (2009) and 2122 (2013) have been described as the two “participation” resolutions.⁶⁵ For example, Resolution 2122 commits the Council ‘to focus more attention on women’s leadership and participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding’.⁶⁶ Scholars have shown that the SCRs embody a tension between the agenda’s two dominant ‘pillars’: the ‘participation’ (of women in peace processes) and the ‘protection’ (of women from conflict and/or sexual violence). The images included within UK NAPs and Annual Reports do not mirror this discursive balance. Rather, it is the ‘agential women-in-conflict’ that is not only dominant, but also hypervisible.

Hypervisibility: The ‘Agential Women-in-Conflict’

Agential depictions of women from the global South appear frequently in the photographs across NAPs and Annual Reports. One of these photographs appears on the cover of the 2014-17 NAP (Fig.1) and has been cropped, and is the only

⁶³ The 2006 ‘Code of Conduct’ available at here, https://www.concern.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/page/images_and_messages.pdf.

⁶⁴ [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UK%20Revised%20NAP%20\(2014-2017\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UK%20Revised%20NAP%20(2014-2017).pdf), p. 4. Here the word ‘image’ refers to a broader representation of women that is not necessarily visual.

⁶⁵ Laura J. Shepherd, ‘WPS and Adopted Security Council Resolutions’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, edited by Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, (Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 100.

⁶⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 2122, para.1.

photograph in the document. We learn from the caption the photograph depicts Pakistani women waiting to vote.

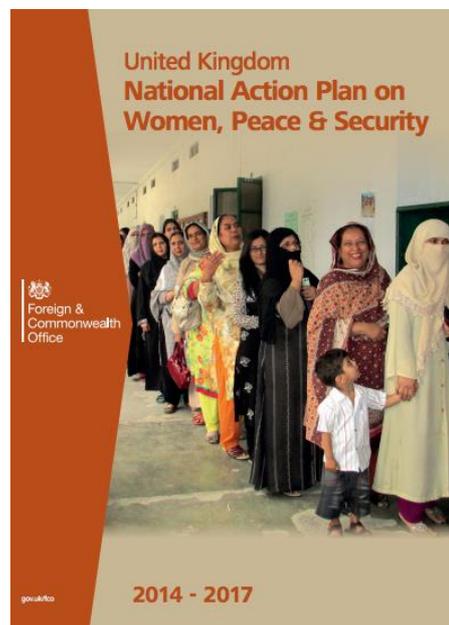


Figure 1. UK NAP 2014-2017. Caption: “Women Waiting to Vote in Pakistan”. **Image © DFID.**
***Reprinted with permission.**

As an indicator of democracy, voting represents a powerful form of liberal agency. In the context of war and conflict, voting signals a transition from ‘conflict’ to ‘post-conflict’, depicted as a result of external support provided by the UK, underlined by the prominence the photograph is given on the cover. The FCO logo, centred middle-left, further indicates the UK’s presence. The orange background, which reflects the colours of some of the women’s attire, visually blends the UK with the women from Pakistan. The women’s traditional dress attests to their ‘authenticity’, linking them to their cultural and religious beliefs, whilst also locating them as ‘local’ actors. Only one child features in the photograph; a young boy who holds the hand of, and looks admiringly towards, a maternal figure. She stands at the front of the queue. This is sufficient to reinforce interlinked themes of motherhood and caregiving. Using a young boy (the only male figure in the photograph) appears to reinforce female agency in this community. The image of a boy watching a mother

figure vote conveys her enfranchised state, not just to the boy, but also to all the report's readers. A visual display of a certain form of feminist emancipation and cosmopolitan universalism 'filters religious practices through a liberal understanding of self-expression and political citizenship'.⁶⁷

The position of the camera and the angle used to take this photograph emphasises the women's agency. As in most of the NAP and Annual Report photographs that depict women, the women gaze directly at the camera. They are close enough for their facial features to be recognised; erstwhile they are identifiable, so able to replicate the agency leitmotif. Although there is more than one woman in the photograph (and some of the others), it is not sufficient to render them 'faceless'. That the viewer is able to discern their facial features and the subjects (mostly) smiling expressions, conveys a sense of positivity which, in this case, is associated with being able to carry out the civic duty/right to vote. Scholars have found that being able to recognise facial features helps the viewer to personally identify with a subject, thus making a compassionate response more likely.⁶⁸ Lilie Chouliaraki argues that an identifiable subject helps give them a voice and humanizes them. This is compared with long shots depicting, for example, people en masse, which she argues is an example of "visual Othering" that can reiterate powerful hierarchies.⁶⁹ In the NAPs and Annual Reports, this is juxtaposed with those subjects who are either invisible, or whose faces are unrecognisable.

The visual reproduction of liberal agency mirrors the topography of feminisms, particularly liberal feminism, written into the language of SCRs, as well as

⁶⁷ Katherine Alison, 'American Occidentalism and the agential Muslim women', *Review of International Studies* 39:3 2013, pp. 665-684, p. 680.

⁶⁸ Roland Bleiker et al, 'The visual dehumanization of refugees', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48:4, (2013), pp. 3998-416.

⁶⁹ Lilie Chouliaraki, *The spectatorship of suffering*, (London: Sage, 2006), p. 90.

those feminisms that are silenced, namely Black/postcolonial feminism.⁷⁰ Swati Parashar argues that ‘WPS discourse endorses a particular liberal vision of equality and peace, which emphasises participation, but which does not appear to be inclusive of all interests and experiences’.⁷¹ Parashar explains that WPS does not accommodate women’s agency that goes beyond individual emancipation/empowerment, or fit within secular-liberal frameworks.⁷² Feminists argue traditional accounts of liberal agency⁷³ are however conceptually limiting,⁷⁴ not least because agency is a ‘tentative, complicated and evolving set of understandings and intentions’,⁷⁵ which defy simple representation.

Agential images are also found in the most recent NAP (2018-22). This NAP covers a timeframe of five years, and is organised around seven strategic outcomes (‘decision-making’, ‘peacekeeping’, ‘gender-based violence’, ‘humanitarian response’, ‘security and justice’, ‘preventing and countering violent extremism’, and ‘UK capabilities’). Seven of the nine photographs depict women from Ghana, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Not all of these are ‘focus countries’, which are defined as ‘areas where there is both a high level need for WPS work, and the potential for the UK to have a substantial impact on the situation for women and girls over the lifetime of the NAP’.⁷⁶ So, instead of photographs from ‘focus countries’ being used to illustrate the NAP text, there is a disconnect between the locations shown in the photographs, and the locations described in the text. This is visually

⁷⁰ See Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing Gender’.

⁷¹ Parashar, ‘The WPS ‘Agenda’: a postcolonial critique’, p. 833.

⁷² Parashar, ‘The WPS ‘Agenda’: a postcolonial critique’, p. 833; see also Basu. ‘The Global South writes (1325) too’.

⁷³ See, for example, Ahearn, ‘Agency and language’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30, 2001, pp. 109-137; Katherine Frank, ‘Agency’, *Anthropological theory*, 6:3, 2006, pp. 281-302.

⁷⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. x; Christine Sylvester, ‘Voice, silence, agency, confusion.’ In *Rethinking silence, voice and agency in contested gendered terrains*, Parashar and Pappart (eds), (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁷⁵ Sylvester, ‘Voice, silence, agency, confusion.’

⁷⁶ UK NAP 2018, p.3.

misleading, perhaps reflecting the haphazard way photographs are chosen. Nonetheless, this disconnect provokes questions about what progress is being made, and where.

A photograph accompanies each strategic outcome, and depicts various representations of agency: women in the military, in peacekeeping, and engaged in civil society activism. These representations mask an agency that is always more complicated, which would necessitate a more nuanced portrayal. Moreover, it blinds the viewer to the ‘serious, (infra) structural inhibitors that may well impede the (superheroic) activities of the women in post-conflict societies’.⁷⁷ However, the representation is powerful, not least because the NAP is part of a growing architecture of policies on women’s rights in international peace and security.

A notable exception to this particular ordering is Strategic Outcome 3: ‘gender-based violence’ (GBV), which is one of the key NAP objectives: ‘to reduce conflict-related gender-based violence’. Perversely, the photograph related to this outcome appears on the cover, alongside the caption ‘Darfur women march in campaign against gender-based violence’. The photograph depicts a column of women marching forwards. The woman closest to the camera lens is smiling, and giving a raised fist salute. The facial features of the five women standing at the front of the crowd are clearly visible, while the rest blur into the background. All the women are wearing what appears to be a UN uniform: white headscarves with blue lettering. The photograph shows female solidarity, a powerful grassroots response to GBV. Undoubtedly, the image seeks to illustrate the aspirational nature of the document. However, it is worth highlighting that historically violence against women

⁷⁷ Shepherd, ‘Sex, Security and Superher(in)es’, p. 511.

has been co-opted to frame women-as-victims, although this representation has been visually recalibrated to reflect agency, which is arguably more humanising.

There is another agential image in this NAP, which is distinguished as being the only photograph with children as its subject. The photograph shows a classroom of mostly female Rohingya refugee children. There are no parental figures, guardians, or members of the international community visible. The children are arranged in a semi-circle along the back wall of a makeshift UN structure. They are barefoot and clothed in brightly coloured garments; some wear skirts/trousers and t-shirts, others the hijab, the churidar, and the kurta pajama. A young girl is set apart from, and framed by, the others. The girl wears a long, burgundy, patterned skirt, with a purple, sleeveless shirt. Like the other children, her hands are clasped and she is smiling. The walls of the classroom are decorated with children's drawings and learning aids. In front of each child is a blue fabric bag on which is placed paper and pens. These learning aids appear to be part of a learning equipment package provided by UNICEF.



Figure 2. Cover page of UK NAP 2018-2022. 'Inside a Bangladesh refugee camp a classroom of Rohingya children sing English songs at a UNICEF learning centre funded by UK aid'. **Image © Anna Dubris/DIFD. *Reprinted with permission.**

The classroom represents a place of transition, both an educational environment and a safe house. From the caption we learn that the children are singing

English songs at a UNICEF learning centre in Bangladesh, funded by UK aid. Presumably, the education they are receiving helps increase their future prospects, yet at the same time affirms the cultural dominance of the English language, which has clear continuities with British colonialism. The caption further informs us that these children are refugees, forced to flee from Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh (both formerly part of the British Empire). However, this is not the usual image featuring children in distress,⁷⁸ rather it is one showing children as survivors with bright futures.

Their barefootedness conjures up images of poverty and rural living, whilst reaffirming their innocence. It is interesting that the photograph depicts mostly girls, and here Erica Burman's work is instructive. Burman posits that 'little girls are the quintessential child victims', and that femininity and childish dependence work together to evoke sympathy, but which contributes to the infantilization of the South.⁷⁹ Although there is some recognition of the heightened vulnerability of refugees and other migrants across UK NAPs, they remain largely unrepresented. It therefore seems misleading to include this image due to the failure to align WPS in successive UK NAPs with areas of international migration. I revisit this point later.

The wider geopolitical context further complicates this saviour narrative. British policy toward Myanmar continued to legitimise its de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, even though she remained silent as the Rohingya crisis unfolded in 2015. After a fortnight in which Rohingya Muslims had been reported killed, and with more than 120,000 people fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh to escape violence from the

⁷⁸ See, inter alia, Helen Berents, 'Apprehending the 'telegenic dead': considering images of dead children in global politics', *International Political Sociology*, 13:2, 2019, pp. 145-160; Erica Burman, 'Innocents abroad: western fantasies of childhood and the iconography of emergencies', *Disasters* 18:3, 1994, pp. 238-253.

⁷⁹ Burman, 'Innocents abroad', p. 242.

Burmese security forces, the former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, in an FCO press release, praised Suu Kyi's for her 'remarkable qualities' to unite the country.⁸⁰

Absent Presence: The 'Woman-as-Victim'

With the visual shift away from victimhood, few photographs in the NAPs outwardly depict its discursive construction. This is not to say that discourses around victimhood are subverted altogether. As demonstrated, photographs of women/children often embody the familiar trope of victimhood with the emergent trope of agency. There is an interesting exception in the 2018 NAP. This is a photograph of a grandmother and her grandchild, which accompanies Strategic Outcome 6: 'Preventing and countering violent extremism' (P/CVE), see figure.3. The caption informs us that this grandmother and grandchild have been displaced by ISIL. Haiban, the young girl, looks directly down the lens of the camera while her grandmother averts her gaze. From the dilapidated surroundings, and their strained facial expressions, it is apparent that they are suffering.



Figure 3. UK NAP 2018-2022, p. 17. 'Wafaa, 50, holds her grandchild Haiban, 1 at their temporary accommodation in an unfinished building in Dohuk, northern Iraq, having been displaced by ISIL.'
Image © DFID/Andrew McConnell/Panos. *Reprinted with permission.

⁸⁰ 'Foreign Secretary Calls for an End to Violence in Rakhine'.
{<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-calls-on-an-end-to-violence-in-rakhine>}.

It is particularly salient that this is the only photograph that directly captures victimhood and corresponds to the strategic outcome around P/CVE, not least because this has been one of the most controversial recent addendums to the architecture of SCRs.⁸¹ Adopted under the WPS agenda, UNSCR 2242 ‘portends a widening of the range of conflicts and insecure settings to which WPS might apply...to include the context of terrorism and counterterrorism’.⁸² Policy alignment established between P/CVE (or ‘counter-terrorism/countering violent extremism’ (CT/CVE⁸³)) and WPS has raised concerns amongst scholars and activists alike.

Firstly, it has been argued that WPS has been instrumentalised in service of P/CVE in ways that undermine women’s rights and reinscribe gender stereotypes.⁸⁴ Civil society network Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS-UK) observed that states “understand WPS as a *way of doing P/CVE*” and it is thus valued in terms of national security objectives, rather than as a way to prioritise women’s rights.⁸⁵ Secondly, by examining a large sample of NAPs, Doris Asante and Shepherd found that representations of gender in relation to CT/CVE reinscribe gender stereotypes by placing women in subordinate and passive subject positions – “as victims of terrorism, conduits of information and community or local actors” – while representing men as inherently violent and extremist.⁸⁶ They argue this has a number of policy implications. First, it denies women’s agency and thus limits the

⁸¹ See Resolution 2242, {https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf}

⁸² Fionnula Ní Aoláin, ‘The “War on Terror” and Extremism: Assessing the Relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda’, *International Affairs* 92:2 (2016), pp. 275-291, p. 276

⁸³ Exact language used in UNSCR 2242.

⁸⁴ GAPS-UK, ‘Prioritise peace: challenging approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism from a Women, Peace and Security Perspective’, {<https://gaps-uk.org/prioritise-peace-challenging-approaches-to-pcve-from-a-wps-perspective/>}.

⁸⁵ GAPS-UK, ‘Prioritise peace’, p. 2.

⁸⁶ See, Doris Asante and Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Gender and countering violent extremism in Women, Peace and Security National Action plans’, *European Journal of Politics and Gender* XXX: XX, pp. 1-20, (2020), p. 15. See also, Sahla Aroussi, ‘Strange bedfellows: Interrogating the unintended consequences of integrating countering violent extremism with the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Kenya’, *Politics & Gender* (2020).

opportunities for women to take up leadership positions within security institutions. Second, it pathologises men – particularly those from minoritised communities – as inherently violent, and thus prone to radicalisation.⁸⁷ Situated as part of this wider discourse, the above photograph reproduces this narrative. Therefore, while countering ISIL as part of the UK’s twinned WPS and P/CVE approach, can of course be a positive move for women’s rights, it can also reinscribe gendered and racialised tropes that ultimately undermine those rights.

Visibility: The ‘International Community’

The third subject position, the ‘international community’, makes up a small proportion of the total number of photographs under discussion, although more appear in the Annual Reports. Each photograph is seized with three subjects: military actors, peacekeepers, and political figures. The latter reflects the generic headshot of departmental ministers who serve as NAP signatories. Another depicts a large group of uniformed UN member state military nationals. The caption reads,

UN Military Experts on Mission Course (UNNEM) has 47 participants from 21 different nations, 27 of which are female officers mostly from African countries. The rest of the students come from the Nordic countries and Europe, Bhutan, El Salvador, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia.

This photograph, which is staged, appears to be an attempt to showcase bilateral cooperation, as well as gender and racial diversity in UN peacekeeping. This is underlined by the fact that more than half of those depicted are female officers from African countries.

⁸⁷ Asante and Shepherd, ‘Gender and countering violent extremism’, p. 15.

The 2017 Annual Report for the 2014 NAP is also illustrated with photographs of the international community, but this time pictured alongside the civilian population. These representations fuse two subjects that span the visibility spectrum. One of these shows a female military official with two young girls, wearing hijabs, crouched down either side of her. All three subjects look and smile directly at the camera. The caption reads: ‘An army of the military stabilisation support team (MSST) during a visit to Abbazhan School in Gereshk Helmand. The MSST helped sink three wells and supplied books and desks to the students.’ A similar photograph, probably taken at the same time, is printed on the cover. The use of a female military official, reinforced by educational references around ‘helping’ and ‘supplying’ lends a representation of “the ‘softer’ militarized masculinities of peacekeeping”,⁸⁸ whilst presenting the NAP as a form of civilising marker, distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’.

Overall, these photographs convey that ‘help’ is the purview and responsibility of either the mother or the international community, and even though they may not always be shown, their presence is almost always implied. Casting the international community in roles that connote protection also serves to decontextualizes violence, obfuscating the role colonial, and imperial, powers have played in creating or exacerbating (some of) the conflict dynamics referred to in the documents. In most cases, for example, Britain’s contemporary relationship with the ‘focus countries’ can be traced back to the British Empire. Out of the nine focus countries in the 2018 NAP, six are former British colonies, two are former British protectorates, and the country that is neither is a former colony of another European state. This reflects Britain’s historical formal and informal Empire, those over which Britain exercised full sovereignty, its colonies, and its informal empire, which consisted of foreign

⁸⁸ Henri Myrntinen, ‘Stabilizing of challenging patriarchy? Sketches of ‘selected’ new political masculinities’, *Men and Masculinities* 22:3, pp. 563-581, (2019), p. 564.

territories over which Britain had acquired some degree of suzerainty or partial sovereignty.

Invisibility: Men and Boys

The last subject position is implied through the near complete invisibility of men and boys across the documents. Particularly striking is the absence of a male figure, guardian, or putative father from the global South, the result being that family portraits, or men with children, simply do not feature. While this exclusion challenges the perception of the nuclear, heteronormative family, with a male breadwinner, as the norm, it is a lost opportunity to both counter stereotypes of the broken 'Third World' family, and humanise at the same time.

Men and boys are rarely shown as beneficiaries, partners, or implementers of WPS policies or programmes, although they are increasingly incorporated into the vernacular of WPS discourse. Notwithstanding the integration of a 'masculinities perspective',⁸⁹ they are still very much a constituency on the edge of WPS policy and advocacy. This visual exclusion serves to mythologise these men as always 'elsewhere', operating outside the family unit, and thereby abdicating family responsibilities, thus a limited and regressive conceptualisation of 'local' masculinity is constructed. Their 'absence' is in direct contrast to the mythologised presence of the 'international community', who are cast as saviours and protectors, associations steeped in protectionist discourses.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Wright, "Masculinities perspectives"; David Duriesmith, 'Engaging men and boys in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: beyond the 'good men' industry', LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, 2017. Online at, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2017/wps11Duriesmith.pdf>.

This is compounded by the absence of photographs that depict the local population helping each other. Rather, they are always being ‘helped’ by the international community. Unrelated to the NAP, this was highlighted in a series of comments posted by Laila Alodaat, the MENA director at WILPF-UK,⁹⁰ on her Twitter account. In these tweets, Alodaat responded to the debate surrounding the comic relief documentary on Uganda, and the images that were subsequently posted on social media featuring documentary filmmaker, Stacey Dooley with Ugandan children. David Lammy MP stated that these images reinforced stereotypes of Africa. Responding to Dooley’s riposte, ‘Is the issue with me being white?’ Alodaat tweeted that the issue is about what is excluded. She then referred to the late photojournalist and senior editor with Reuters, Yannis Behrakis.⁹¹

Go through #YannisBehrakis photos & see how we’re not used to seeing Kurdish aid workers distributing food to Kurdish IDPs, Somali doctors treating Somali children, Syrian refugees pulling refugees from the sea without a smiling rich white celebrity.⁹²

This visual exclusivity not only suggests a lack of humanity in the global South but blinds us to the humanity that Alodaat reminds us exists even in the most extreme, and desperate, of circumstances. It is vital that photographs document but without making the subject objects of pity. For example, we seldom see images such as those taken by Behrakis, which offer a way to (re)humanise a dehumanising narrative.

There are interesting parallels with the absence of particular representations of men and women in the ‘refugee crisis’. Scholars have shown that the dominant discourse of the ‘refugee crisis’ has visually represented the refugee as predominately

⁹⁰ WILPF-UK is part of a network of UK-based NGOs and CSOs advocating in the field of WPS.

⁹¹ Obituary of Yannis Behrakis, including some of his work online at, {https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/yannis-behrakis-award-winning-reuters-photographer-dies-aged-58?utm_campaign=web-share&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter}.

⁹² Laila Alodaat (@LailaAlodaat), Twitter post, 1.31 am, 3 March 2019, available at: {<https://twitter.com/LailaAlodaat/status/1102139147211497472>}.

male, and a potential terrorist.⁹³ Such representations stand in stark contrast with the lack of visibility of refugee women. These visual skews contribute to growing anti-immigrant and xenophobic discourses. Set against this research that examines the visual reproduction of WPS, this raises questions about whether Northern audiences are only comfortable with seeing the suffering (though visually recalibrated as agential) representations of women overseas, but less comfortable seeing refugees, asylum seekers, migrant, and trafficked females suffering in their own backyard? This conclusion seems ironic given UK civil society has demanded greater policy alignment between WPS and areas of international migration.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the UK continues to insist that the WPS agenda is not applicable in the UK and indeed emphasised in the 2014 UK NAP that “preventing conflict minimises the risk to our own national security”. Such a view negates the insecurity that exists within the UK’s own borders, especially for those who come to the UK to seek safety. The dire situation faced by woman at ‘Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre’ illustrates this point,⁹⁵ and forces us to ask uncomfortable questions about whose suffering mobilises what type of political intervention, and for whose gain?

Conclusion

The WPS agenda is reproduced in many forms across multiple sites and by different actors, and as demonstrated in the literature, in colonial, institutional and

⁹³ Jill Walker Rettberg and Radhika Gajjala, ‘Terrorists or Cowards: Negative Portrayals of Male Syrian Refugees in Social Media’, *Feminist Media Studies* 16:1, (2015), pp. 1-3.

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion examining the WPS agenda and the ‘refugee crisis’, see Aiko Holvikivi and Audrey Reeves, ‘Women, Peace and Security after Europe’s ‘refugee crisis’, *European Journal of International Security* 5:2, (2020), pp. 135-154.

⁹⁵ See, Help Refugees, ‘Innocent, Abused and Imprisoned: The Women of Yarl’s Wood’, <https://helprefugees.org/news/innocent-abused-and-imprisoned-the-women-of-yarls-wood/>, (date accessed 5 April 2020).

epistemological ways. The focus for analysis in the literature to date however has been on linguistic modes of communicating WPS. Turning towards visual sites of WPS, this article proposed a different way to approach and studies the agenda. In presenting the most comprehensive visual analysis of the WPS agenda to date, this article has made three distinct contributions to the literature. Firstly, it offered a theoretical contribution advancing visibility as a vector of power in the reproduction of WPS. Secondly, it developed a methodological contribution by proposing an analytical framework constructed around a visibility spectrum. Thirdly, it provided an empirical contribution through its focus on the UK as an illustrative case of visual reproduction.

The visual reading of NAPs and Annual Reports revealed four subject positions, each occupying a different position on the visibility spectrum: the agential women-in-conflict (hypervisible); the women-as-victim (absent presence); the international community (visibility); and the (invisibility) of men and boys. The analysis demonstrated how these mutually constituted subjects reiterate particular gendered, racialised, and colonial logics and hierarchies. Although the 'agential women-in-conflict', the hypervisible representation, reflects the shift away from images of victimhood towards images of agency, this visual reproduction mirrors the type of liberal agency and imperial discourse inscribed into the language of SCRs. In other words an agency that is largely dependent on the support of the international community. The second subject, the 'women-as-victim', is nearly always visually implied and effectively underpins the emergent trope of agency.

The third subject position, the international community, appear in only a small proportion of the total number of photographs, but whose presence is implied across the other photographs, as well as in the document's surrounding text. Photographs of

the international community ‘helping’ the local population show them as protectors, and in a position of benevolent power over the ‘local’ population. The last subject, yielding the most significant insights, is the invisibility of men and boys. Particularly noteworthy across all of the documentation, is the absence of the male figure. This representational vacuum reproduces masculinity in the global South as threatening, which is underlined by the absence of photographs showing the local population helping each other, which I argued could have a humanising effect.

The analysis demonstrated that where different subjects are placed on the spectrum, they are differently refracted through structures of power, in particular those of gender and race. Rather than challenging global hierarchies of power, these photographs facilitate the reproduction of WPS in accordance with gendered, racial, and colonial logics, further stripping the agenda of its transformative potential. With the 20th anniversary of WPS likely to breathe new life into the agenda, it is hoped that the new direction proposed in this article will prompt future research on this nascent topic.