The Power of Mixed Messages: Women, Peace, and Security Language in National Action Plans from Africa

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Spectrum

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Heidi Hudson

Abstract: Against the backdrop of global and continental women, peace, and security discourses, this contribution analyses the gender and women-focused language of national action plans from four African countries (Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Uganda), which were drafted with a view to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. I argue that national action plans have the potential to transcend the soft-consensus language of Security Council resolutions because they create new spaces for feminist engagement with policy and practice. The analysis reveals three discursive themes – namely, the making of "womenandchildren," women civilising war, and making women responsible for preventing gender-based violence. The themes relate to the construction of, respectively, gender(ed) identities, security, and violence. To varying degrees, the plans reflect a combination of predominantly liberal-feminist language interspersed with some examples of critical insight. I conclude that the ambiguous nature of the messages sent out by these plans serves as a reminder that discourses are fragmented and therefore offer an opening for nuanced contextual analyses and implementation.

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In May 2000 a workshop hosted by the Namibian government and or-
ganised by the Lessons Learned Unit of the United Nations Department
of Peacekeeping Operations was held in Windhoek. That event and the
subsequent Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on
mainstreaming gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations are com-
monly regarded as catalysts for the adoption of United Nations Security
Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
in October 2000. Since then, a loosely consolidated transnational WPS
agenda has emerged. It coheres to the four pillars of UNSCR 1325 (2000)
– namely, participation of women in conflict resolution and peace pro-
cesses; gender mainstreaming in conflict-prevention initiatives; protection
of women's rights and bodies in peace and war; and relief and recovery,
especially for survivors of sexual violence. Seven other WPS resolutions
have subsequently seen the light, each emphasising these four pillars to
varying degrees.[1]

However, the WPS debate of the last 17 years has become quite po-
larised. On the one hand, a largely optimistic feminist school of thought
argues for the power of norm diffusion, maintaining that the WPS resolu-
tions signify a major shift in the way the UN thinks about security (Hud-
son 2009a, 2009b; Tryggestad 2009, 2010). On the other hand, a critical-
feminist position maintains that the WPS architecture has left gendered
power relations largely unchallenged (Binder, Lukas, and Schweiger 2008;
Cohn 2008; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; Shepherd 2008, 2011). At the
heart of this contention lies the fact that despite a growing WPS normative
agenda, there is an implementation gap – the lives of women in conflict-
ridden areas remain unchanged, and women continue to play a marginal
role in formal peace talks. In 2007 the UN secretary-general therefore
called on member states to ensure the consideration of gender in peace-
building processes through national action plans (NAP) (UN Secretary-
General 2007). NAPs, as one of the main mechanisms of policy imple-
mentation (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014), mirror the tension between
these schools of thought. Critics argue that NAPs perpetuate the flaws of
UNSCR 1325, whereas norm-entrepreneur proponents see NAPs as a
means of domesticating these international gender norms.

Such bifurcation is not helpful in gaining a better understanding of
the place of NAPs in the broader WPS framework. The two schools of
thought offer us an impossible choice between two universalised options
– one that assumes that NAPs from the global South are multipliers of

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1   UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122
     (2013), and 2242 (2015).

international (interventionist) discourse and therefore problematic, and the other that these international gender norms will necessarily find context-specific translation through NAPs. In search of a more nuanced position, it thus becomes necessary to let these texts speak for themselves. Towards that end, I make the gender language and discursive power of four African NAPs (Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Uganda) the subject of analysis. I aim to deconstruct and assess through discourse analysis whether, or to what extent, the language of the plans offers an alternative reading beyond the two oppositional WPS discourses. I therefore ask whether the representational power of language itself can in fact be harnessed for transformational purposes while it coexists (albeit uneasily) with the mechanics of NAP operationalisation in patriarchal and/or deeply politicised contexts.

The article opens with a discussion of the role and context of NAPs that informed the African case selection. This is followed by a literature review of the dominant WPS discourses and concepts. These concepts facilitate the identification of three discursive themes against which I then read the plans. The themes concern how gender/women, security, and violence are constructed and represented, guided by the understanding that gender plays a role in the construction of peace and conflict, which in turn shapes understandings of gender. In terms of identity, the first theme, I highlight the large-scale conflation of constructs such as gender and women as well as "womenandgirls." In the second theme, security discourses display a civilising intent through the participation of women in the security sector ("making war civil for and through women"). The third theme captures violence seen through a sexualised lens. It privileges women's protection yet still makes women responsible for preventing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The findings suggest that these NAPs send out mixed messages in terms of women's identity, participation, and protection. I conclude that this very ambiguity is what gives these plans a transformational edge – it provides the creative space where a holistic mix of radical-feminist/liberal-feminist equality language together with pragmatic execution can bring about more inclusive security practices.

National Action Plans: Role, Context, and Case Selection

The UN defines a NAP as

> a document that details the actions that a government is currently taking, and those initiatives that it will undertake within a given time frame, in order to meet the obligations set out in all of the WPS resolutions. (Popovic, Lyytikainen, and Barr 2010: xv)

Such plans also help national stakeholders "to identify priorities, determine responsibilities, [and] allocate resources" (Coomaraswamy 2015: 240), to mediate the gap between international WPS standards and the dynamics of the national levels (Kirby and Shepherd 2016b).

Of the 67 NAPs currently in place,[2] 46 (68 per cent) are from the global South, of which 19 (28 per cent of the total 67) are from Africa. The fact that African states with NAPs comprise nearly 41 per cent of the NAPs from the global South is explained by a combination of factors. Most of these African states have experienced some form of violent conflict or are currently in a post-conflict phase where the general levels of women's political, socio-economic, and physical insecurity remain high in the aftermath of war. African countries with NAPs include Côte d'Ivoire (2007), Uganda (2008), Liberia (2009), Guinea (2009), Sierra Leone (2010), Rwanda (2010), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2010), Guinea-Bissau (2011), Burundi (2011), Togo (2011), Senegal (2011), Mali (2012), Burkina Faso (2012), Ghana (2012), Nigeria (2013), Central African Republic (2014), Gambia (2014), Kenya (2016), and South Sudan (2016).

Given the limited scope of this article, I selected only four NAPs from Africa for analysis: Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Uganda. My case selection was guided by four factors: comprehensiveness, time of adoption, regional location, and whether countries are post-conflict or not. First, it is assumed that a more comprehensive plan will offer more opportunity for detailed analysis. Both the Liberian NAP (LNAP) and the Ugandan plan (UNAP) incorporated the content of UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820, with the latter also taking the Goma Declaration (2008) on eradicating sexual violence and ending impunity in the Great Lakes Region into account (Republic of Liberia 2009; Republic of Uganda 2008). The Nigerian plan (NNAP) captured the first five WPS resolutions (Government of Nigeria 2013), and the Kenyan plan (KNAP) has

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2   As of August 2017.

had the advantage of drawing on the whole suite of WPS resolutions and on the Sustainable Development Goals (Government of Kenya 2016: 7–9, 13). Second, I selected two plans that were adopted during the early phases of this call for NAP development (Uganda [2008] and Liberia [2009]) and two that were adopted more recently (Nigeria [2013] and Kenya [2016]) to allow for some learning to have taken place. Third, although I do not engage with discursive contexts in this article, I selected two cases from West Africa (Liberia and Nigeria) and two from East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) to capture possible contextual variation. Fourth, I selected one country that adopted plans as it came out of war (Liberia), one that is experiencing protracted conflicts in certain areas (Uganda), and two that identified more with a broader range of "smaller" conflicts linked to human insecurity (over oil in Nigeria, pastoralism in Kenya, and terrorism in both countries). The human-security issues that come with having large populations of displaced people is, for example, a contextual factor present in all four cases.

Even though the focus in this article is on global South cases that have undergone or are still experiencing protracted violence and insecurity in some form, it would be incorrect to assume that all global South and/or African NAPs are in post-war contexts. Over the years, two broad types of plans have evolved: outward- and inward-looking plans. So-called "outward-looking" plans are described as being mainly from developed countries whose plans are framed to guide their peacebuilding assistance to conflict-affected states; they are focused on international engagement. By contrast, "inward-looking" plans come from countries mostly emerging from conflict, assisted by UN agencies and donor states (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014). These plans have a stronger domestic orientation (Shepherd 2016). This distinction may, however, be too artificial and ultimately essentialising,[3] because it reinforces the North–South binary. The Nigerian NAP is an outlier – outward-looking because of its strong foreign policy involvement in peacekeeping, yet not necessarily in the same category as countries such as Australia and Norway when it comes to providing external assistance. Although NAPs have become foreign policy tools for many developed-world countries such as Australia (Kirby and Shepherd 2016b), it would be wrong to view actors in the global South as mere passive recipients of NAPs.[4]

Therefore, rather than trying to fit the four African NAPs into neat categories, I prefer to label them loosely as contexts where conflict-related

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3   Thank you to the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
4   Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) was a founding member of the NGO Working Group on WPS (Basu 2016).

and/or more general human-security issues (whether post-war or not) prevail in an acute form. Within this context, my focus is on the language and representations (discourses) of these four plans. In comparison to several studies on UNSCR 1325 and other WPS resolutions with a discourse-analytical slant (Cohn 2008; Hudson 2015; Puechguirbal 2010; Shepherd 2008), very few studies have examined the (feminist) language/ discourse of NAPs, and those that do exist remain limited to analyses of global North NAPs (Lee-Koo 2016; Shepherd 2016). The larger body of work on NAPs for UNSCR 1325 has coalesced around the development of toolkits as well as content analyses, focusing on technical and process lessons (e.g. Gumru and Fritz 2009; Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014; Popovic, Lyytikainen, and Barr 2010). Studies on global patterns of WPS policy diffusion (True 2016) and regional "impact" studies (e.g. Basini and Ryan 2016; Olonisakin, Barnes, and Ikpe 2011) are relatively recent developments. Thus, while the benefits of NAPs as a tool to translate political purpose into concrete guidelines are well documented (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014; Popovic, Lyytikainen, and Barr 2010), the aim in this article is rather to assess, via the three themes, whether the language used in these four plans has the potential to contribute to the transformation of entrenched sites of power.

In the next section I review the broad "camps" within feminist security studies literature, their views on language, as well as WPS trends on the African continent. I clarify key concepts of gender, security, and violence from a variety of perspectives and draw on these conceptualisations for the construction of the three themes in the discourse analysis section.

WPS Discourses and the Language of NAPs

As mentioned in the introduction, divergent discourses have emerged on the growing WPS agenda and the "utility" of language in NAPs. The case for WPS norm diffusion through gender language is wedded to liberal-feminist assumptions and is consequently contested by critical-feminist scholars who contend that gender-sensitive language often serves the interests of the dominant.

With regard to the former, Torunn Tryggestad (2009, 2010) argues that linking gender equality and women's rights to international peace and security through the adoption of UNSCR 1325 signifies a shift in both policy and rhetoric. Helga Hernes (2014) also argues that the evolution of international norms on women's rights has benefitted women coming out of conflict particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Local women

were able to invoke these norms to argue for the inclusion of these norms into constitutions, peace accords, and ceasefire agreements.

Supporters of global gender-norm diffusion view the increase in the number of NAPs as evidence of growing norm diffusion. NAPs are regarded welcome carriers of gender norms, shifting UNSCR 1325 from formal adoption at the international level to the national level of jurisdiction (True 2016). Period effects were evident around the tenth and fifteenth anniversaries of UNSCR 1325 (True 2016), such as during the preparation of the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Coomaraswamy 2015). Proponents also cite progression in the (feminist) rights language used as evidence of the institutionalisation of WPS ideas and the eventual constitution of a WPS architecture (Hudson 2015). Following UNSCR 1325 (2000), which grounds the message about women's agency in peace and conflict, UNSCR 1820 (2008) recognises rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity. UNSCR 1888 (2009) broadens the language to refer to "survivors" and not just victims of SGBV. Both UNSCR 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010) expand the scope by emphasising accountability mechanisms to monitor the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The language of UNSCR 2106 (2013) singles out male survivors of SGBV, while UNSCR 2122 (2013) deepens the focus on systematic implementation of commitments by calling for the 2015 High-Level Review of UNSCR 1325. Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1960, and 2106 focus on prevention of violence and on protection (women's victimhood), with Resolutions 1889 and 2122 prioritising women's participation in peace and security governance (women's agency) (Shepherd 2014). The most recent WPS addition, UNSCR 2242 (2015), appears to have broadened the exclusive focus on women and girls to an agenda that considers women and gender more broadly. A strong normative case can therefore be made that the WPS resolutions collectively have contributed to a significant broadening of how we define international security (Hudson 2015).

Where one feminist school applauds the introduction of progressive feminist content in international security architecture, the radical school (e.g. Gibbings 2011; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011) argues that the language of the WPS resolutions and NAPs may appear feminist but in fact entrenches militarist and Western/imperialist positions (Basu 2016). Such language undermines the anti-war feminist objectives instrumental in the adoption of UNSCR 1325 (Binder, Lukas, and Schweiger 2008; Cohn 2008; Gibbings 2011; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; Puechguirbal 2010; Shepherd 2008, 2011). It is also argued that such language foregrounds a narrow peace related to the absence of armed conflict.

The silence on cultures of violence, which lie at the root of armed conflicts and are carried over into the post-conflict period, means that radical-feminist ideals are eclipsed by traditional security concerns. The growing emphasis on NAPs as an end in themselves has therefore contributed to the securitisation of the WPS agenda (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014).

The critique of the neoliberal underpinnings of UNSCR 1325 (e.g. Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004; True 2011) maintains that feminist norms and women's rights are hijacked to serve international development and security interests. The dominance of liberal-feminist UN discourse leads to an overemphasis on gender equality and an almost exclusive focus on women. In the process, gender and sex (women) are conflated and stereotypical constructions of women as victims and peacemakers and men as perpetrators or protectors become the norm. Critics also regard as problematic the connection that is made in UNSCR 1325 between women's so-called "participation" (presence) and positive change. States include women in peacekeeping operations because they assume it will socialise actors to behave "better." They tend to make a normative and policy link between the inclusion of women and more democratic, accountable governance and the goal of more peace and security (True 2011).

This critical-feminist school therefore sees UNSCR 1325 NAPs as problem-solving tools that perpetuate the stereotypical fixation on adding women through participation, representation, and protection practices. In this view, it becomes difficult to reconcile the feminist language and quantitative indicators of the plans. It is argued that operational issues often eclipse language, or that they depoliticise feminist language and co-opt it within quantitative accountability frameworks (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014). The case of Liberia illustrates this dilemma. The plan contains over 190 indicators, which proved to be challenging in a conflict-ravaged country where data-collection mechanisms are being reconstructed. As a result, the Ministry of Gender and Development, supported by UNIFEM, prioritised 21 indicators to make the process more manageable (Popovic, Lyytikainen, and Barr 2010), but may have failed in effecting structural change, as illustrated by Basini and Ryan (2016) in the context of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Indicators cannot tell us why certain patterns emerge, and radical-feminist concepts of empowerment/agency cannot be translated into practice in short time-frames.

An ambiguous picture emerges when it comes to the manifestation of these divergent WPS discourses in the African context. There is a case to be made for WPS norm visibility in Africa through gender-equality lan-

guage, or what Toni Haastrup calls an "emergent gender-equality regime" (Haastrup 2014: 103). African governments and regional organisations are increasingly recognising the impact of both conflict on women and women's roles in peacebuilding – for instance, when African leaders declared 2010–2020 the "African Women's Decade." Instruments such as the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (Maputo Protocol) (AU 2003) and the *AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* (AU 2004) offer opportunities for African Union member states to apply the principles of UNSCR 1325. *The Solemn Declaration* mentions the resolution explicitly and informs the *Action Plan for the Solemn Declaration*, the *AU Gender Policy* (2009) (AU 2009), and the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (2007) (Haastrup 2014; Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech 2015).

At the regional level, the *Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development* (2008) (Article 28) calls for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The *SADC Gender Policy* (2009) also urges member states to eliminate SGBV and all other forms of violence towards women and girls (Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech 2015). In 2006 the *Pact on Peace, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region* adopted by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) also integrated WPS principles (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014). The development of regional action plans (RAPs) helps to foster shared understandings and the diffusion of common norms. The Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) contains a WPS section, and its action plan for this component was adopted in 2010 (Olonisakin, Hendriks, and Okech 2015; Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014). The Women and Peace Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is also implementing and monitoring a RAP (Sigsworth and Kumalo 2016).

Be that as it may, norm visibility alone constitutes an incomplete project. Institutionalisation happens only when policymakers actually "get" and accept the language (Hudson 2015). Despite evidence of rhetorical commitments, African feminist security scholars measure substantive progress in terms of the successful convergence of feminist security analysis, civil society activism, and policy decision-making. They contend that in Africa at present these three agendas or pillars of influence remain "organically disconnected" (Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech 2015: 377). The result is a piecemeal and superficial approach to the application of UNSCR 1325 in Africa. The flipside of this is the fact that feminist academics, practitioners, and policymakers do not always agree on what makes their language and practices feminist. This helps to

counter positions of narrow consensus. The two feminist academic positions on WPS also do not operate as stark opposites in reality but rather reflect a much more nuanced coexistence.

If we then read the plans with less of an ideological bias, three assumptions about the role of language in the WPS agenda and plans need to be made explicit. First, feminist meaning-making of NAPs does not exist separately from implementation – discourse and reality (NAPs and their operationalisation) are co-constituted. So despite the fact that global feminist language is no guarantee for successful implementation, as illustrated by Katrina Lee-Koo (2016) in her analysis of the Australian NAP, implementation is not just an empirical issue, but also connected to how participation, protection, prevention, and gender equality are discursively produced through the plan itself. Second, language is not static. It is incorrect to assume that the so-called narrow and exclusionary militarist and masculinist language (Cohn 2008) upon which the consensus language of UNSCR 1325 is built always determines or fixes the kind of NAP language used. NAPs have more creative licence than UNSC resolutions since they "can create new spaces and entry points for a range of actors to dialogue with one another," raising awareness and deepening the understanding of the relevance of UNSCR 1325 (Hudson 2015: 20). Third, if language is seen as a conduit for policy, then its potential to transform the material conditions of people is foregrounded. The power of language is not only symbolic but also tangible – as it captures norms aimed at influencing attitudes and behaviours nationally and internationally (Hudson 2015; Tryggestad 2009).

Discourse Analysis of African NAPs

Drawing on the variegated arguments encapsulated by the WPS agenda, a critical discourse analysis of the four African NAPs reveals representational themes related to three pre-selected concepts: gendered identity, security, and violence. The methodology involved reading the texts against the grain – that is, contrary to their ostensible logic to expose taken-for-granted usage of these concepts. The discursive themes analysed below are therefore phrased in a way to capture the dominant feminist critiques of UN texts. However, to avoid the risk of prescriptively foregrounding one perspective, the actual reading itself was done in an open-ended manner to expose not only what was missing but also to read the liberal-feminist slant in a more productive and constructive way.

Gender Identity Constructions: The Making of "Womenandchildren"

In this section I deconstruct the gender logic used in the plans. My first aim is to determine whether there is a slippage between gender and women in the plans. This would also include a look at linkages between women and girls. Although NAPs on UNSCR 1325 are deemed gender-responsive documents, these texts often operate with a specific gender logic, which can be – broadly speaking – treating gender either as an empirical identity category (variable or descriptor of sex) or as an analytical category that reflects relations of power (Scott 1986). Laura Shepherd (2017: 102) concludes that UN Peacebuilding Commission texts articulate a logic of gender that is treated as "loosely synonymous" with sex and women. This has negative implications. First, when gender acts as a proxy for women, the real needs of actual women are negated. The foregrounding of gender in policymaking institutions may appear progressive but could also be a way to shift attention away from women and the radical interventions needed to overcome their position of disadvantage. It means that the policy focus has shifted from "women, to women and men and, finally, back to men" (Shepherd 2017: 102). This leads to the second implication – namely, that the discursive association of gender with women effectively confirms women's lack of agency and subservient position in relation to men. Shepherd (2017) warns that such discursive constructions may impact the amount of resources allocated to women's programmes.

The plans frequently employ gender-equality language in tandem with pro-women/pro-girls references. All the plans resemble the international (UN) liberal-feminist gender mainstreaming approach achieved through equal opportunities and strategies of inclusion, as in UNSCR 1325. For example, even though the term "gender equality" is used only four times in the LNAP, references to gender-aware policies (18), gender-blind codes of conduct (22), and gender sensitivity (35, 37) make up for it. Gender-equality language (e.g. the integration of gender perspectives in all security and peace activities) appears to be entangled with references to increasing women's participation and representation in peace and security. The UNAP argues that gender-related training tools must be reviewed against the extent to which "UN guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women [... are] incorporated in the training of armed personnel" (35). The KNAP also links gender equality with women's empowerment (8), their participation (14), and their human rights (15).

Evidence of the conflation of gender and women is extended through the lumping together of "women and girls." This phrase is repeated 73 times in the LNAP, 60 times in the UNAP, and 47 times each in the NNAP and the KNAP. It is only in the LNAP that girls are mentioned "independently" – for instance, in terms of promoting their participation in conflict prevention, early warning, and post-conflict recovery (24); related to the reform of the juvenile justice system (23); in terms of abuse (27); regarding education and scholarships to study agriculture (36); and related to leadership preparation through camps, youth parliament, and peace clubs (40). In the UNAP, girls' increased care workload during conflict is singled out (17), but the KNAP and NNAP do not refer to girls on their own. Similar to the problems associated with a gender–women slippage, the association of women with girls not only discursively reinforces the vulnerability of both women and children, but also infantilises women (Shepherd 2017: 113), casting them as being in need of care, like children. This construction is what Cynthia Enloe calls "womenandchildren."[5] This preoccupation with women and girls as a homogeneous identity category also "crowds out" the role of men or boys. The UNAP mentions boys 18 times, whereas both the LNAP and KNAP refer to boys only once. Although the NNAP refers to men a couple of times, it is silent on boys.

The second aim in teasing out how gender is constructed in the plans is to determine whether gender is treated as a complex and mobile concept emphasising the multiplicity of women's experiences as these relate to men's multiple identities. My contention is that an unintended consequence of this tendency to conflate gender and women is the negation of multiple overlapping identities, which manifest when women and men experience security at the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, and disability, to name a few. Here I seek to determine whether attention is paid to subtle inter- and intra-group differences, and, if applicable, to what extent the plans sanitise the complexity of identity construction when different identity groups are lumped together.

In this respect, another reading of the plans reveals a much more ambiguous interpretation – one that is perhaps more reflective of the reality on the ground and that does not foreclose the possibility of the construction of transformative representations in the plans. Such a reading reveals piecemeal evidence that identity categories are not always treat-

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5   Coined by Cynthia Enloe in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

ed as homogeneous. In the NNAP, the definition of gender-responsive budgeting not only recognises that "biases […] can arise because a person is male or female" but also takes into account "the disadvantages suffered as a result of ethnicity, caste, class or poverty status and location" (35). The KNAP, too, refers to tolerance of ethnic, gender, and other diversities in security sector institutions (SSIs) (40). The LNAP specifically mentions "justice for juveniles – especially for girls" (23); the special needs of women and girls living with or caring for those living with HIV/AIDS, including women associated with the fighting forces (26); and the special needs of the disabled and widows (27). The UNAP singles out child perpetrators (29); minors – very young girl and boy victims of sexual violence (31); and women with disabilities who have to deal with SGBV issues (69).

However, the gains made through attention to special needs are at times diluted by essentialist representations, such as in the LNAP where women are represented as "good female role models" (20) in a documentary film on the security sector. The aim with the airing of this documentary was to convey the message that increased female enrolment in the security sector is necessary "for their [women's] enhanced protection and security" (20) and because more women in the security sector will help to shift negative public perceptions of SSIs (20). "Good female role models" thus become shorthand for the problematic assumption that the inclusion of women will make the armed forces more peaceful and law-abiding. There is, however, also evidence of some plans displaying a more nuanced perspective regarding women's multiple roles. The UNAP states that

> rather than simply regarding women as helpless victims of war and violence, it is crucial to take into account their active roles as combatants, peacebuilders, politicians and activists. (14)

Sanitised gender roles are somewhat avoided when the UNAP highlights masculinity and femininity/gender stereotypes (16); gender division of labour, women's roles in the everyday (17); the assumption that only men can be combatants (18); and gender barriers and power imbalances in the household and public arena (22). The NNAP in a similar vein calls for advocacy against traditional practices that "perpetuate gender role stereotypes" (27). The KNAP also acknowledges that women's gender and peacemaking roles are not natural but contextual (10). The KNAP further recognises the structural roots of gender-based discrimination embedded in Kenya's pre-2010 constitution, laws, policies, and practices (10).

Constructions of Security: Women Civilising War

The plans acknowledge the human-security approach, with an implicit holistic understanding of security that goes beyond the protection of physical (military and state) security to include socio-economic and environmental (everyday) security. The KNAP "recognizes that security threats include social, economic, and environmental factors" (12) and therefore supports dealing with "root causes of conflict" (14) through making a "critical link among gender equality, security, development, and human rights" (15). The foreword of the NNAP recognises the multidimensional nature of women's insecurity, ranging from women-headed households to displacements, food insecurity, legal prohibition on owning land, bodily threats, and flooding (5). Broader people-centred notions of security in the LNAP are inferred through references to women's increased access to housing, natural resources, and health education on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS (24). It can also be gleaned from the specification that women's human rights extend beyond political rights to include their socio-economic right to equal access to resources in relation to property, land, and inheritance (34). A normative acknowledgement of security as affecting the lives of civilians in their local surroundings is therefore implied in these constructions.

But in order to come to some conclusion as to whether these are symbolic discourses, I focus in this section on who participated in the development of the plans and on how the participation of women in SSIs is represented and what this means for the realisation of more inclusive security.

It is ironic that while UNSCR 1325 was drafted and vetted by women from civil society organisations across the globe, and therefore grounded to some extent in local needs and values (Weiss 2011), it was found that "only about a third of NAPs specify civil society involvement in their planning and drafting, while about 45 per cent mention some form of non-specific civil society involvement" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016b: 384). This suggests that the NAP development process may not be as participatory as assumed and therefore much more reminiscent of the headquarters-driven process followed by subsequent WPS resolutions (Weiss 2011). A brief examination of background information paints the development process of the four African NAPs as a collaborative effort between the funders (national governments and UN bodies) and local partners (activists/experts from local non-governmental organisations [NGOs] such as women's associations, local staff working for missions of international organisations, and governmental actors). For instance, the UN Fund for Population Activities funded the development of the UNAP.

Individuals participated in different consultations (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014). The LNAP includes a list of participating NGOs and references community-based organisations (CBOs). Their partners (and funders) included UN Women, Action Aid, the Danish Refugee Council, International Alert, Oxfam GB, and governments (2). The development of the NNAP is described as a "very inclusive and participatory" process (10). UN Women provided technical and financial support; the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre and DFID's Nigeria Stability Reconciliation Programme also provided financial assistance. The development of the KNAP was spearheaded by the National Steering Committee consisting of government, civil society organisations, and individuals, with financial and technical support from UN Women and the government of Finland.

However, local participation does not guarantee local ownership. In this regard, Helen Basini and Caitlin Ryan's (2016) study on Liberia and Sierra Leone reveals how the top-down state-centric character of the NAP development process harmed the WPS agenda. The LNAP paradoxically not only devotes attention to the role of women's groups as implementers and watchdogs of the process, but also stresses women's roles as facilitators of funding from donors (39). The suitability of women's organisations in drafting the plan is assumed without considering the possible negative implications of their role as multipliers of international discourse. The plan thus superficially acknowledges the importance of local partnerships but neglects a deeper feminist exploration of power asymmetry between the local and the international. In this regard, Emma Wamai (2011) observes that women's networks played an important role in designing and implementing the LNAP, but informal and rural women's networks remain largely underrepresented in such technical meetings. Similarly, Ugandan measures to combat SGBV are devolved to "provide support to local leaders" and "mobilise and empower traditional health practitioners to handle SGBV cases" (32), but the UNAP is silent on the transformational role of local women's organisations. In Nigeria, the absence of a UN mission means that there is little external pressure for NAP implementation, and this may open a space for local conceptions of security and gender inequalities to come to the fore (Ikpe 2011). However, the plan itself does not reflect this latent potential and very much resembles the cookie-cutter format of most plans. Although UN Women Kenya organised five Kenya Open Days on Partnership for Peace, as well as a High-Level Conference on WPS in 2012 to bring government, the international community, and local civil society together around WPS issues, the plan itself is silent on how the "local" is conceptualised (21–22).

Thus, evidence points to a contradictory mix of collaborative work and the exclusion of some groups, both in the language/framing and in the execution. It therefore necessitates more nuanced analysis of civil society participation in security practices. Theoretically the input of civil society is considered useful in countering statist tendencies by introducing human-security concerns through a bottom-up approach. At the same time we need to recognise that civil society is heterogeneous and does not automatically advocate non-statist notions of security. Equally, the fact that NAPs are tools of states at the national level should not presuppose their inevitable framing in elitist, Weberian, monopoly-of-violence language.

The emphasis on the inclusion of women in the armed forces is framed liberally in the context of their "full/equal or active participation," which is seldom explained or questioned. As Nigeria is not technically a country at war, more emphasis is placed on the outward-looking dimensions of WPS in the NNAP (7), and by implication an emphasis on women's participation in the military. The NNAP affirms Nigeria's role as a significant troop-contributing country to UN peacekeeping missions (9) and as "the fourth-largest contributor to peacekeeping operations" globally (12). Eka Ikpe also states that "as of December 2009, Nigeria was deploying the highest number of women globally" (Ikpe 2011: 94). This numerical "achievement" is an important measure of Nigeria's foreign policy status. The UNAP – under one of its strategic objectives on women in leadership and decision-making – similarly devotes four out of seven strategic actions to women's participation in armed forces and peacekeeping/peacebuilding (34–36). The title of the KNAP – *Kuhusisha Wanawake ni Kudumisha Amani* ("to involve women is to sustain peace") – appears benign, even positive, but at the same time conjures up stereotypical assumptions about the simplistic link between women and peace. By highlighting the importance of traditional knowledge and women's involvement in alternative forms of dispute resolution (38, 44, 45), there is also a risk of relegating women's peacebuilding role to the "local" and thereby informal/private sphere. The LNAP makes a link between women's participation in the security sector and "their enhanced protection and security" (20), rather than affirming their agency. Furthermore, the creation of peace clubs for girls (40) is juxtaposed with attempts by parent–teacher associations and the community to encourage girls to enrol in SSIs (41). The militarisation of women's and girls' participation makes "war safe for women" (Weiss 2011).[6] The net effect of such contradictory messages is

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6   "Women civilising war," the subtitle of this section, is a play on Cora Weiss'
     warning that we should not make war safe for women. Also see Shepherd (2016).

that participation becomes elevated to an end in itself – opening the door for turning the tools of peace education on themselves and securitising the anti-militarist objectives of the WPS agenda.

Constructions of Violence: Making Women Responsible for Preventing SGBV

In the last theme I consider how violence has been framed in the four plans and draw on the relationship between the various WPS discourses (of prevention, participation, and protection) to reconstruct a picture of their transformative potential.

A detailed reading of the four plans shows that they all include prevention as a pillar. The conceptualisation of prevention cannot be separated from how peace is framed in the plans – as either the absence of armed conflict with a preference for managing conflicts or a long-term engagement with underlying structural causes (Basu and Confortini 2017). In gender terms, prevention means assessing whether the role of gendered structures is considered in the entrenchment of institutions that perpetuate war, militarism, violence, and women's insecurity (Basu and Confortini 2017). In relation to SGBV, it means that SGBV must be understood as both a trigger for and an outcome of violent conflict. Prevention efforts should then challenge harmful social norms and promote understandings of non-violent masculinities (Saferworld 2014).

The plans reflect two types of discourses on prevention. The first discourse concerns the association of prevention with participation, frequently calling for women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding processes, although conflict prevention is never clearly defined. Only the LNAP differentiates substantively between the types of participation that would contribute to prevention, when it highlights, for example, girls' participation in peace clubs (13). Measures such as the mobilisation of resources for women's active involvement in conflict prevention, as mentioned in the KNAP (29) and NNAP (18), facilitate participation but do not speak directly to prevention. The KNAP links indigenous and traditional knowledge-based systems with women's roles in early warning (44–45), whereas the NNAP explains "preventive performance" as a strengthening of women's roles in conflict resolution (18). The implication is therefore that women become responsible for the prevention of violence. This comes with the assumption that "their agency will necessarily be exercised in productive and socially transformative ways" (Shepherd 2017: 117).

The second discourse links prevention and protection. All the plans make a strong connection between the prevention of SGBV and protection against SGBV. The goal of the LNAP is to prevent all types of violence against women and girls, including rape, systematic rape, trafficking, and other human rights abuses (12, 13). The KNAP draws on the *National Policy for the Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence* (2014) as well as the *Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children* (2006) of the ICGLR (15–16). The UNAP's focus on SGBV prevention is also framed in the context of the latter protocol (20), the Goma Declaration (2008), and UNSCR 1820 (2008), with their strong protectionist slants. The UNAP states that apart from increasing women's representation in decision-making, ensuring the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence is the other overall goal (10). There are encouraging initiatives to challenge gendered social norms related to SGBV, such as awareness raising and proactive institutional and community-based advocacy initiatives in the KNAP (49); the prevention of harmful traditional practices around reproductive health, girl-child education, and child marriage (NNAP 27); and the strengthening of institutions working on GBV (UNAP 42, 48). However, in some cases, such as in the LNAP framework, three strategic issues are devoted to protection, four to promotion, and only one to prevention (13). At times it thus appears as if prevention is framed as a means to the real end – protection.

Similar to UNSCR 1325, the gender–prevention nexus in the plans is underdeveloped, and stands in service of the gender–participation and gender–protection connections. Feminist scholars criticise such "blindness" for crafting a hierarchy of priorities that favour protection from the exceptional nature of SGBV during war at the expense of prevention of structural violence during peacetime. This has two implications: First, while a targeted campaign against SGBV is necessary, it risks treating SGBV as an issue separate from others, and further marginalises survivors of SGBV (Saferworld 2014). Jacqui True (2011) also warns that these discourses and practices become separated from the socio-political and economic root causes of gender inequality that fuel women's vulnerability to violence.

In this regard, I find that the plans do go beyond wartime sexual violence (in the form of rape as a tool of war) to reflect a more holistic understanding of gender-based violence, both in terms of cause and consequence. In the NNAP, gender violence is framed in the broader context of both conflict and post-conflict situations (13) as a complex phenomenon that "can prevent women from accessing education, be-

coming financially independent and […] participating in governance and peacebuilding" (7). Sexual violence is seen as debilitating development. But even in Liberia, where one would expect a narrow focus on SGBV "committed against [women] during the war years" (15), the scope is widened to focus on

> prevention of all types of violence against women (VAW) and particularly rape, domestic violence, sexual offences including sexual harassment and abuse of young girls, harmful traditional practices, and human trafficking. (27)

Although the UNAP is largely dominated by commitments to address sexual violence against women in armed conflict, it defines gender-based violence broadly to include "physical, sexual, psychological violence occurring in the family, community, or perpetrated or condoned by the State" (13).

A second consequence of the exceptionalisation of SGBV is that in the process of conflating broader SGBV discourses with rape discourses (or equating SGBV with violence against women and girls), it establishes an understanding of women as victims of male (sexual) violence. My findings here are less positive. Protection trumps prevention. The plans represent women's and girls' agency/victimhood in somewhat ambiguous and circumscribed terms – they are in need of protection and need to be assisted in becoming agents. For instance, traumatised women and girls are seen in the LNAP as victims who deserve care, but also need to acquire "strengthened coping strategies" (16). Such language recognises the need for material intervention, as exemplified by the statement that the "war-widowed are empowered through skills training, micro-credit and loan facilities and are provided plots of land to produce environmentally friendly bio-fuels" (16). However, these interventions take place on their behalf – hence the emphasis on "provision." Similarly, civic education programmes to change attitudes and behaviour (27), such as peace education initiatives (32, 35, 39) reflect an understanding of structural violence but the good intentions come unstuck when essentialist ideas of women's roles "in socializing the community to peace" (28) are raised. And although the UNAP links war-making and "norms of masculinity" (16) and its impact on perceptions about women's passivity and victimhood, and calls for debunking myths that fuel sexual violence (37), commitments to women's agency remain superficial and tenuous.

One of the main reasons for this ambivalent treatment of women's and girls' agency is because (despite rhetoric about adopting a gender perspective in conflict prevention) gender is loosely used as a synonym for women (Basu and Confortini 2017). The four plans use terms such as

violence against women and girls (VAWG) and (S)GBV interchangeably, seemingly unaware of the political implications of language choice. For example, the relation and/or distinction between the 17 references to VAWG and 21 references to (S)GBV in the LNAP is not clear and therefore tends to obscure the gendered power relations that underlie the violence. A Saferworld briefing clarifies the implications as follows:

> While violence against women and girls is a form of gender-based violence, by conflating the two (and in doing so, their causes) it is possible that any preventative activities may not address their specific underlying causes. Greater attention and resources are needed to document SGBV against men and boys. (Saferworld 2014: 3)

If conflict prevention is seen to happen through increased women's participation – thus making women responsible for conflict prevention – and if prevention is all about rape and/or SGBV, it follows that women become responsible for addressing SGBV. Instead of paying attention to complex normative gender practices of both men and women, increasing women's representation at the peace table and in government becomes the main remedy.

Conclusion

NAPs are regarded as one of the ways to domesticate international instruments such as UNSCR 1325. The first part of the article considered the role and context of NAPs and motivated the choice of the four plans from Africa. In the review of WPS literature I emphasised the divergent views on the role of language in transforming security discourse and practice. The first school of thought argues that we are witnessing slow but tangible norm diffusion and institutionalisation of WPS architecture through the use of gender-specific language. The second school is hesitant to celebrate such developments, and cautions that gender-sensitive language could mask lingering structural inequalities. In the final section I analysed the discourses in the four African plans through the lens of three sets of representations: women and gender, security, and violence. I read the plans for what they said or did not say, inferring the extent to which the language communicated the normative stance of the plan regarding WPS issues.

To varying degrees, the plans reflect a combination of predominantly liberal-feminist gender-equality language interspersed with some hints of critical-normative insight. And herein lie their defining features – ambivalence and paradox. First, in terms of representations of gen-

der(ed) identities, it is not all doom and gloom. Although the language effectively equates women with gender, and women with girls (children), there is evidence across all four plans that rudimentary attention was paid to the intersecting needs of particular groups. Second, conceptualisations of security are hard to pin down. The majority of the plans acknowledge feminist interpretations of human security (mostly implicitly) and the multidimensional nature of women's insecurity (explicitly), only to privilege women's participation in the security sector over genuine local ownership – in the name of "their protection" and for the "greater good." This militarisation of the WPS agenda is therefore founded on instrumentalist assumptions about women's roles in transforming security institutions. That said, except maybe for Nigeria, there is a sense that given the more inward-looking focus, plans from African countries recovering from war may appear to be less militaristic. But that can be confirmed only through a comprehensive survey of all African plans. Third, constructions of violence do not entirely follow the expected exceptionalising trend that one sees in international discourse, such as when "outward-looking" Northern plans forget about the violence of submerged gender discrimination in their own societies, and focus more on their outward reach to help others deal with their war-related SGBV. The plans generally display, at least in theory, a holistic understanding of violence beyond war. However, this positive trend is not sustained. The structural (gender) dimensions of prevention take a backseat to representations of gender–protection–participation connections. VAW and SGBV are conflated, which reinforces women's victimhood. This, coupled with the imperative to increase women's participation in the armed forces, creates an uncomfortable narrative of militarisation for the sake of both women's protection and women becoming change agents in the "battle" against SGBV.

Reflecting on the transformational potential of language, I contend that we cannot make a blanket claim that NAPs leave many of the important rules and discursive practices of the international peace and security institutions in place. On the one hand, the subtle production and reproduction of male power through the use of diplomatic-compromise language does pose a risk of relegating the gender question to the margins – despite or rather because of the women-focused language. This reading also confirms the conundrum that while it is a positive development when security institutions recognise WPS issues, militarised language confines the integration of WPS issues to a narrow understanding of peace and security. On the other hand, these "traps" can be mediated by following a reading that works with ambivalence rather than against it.

The mixed messages suggest that these plans have some capacity to challenge gendered power – there are glimpses of critical thinking that should be harnessed. Combined, the various degrees of gender-sensitive language – some intentional and the rest inadvertent – should be regarded as a conceptual opening. Since NAPs are intended to holistically reflect the intention of UNSCR 1325, there should be room for creative engagement and for the opportunity to address some of the limitations of UNSCR 1325 within the NAPs. A combination of radical-feminist intent, gender-friendly language, pragmatic execution, and context-sensitive indicators may stand a better chance of bringing about more inclusive security practices (Peace-Women 2013). These NAPs, I submit, create dialogical spaces that do not necessarily produce emancipatory outcomes, but at least in a small way facilitate a conducive environment for the change to happen.

Reading these discourses in the plans as if they were fixed, separate, and whole narratives is counterproductive. Language matters exactly because it cannot be pinned down. It is open-ended and fluid, and the discourses that it helps to sustain are equally fragmented. The transformative potential of language rests in this fragmented and ambiguous nature, as it mitigates binary analyses, and instead produces nuance. In the same way that UN resolutions can send out mixed messages about women's agency and victimhood, NAPs can also be read in ways that blur the lines of discursive fields (Shepherd 2011). I concur with Laura Shepherd, who argues that, in practice, "women" is used as an umbrella term representing "both the diversity of actual women seeking greater voice at multiple sites of political struggle, and also a whole array of gender arrangements which implicate men and women" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016a: 252; emphasis in original). I therefore conclude that these fragmented and fluid representations of women/gender, security, and (sexual) violence offer us an opening to figure out what gendered security means in Africa. The discursive content of the NAP is an important facilitator and co-producer of the material conditions in the spaces where policy is implemented. Language as the conveyer of multiple and entangled gendered meanings (some more radical than others) thus plays an important part in the production of gendered practices, with enormous power to change material futures for better or worse.

The broad patterns of fragmentation reflected in the four plans could be useful in the analysis of other plans from Africa/the global South as these relate to and contrast with Northern plans. What we learn is that meaningful implementation in diverse and hostile contexts is dependent on understanding that the language of the plans is more than just facilitator or impediment. The "messiness" of the discourses in the

four plans underscores their entanglement with the values of the developers and their discursive context. Reading NAPs productively as organic texts therefore makes them useful tools for UN gender officials and women's organisations in Africa to reflexively and strategically use the WPS security architecture in innovative ways in pursuit of agency. Ultimately, language lies at "the heart of what the WPS agenda is, and what it might become" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016b: 374).

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Die Macht widersprüchlicher Botschaften: Frauen, Frieden und der Sicherheitsjargon in afrikanischen National Action Plans

Zusammenfassung: Vor dem Hintergrund globaler Diskurse zu „Frauen, Frieden und Sicherheit" analysiert die Autorin die gender- und frauenbezogene Sprache in vier Nationalen Aktionsplänen afrikanischer Staaten (Kenia, Liberia, Nigeria und Uganda), die mit Blick auf die Resolution 1325 des UN-Sicherheitsrats entworfen wurden. Aus Sicht der Autorin besitzen Nationale Aktionspläne das Potenzial, die konsensorientierte Sprache der Resolutionen des Sicherheitsrats zu überwinden, und eröffnen daher neue Räume für politisches und praktisches feministisches Engagement. Ihre Analyse deckt drei diskursive Themenbereiche auf: die Konstruktion von "Womenandchildren", die Zivilisierung des Krieges durch Frauen und die Zuweisung von Verantwortung für die Verhütung geschlechtsspezifischer Gewalt an die Frauen selbst. Alle drei Themenbereiche haben einen Bezug zur Bildung geschlechtsspezifischer Identitäten sowie zu geschlechtsspezifischen Formen von Sicherheit und Gewalt. Auf unterschiedliche Weise kombinieren die Aktionspläne eine überwiegend liberal-feministisch geprägte Sprache mit kritischen Einsichten. Die Ambivalenz der Botschaften, die von diesen Plänen ausgehen, zeigt nach Ansicht der Autorin, dass Diskurse Brüche aufweisen und damit die Möglichkeit zur differenzierten Kontextanalyse und Umsetzung eröffnen.

Schlagwörter: Afrika, Kenia, Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda, Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, Frauen, Frauenpolitik, Aktionsprogramm/Aktionsplan, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000-10-31)