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Transforming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Critical Feminist Reflections and Views From the Diaspora

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Declaration

I, Harriët Meiborg, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature……..

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security. Whereas previously gender equality had been recognised primarily as a development issue, the adoption of Resolution 1325 firmly placed it on the international peace and security agenda. The so-called 'landmark resolution' identifies the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls stressing the importance of taking adequate measures for their protection, especially against sexual and gender-based violence, while calling for women's full and equal participation in all efforts relating to maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Since the adoption of Resolution 1325 twenty years ago, nine additional resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) have come into force highlighting especially overlooked and undervalued elements in previous resolutions. Together, these resolutions make up the WPS agenda.

Although the agenda is celebrated by many across activist, academic and policy environments, it has also been subject to critique. Whereas many debates have revolved around implementation gaps, improving strategies and priorities for action (e.g. Miller, Pournik & Swaine, 2014; UN Women, 2015; Shekhawat, 2018), others have questioned more fundamental aspects of the WPS agenda. For example, the assumption of a liberal version of peace and gender equality which are not necessarily inclusive of all interests (Parashar, 2019); the absence of a critique on militarism (Gibbings, 2011; Hudson, 2009), its failure to account for the ways in which gender relates to racial, sexual and classed oppressions (De Almagro, 2018) and the disproportionate control of powerful countries and institutions over the agenda (Shepherd, 2008; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). Critical studies as these demonstrate how unequal and exclusionary dynamics are embedded in the very agenda of WPS.

While these studies provide a starting point for critical inquiry into the agenda, this thesis aims to further such efforts by examining the challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS policy and practice through the lens of critical feminist theories. Drawing on socialist feminist, postmodern feminist and postcolonial/transnational feminist insights, this thesis first seeks to identify in what ways injustices and inequalities may be countered or reproduced in WPS policy discourse. Recognising that policy understandings oftentimes differ from practice, it will then explore how these critical feminist theories relate to the views of a specific set of WPS practitioners in the Netherlands. Four diasporic actors active in the Dutch WPS community were selected. While being part of the same WPS community, the practitioners come from different backgrounds and relate to the WPS agenda in different ways. Apart from providing a view from practice, diasporic actors are a particularly interesting site for investigating the challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS politics. Unlike other non-state actors in international politics, the diaspora is located at the interface of the local and the global and often combines both institutional and confrontational means to advance their agendas (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001). Involving diaspora women in these conversations, then, may tell us more about the possibility of a transformative WPS project through or beyond critical feminist theories.

1.2 Background information

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda: an introduction

In short, Resolution 1325 (2000):

> *…reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the United Nations system* (UN OSAGI)

Although Resolution 1325 was the first formal and legal Security Council document to recognise the gendered dimensions of conflict, peace and security, the agenda's key arguments were not new. A long history of women's activism for peace predates Resolution 1325. In 1915, in response to the outbreak of the First World War, female peace activists in Europe and the United states came together and formalised their efforts by founding the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). They formulated twenty resolutions which, among other things, highlighted women' vulnerability to violence in war, urged states to begin immediate negotiations for a just peace and underlined that democracy meant equal political rights and participation for women (Tickner & True, 2018). There are striking similarities between these resolutions and the Security Council Resolutions on WPS adopted 85 years later (Idem.). However, whereas the WPS agenda today focuses primarily on 'women's issues', the agendas of earlier women peace activists also included critiques against militarism, white supremacy, global capitalism and the state itself, none of which are incorporated in today's WPS resolutions (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016).

While some credits are usually given to grassroots activism in the adoption of Resolution 1325, most WPS literature points at previous international treaties for women's rights and gender equality[1] and the lobby efforts of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGO WG) as direct predecessors of the WPS agenda (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016). Informed by a review session of the Beijing Platform for Action on gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century, the NGO WG (then called NGO Working Group on Women and Armed Conflict) was founded in 2000 to lobby for the passage of a UN Security Council resolution that would help to ensure that the issue of women, peace and security would be properly addressed (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011).

[1] In particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the more recent Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. CEDAW is an international treaty which was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and ratified by all UN member states in September 1981. The treaty is also referred to as 'international bill of rights for women'. During the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was unanimously adopted. All UN member states made comprehensive commitments to endorse gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Declaration and Platform for Action was considered the most progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights thus far.

After Resolution 1325 was adopted, the NGO WG continued to play a key role in advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the United Nations and around the world (NGO WG, 2020). Today the NGO WG consists of 19 international non-governmental organisations, which work in over 50 conflict affected countries and partner with over 200 NGOs and 75 networks of civil society actors and activists (Idem.). The NGO WG is regularly invited "to provide the UN Security council with the civil society perspective on the women, peace and security agenda", while serving as a "bridge between women's human rights defenders and peacebuilders working in conflict-affected situations and senior policy-makers at UN Headquarters" (NGO WG, 2020). Given the central role of the NGO WG in pushing for the adoption of Resolution 1325 and their continued influence in the development of the agenda today, they claim a degree of authority over the agenda (Shepherd, 2008).

After the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000, nine additional resolutions have come to supplement the Women, Peace and Security agenda: UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960(2010), USCR 2106 (2013), UNSCR 2122 (2013), UNSCR 2242 (2015), UNSCR 2467 (2019) and UNSCR 2493 (2019). The first follow-up resolution came in 2008 (UNSCR 1820) and was first to recognise the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war "to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group" and demanded its immediate cessation by all parties to conflict. Many other resolutions would focus on the issue of sexual violence, including a call for special protection for women and children against sexual violence (UNSCR 1888), ending impunity for its perpetrators (UNSCR 1960 & 2106), while acknowledging that also men and boys are affected by this type of violence (UNSCR 2106). In 2019, another resolution on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) was added which underlines the need for strengthening justice and accountability and called for a survivor- centred approach in the prevention and response to CRSV (UNSCR 2467). Apart from sexual violence, two additional resolutions are specifically concerned with women's participation, recognising the barriers to their participation in peace processes (UNSCR 1889) and call for special measures to increase women's participation in all phases of conflict prevention, resolution and recovery (UNSCR 2122). Both Resolution 2242 (2015) and Resolution 2494 (2019) focus on the agenda's full implementation. In 2015, a high-level review of the WPS agenda was launched, assessing fifteen years of UNSCR 1325 (UN Women, 2015). Drawing on responses from over 60 member states, international and regional organisations, as well as inputs from 47 civil society organisations, academics and research institutes, a number of implementation gaps were identified. It reports, among other things, the continued low proportion of women among negotiating delegations to peace talks; limited funds dedicated to addressing gender concerns; and the barriers local women's organisations face when seeking access to international forums. Resolution 2242 includes several of the recommendations of this study, while Resolution 2494 four years later again reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of all previous resolutions. The listed resolutions give a good indication of which areas have been in focus over the past years. Although WPS is a wide- ranging agenda, its main discussions have revolved around a specific set of themes: conflict- related sexual violence, women's participation in peace and security processes and the agenda's full implementation.

Although new resolutions used to be much celebrated, in the past year civil society and some member states have become reluctant to adopt 'yet another resolution' (Security Council Report, 2019).

Especially since Resolution 2467 (2019) has been received by many as a pushback on women's rights rather than a sign of progress. Some of the ambitious goals included in the draft version of this resolution, initiated by Germany evoked resistance among certain Council members. For example, the idea to establish a formal Security Council subsidiary body on conflict-related sexual violence was removed as it did not resonate with all members. Yet most strikingly, during the negotiations, previously agreed language on the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of victims of sexual violence was challenged by the United states, and consequently removed from the final document (Security Council Report, 2020). According to Allen & Shepherd (2019), "the absence of SRH language must be read through the lens of the Trump administration's continued war on women", following the administration's 'global gag rule' – which banned federal funding to international family planning institutions offering abortion information, referrals or services – and its recent efforts to remove the word 'gender' from UN documents. In addition, during the negotiations of the lastest Resolution 2493 (2019), the role and protection of women human rights defenders proved controversial. China and Russia resisted against explicit use of language on this matter. Eventually, the resolution passed with a watered-down version of this passage (Security Council Report, 2019). These developments pose further questions about the future of the WPS agenda.

WPS politics in the Netherlands

While the WPS agenda is a global policy framework, individual states are expected to "outline strategies, identify priority areas, assign roles, establish timelines, construct indicators and determine a means of measurement and evaluation" in the form of a National Action Plan (NAP) (Miller et al., 2014, p.10). These NAPs have been the primary mechanisms to translate the 1325 agenda to both national and local levels (CARE, 2015). Likewise, in the Netherlands, WPS politics revolves primarily around the NAP on Women, Peace and Security. The Dutch NAP is a partnership between ministries, universities and fifty Dutch civil society organisations. The NAP contains several agreements about the ways in which the Netherlands will implement UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. The close collaboration between government and civil society in the Dutch NAP is exemplary, as most NAPs are formulated exclusively by governments. The civil society 'signatories' of the Dutch NAP include development, peace, human rights and diaspora organisations operating at local, regional, national and international level. Diaspora organisations fulfil a specific function within the civil society community. The official website for the Dutch NAP states that "diaspora organisations occupy an important role, because they know the local situation in conflict areas, the actors, the sensitivities, the challenges and the possibilities. In addition, they maintain contact with people in their countries of origin and can build bridges between peace activists in the West and the South. The diaspora signatories of the NAP are successful in their reconciliation efforts; they develop peace and reconciliation initiatives within local communities" (Dutch NAP Partnership, 2020)[2]. Others confirm that a special characteristic of the Dutch NAP, compared to other countries, is the active engagement of diaspora women (Oranje & Scholte, 2019).

[2] This is my own translation (Dutch-English).

The first Dutch NAP came into force in 2008 and covers a period of four years. The latest NAP published is NAPIII (2016-2019), while the fourth is currently being developed and soon to be published. The objective for NAPIII is "contributing to an enabling environment for women's participation and empowerment in conflict and post-conflict environments, so they can meaningfully participate in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, protection, relief and recovery" (Dutch NAP Partnership, 2016, p.5). Each NAP includes a list of Southern focus countries. The NAP that is currently being developed will also include a 'domestic pillar', which will focus on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in the Netherlands itself. Diaspora organisations have had an important role in pushing for this domestic component in the agenda. All four organisations participating in this study are part of the Dutch gender, peace and security lobby group and are all signatories of the current NAP. However, the organisations vary in degree of involvement in the NAP development and in the extent to which they allign their work to the WPS agenda more generally.

The diaspora as political and developmental actor

Whereas the concept of diaspora typically used to refer to victimised exile groups unable to return to their homeland – typically the Jewish diaspora – it is now used in a much broader sense. In common usage, it denotes the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland, including voluntary migration (Oxford Dictionaries). In the context of international politics and development, the diaspora is typically understood in this broad sense, as 'expatriate communities' (e.g. Sharma et al., 2011). This is, therefore, also the understanding adopted in this thesis. While diasporas are by no means a new phenomenon, their involvement in development and transnational politics has proliferated over the past decades. Development institutions have shown interest in the 'development potential' of diasporas in the understanding that they can effectively contribute to and promote development in their homelands (e.g. Sharma et al., 2011). In this discourse, diasporas are typically seen as bridging actors, connecting the local and the global. In a similar fashion, the Dutch NAP emphasises the diaspora signatories' successful efforts in developing peace and reconciliation initiatives within local communities. At the same time, the growth of 'transnational advocacy networks' has facilitated the access of nontraditional international actors, like the diaspora, to the international system (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001). Following Keck & Sikkink (1998), "A transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" (p.2). The cross-border advocacy for women, peace and security, may be seen as an example of such a network, in which also the diaspora is ever-more present.

Indeed, by formulating their demands in compliance with internationally institutionalised principles and norms, diasporas have increased their ability to influence policymaking on national and global levels (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001). However, the political position of the diaspora in international politics cannot be characterised only as such. Paradoxically, as Østergaard- Nielsen (2001) points out, while being transnational per definition, "many diasporas do not advocate transnational forms of organization such as global civil society" (p.218). Instead, diasporas often have a national or local rather than a transnational political agenda (Idem.). Similarly, as the Bond for International Development (2015) points out "the approach [of the diaspora] is often more immediate, more familiar and less remote,

although not to the exclusion of seeking to address structural issues" (p.2). They also report that: "Diasporas tend to lack trust in INGOs and their effectiveness…Many diaspora communities believe that INGOs perpetuate negative stereotypes and oversimplify the serious issues that affect the lives of their families and friend in their countries of origin" (p.3). In addition, while diaspora involvement in host-state politics may be welcomed in certain cases, political institutions tend to be more sceptical when diasporas' domestic or international agendas differ from that of the host country (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001). Given that strategies and aims of diasporic actors may at times be conflicting with transnational and or host-state agendas, they may also strategise beyond these institutions. As Østergaard- Nielsen (2001) clarifies, "most diasporas employ multi-level strategies drawing upon both confrontational and institutional means" (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001, p.224). Because of this ambiguous position, being transnational and local at once, and working both through and against prevailing institutions and structures, the diaspora is an especially interesting site of investigation for this study. Given that the aim of this study is to examine progressive ways forward for the WPS agenda, the diaspora may provide greater insight into if, where and how to instigate such a project.

While it might be tempting to visualise the diaspora as united voice of 'the people', the reality, of course, is more complex. In fact, as Østergaard- Nielsen (2001) points out, historically mainly political elites have undertaken transnational political activities. While some argue that 'grass-roots transnationalism' is rising, it continues to be difficult to differentiate between diaspora political mobilisation 'from above' and 'from below' (Idem.). In addition, we should take further note of the enormous variety within and amongst diasporic communities. The diaspora of a certain country is never a homogenous community and their particular political agendas rarely represent the entire community (Østergaard- Nielsen, 2001). The aim of this thesis, then, is not to make any definite claims about a common diasporic vision or perspective. Rather it is an explorative account into transformative pathways for WPS incorporating the views of set of practitioners that may be more inclined to combine institutional means with rupture and transformation efforts. Whether this assumption is valid however, is also a question asked in this thesis.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The main theories drawn upon in this thesis are critical feminist theories. While it may be argued that feminist theory in principal is critical as it seeks to understand, expose and/or challenge gendered inequalities, not all feminist theories seek to confront hegemonic power relations to the same extent. For some scholars, therefore, the only truly critical feminism can be found in the integration of Critical Theory and feminism. The field of Critical Theory – in singular and upper case – designates several generations of philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition, also known as the Frankfurt School. Recent feminist contributions associated with this school of thought include thinkers such as Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib. Although the aspiration of social change that can be found in the work of these theorists is central to the critical feminist framework this uses, it includes a wider range of theoretical strands. Similar to Keuchevan's (2013) 'mapping of contemporary critical theory' which covers a range of different theorists, including Judith Butler's queer theory, Frederic Jameson's theory of

postmodernism, Gayatri Spivak's postcolonialism and John Holloway's 'open Marxism', this research includes socialist, postmodern, postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches as a way to identify progressive ways forward for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The shared critical dimension of these theories, then, drawing on Keuchevan's account (2013), "whether radical or more moderate, …consists in the general character of their challenge to the contemporary social world" and rather than merely being an analysis or interpretation "necessarily contains a political dimension" (p. 2-3). 'Political', here, should not be understood in relation to governance, nor to the mere existence of power relations. Rather, in a Rancièrian sense, 'politics' denotes dissent, rupture with the 'police order'. 'The police' should not be interpreted in the narrow common understanding of the petty police. Rather, Rancière's (1999) defines it as a broader, all-encompassing order of bodies which dictates what can and cannot be said and done, who can and cannot be seen and heard. Politics occur when there is a rupture in this order on the basis of equality, an event which makes visible those whose existence had been denied by the police. It is this 'political' dimension', as rupture, as challenge to the contemporary social world, that the selected theories for this thesis share, albeit in different ways. Given the central role of critical feminist theory in this thesis, a separate chapter is dedicated to the discussion of socialist, postmodern, postcolonial and transnational feminisms (chapter 2).

1.4 Research objective and question

Research objective: The main objective is to identify challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS policy and practice through an inquiry into critical feminist theories. It aims to do so by analysing the WPS policy discourse through the lens of socialist feminism, postmodern feminism and postcolonial/transnational feminisms *and* by seeking ways in which the views of a select group of Dutch diaspora practitioners may or may not coincide with such critical feminist reflections. The study selected four founders of diaspora organisations in the Netherlands, from different countries of origin, yet all actively involved in the Dutch WPS community. While the critical feminist theories form the entry point of the conversations with the practitioners, it also leaves space for them to reflect on the WPS agenda beyond these theoretical concerns and discussions.

Research question: What are the challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS policy and practice through the lens of critical feminist theories and how does this relate to the views of a select group of diaspora practitioners active in the Dutch WPS community?

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 WPS policy discourse: sampling approach and data analysis

The first component of this study concerned the analysis WPS policy discourse. Two levels of 'purposive sampling' were applied for selecting the 'setting' and the documents. Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling common to qualitative research which aims to "sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed" (Bryman, 2012 p.418). The first level is that of the setting – in this case the Security Council and the NGO

WG – and the second one of specific documents – selected Security Council documents and official statements of the NGO WG. Although these two actors differ in terms of power and perspectives, both are central in shaping the WPS policy discourse. While the Security Council has the final say in deciding what is included in the agenda, the NGO WG as *the* representative of global civil society is able to set the contours of debate at the highest level. Incorporating both, thus will give a completer and more dynamic view of WPS policy discourse. In order to give a good account of the agenda's formal content and evolution over the past twenty years, all ten Security Council resolutions were included in this analysis. These are documents ranging from two to ten pages and typically include two main parts: an unnumbered preamble which sets the context, refers to past actions and clarifies the purpose of the resolutions, and a set of numbered paragraphs which contain a Security Council opinion or requested action. Similarly, all official statements of the NGO WG during the Security Council Open Debates on WPS since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 were included (21 in total). The statements of the NGO WG are usually delivered by different civil society representatives who work themselves in conflict areas. Including all statements over the same time span as the Security Council documents allowed for a good overview and comparison between the two.

The critical feminist theories outlined in chapter two (socialist, postmodern and postcolonial/transnational feminisms) informed the analysis of the documents. Chapter two gives insight into key issues of concerns and debates associated with each theoretical frame. Through content and critical discourse analysis, this study investigated whether these critical feminist insights were applicable to the Security Council resolutions and NGO WG statements, and how the two actors may differ or overlap in their views. Content analysis could be described as "a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p.349). This form of analysis focuses on 'objective' observations rather than on the interpretations that are likely to be observed differently among analysts (Bryman, 2012, p.289). While such more systematic and 'objective' observations were part of the analysis, for example to determine the amount of attention paid to specific themes, the main focus of the document analysis has been critical discourse analysis. In discourse analysis, language is treated as topic rather than as a resource (Bryman, 2012, p.22). In fact, it is understood as *constitutive* of the social world. *Critical* discourse analysis distinguishes itself from 'general' discourse analysis through its focus on how power relations are established and reinforced through language use (Blommaert, 2000). In this manner critical discourse analysis allows for the uncovering of power asymmetries and exclusions in the WPS agenda. While the analysis was primarily categorised along the lines of previously established critical feminist concerns, it should be noted that the process was somewhat 'iterative', meaning that "it involves weaving back and forth between data and theory" (Bryman, 2012, p.26). Aspects of the critical feminist theories that proved highly relevant were further elaborated on in the theory chapter, while certain less relevant aspects were later omitted. This process continued during the second phase of the study: the analysis of the diaspora perspectives.

1.5.2 Diaspora perspectives: sampling approach, data collection and analysis

The second component concerned the analysis of diaspora perspectives. In this case, too, both the context and participants were purposively sampled. First, the Dutch Gender, Peace and Security civil society lobby group was chosen as context. During my internship in the previous semester I was introduced to this lobby group and learned that those civil society actors actively involved in WPS politics in the Netherlands could be found in this group. As noted above, strategies, priorities, indicators, measurement and evaluation are typically identified at the national level. For this reason, studying WPS politics in national context provided greater insight into the practical application of the agenda. The Dutch WPS community was chosen because of my previous familiarity with the context and some of its members. In consultation with the leader of the Gender, Peace and Security lobby group, I selected four diasporic practitioners from different countries of origin who are active members of the group. This selection provided me with a diverse, yet specialised set of diaspora practitioners. Although the small sample may be perceived as a limitation to this study, it is important to note that the sample did not mean to represent a larger diasporic community *per* se. Although there will be reflected upon what these findings may indicate about the role of the diaspora in WPS politics, the focus has been on the content of the contributions of the diaspora women, drawing on their WPS expertise. Apart from being professionally involved with WPS, they often have first-hand experience through having worked and lived in conflict-affected areas. In addition, many of the women hold relevant academic degrees. They are not 'outsiders' to the research subject, they are experts. The 'interviews', then, may better be characterised as shared conversations about challenges and desired ways forward for the WPS agenda. Although it would be overblown to call this approach 'decolonial' in nature, it may be seen as a first effort to disrupt some of the hierarchical and colonial tendencies in academic research.

Data was collected through four semi-structured interviews/conversations of approximately one hour each. While using an interview guide covering questions appropriate to the different critical feminist theories as a starting point (see appendix 1), there was space left for the participants to take the conversations beyond these questions. I would ask both open questions, for example, about their visions, agendas and relation to WPS in their work, while also sharing specific feminist critiques and asking them about their views on these critiques. Anecdotes were encouraged, while I tried to refrain from pushing the participants towards certain critical perspectives. While using the critical feminist theories as frame of reference, a mix of conversation, content and critical discourse analysis was used to analyse the contributions of the four participants. Similar to the analysis of policy documents, this study component combined systematic examination of certain patterns, themes, biases and meanings, with a critical interrogation into language use and power relations. Occasionally, it incorporated elements of conversation analysis: "the fine-grained analysis of talk as it occurs in interaction in naturally occurring situations" (Bryman, 2012, p.522). For example, I reflected in some instances on how questions might have been understood or misunderstood through the way that they had been uttered.

1.5.3 Limitations

This study could have benefited from more elaborate research into the views of the diaspora practitioners, as well as a more participatory process. In the research design, I indicated the option for a

group session following the individual conversations. Given that I gained a large amount of data from these individual sessions with plenty of material for discussion, I decided not to carry out this group session and strengthen the document analysis and theoretical component of the thesis instead. Although I think this decision benefited the overall quality of my thesis, further research into the perspectives of the diaspora women in a group setting could have resulted in more complex and nuanced data. In addition, this would have resulted in a more participatory process, in which the relation between 'researcher' and 'participants' becomes less hierarchical, coinciding with efforts to decolonise knowledge production processes.

Moreover, the participants may have associated me with the organisations that have facilitated the contact between me and the participants. I met some of them during my internship for a relatively large international development organisation and the leader of the Gender, Peace and Security lobby group has facilitated the email contact. These organisations are not neutral actors in WPS politics. Despite the fact that I emphasised that it concerned an independent research, this may have still influenced the contributions of the participants.

Finally, while this study has purposively chosen to use critical feminist theories as a primary means of reference for identifying challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS policy and practice, this also constitutes a limitation. Despite increasing attention for Southern perspectives and knowledges, particularly in postcolonial feminism, critical feminist theories remain for an important part located in the Western academy. In order to gain greater insight into transformative views beyond Western frameworks and established understanding of both 'theory' and 'critique', further explorations into decolonial methodologies are required.

1.5.4 Ethical considerations

This research project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) before starting field research. In anticipation of the interviews, the participants were notified about the purpose of the project, personal data storage and recording in an information letter. In addition, they were asked to sign a consent form following the format of the NSD (see appendix 2). In order to make sure that no unauthorised person is able to access the personal data, names and contact details were replaced with a code in the interview transcripts. A list of names contact details and respective codes was stored separately from the rest of the collected data. The participants were informed that, in the final thesis, their names and the names of their organisations would be anonymised. However, they were also notified that background/contextual information provided in the interviews could indirectly be traced back to them. Given the importance of the personal, professional and academic backgrounds of the participants in informing their views on WPS, it was pivotal to incorporate elements of this in the thesis. Aware of the issue of anonymisation, it only incorporated those details relevant to the findings and analysis, while leaving out those that did not directly have a purpose.

1.6 Thesis Outline

Chapter two introduces the different critical feminist lenses: socialist feminism, postmodern feminism and postcolonial/transnational feminism. For each of these currents, it will identify key scholars (including Nancy Fraser, Judith Butler and Chandra Talpade Mohanty), their main contributions and relevant discussions within and between the different currents. This includes dilemmas such as recognition politics versus redistribution politics, individual versus collective acts of resistance, and micropolitics of context versus projects for systemic transformation.

Drawing on these critical feminist perspectives and debates, **chapter three** examines WPS policy discourse. It analyses the ten Security Council Resolutions on WPS and the official statements of the NGO Working Group over the same time span (2000-present). The different feminist lenses lay bare how different forms of inequality, exclusion and marginalisation are reproduced through the discourses of both actors. These findings, then, allow for a further reflection on the discrepancies between policy perspectives and critical social science perspectives.

Departing from the perspectives of four diasporic actors active in the Dutch WPS community, **chapter four** aims to further the critical discussion on the WPS agenda and explore ways in which (diasporic) practice may allow for politics beyond the WPS policy framework. Taking the critical feminist theories as reference point, it explores the ways in which their perspectives may or may not coincide with these critiques. Based on these findings it will further reflect on the relation between the diaspora and critical vision and the transformative potential of WPS practice more generally. In the **concluding chapter**, I will summarise the main findings and answer the research question accordingly.

2. Critical feminist theories

The term critical feminist theory evokes multiple theories and meanings. As noted above, the 'critical' aspect of the feminist theories drawn upon in this thesis, relates to its challenge to the contemporary social order, or its 'political' dimension which is best described as a rupture with this order on the basis of equality (Keuchevan, 2013; Rancière, 1999). As this chapter will demonstrate, such ruptures may occur in different ways. Rather than arguing in favour of one specific form of doing so, this chapter lays out different perspectives with different priority areas. It draws on the following critical feminist lenses: socialist feminism, postmodern feminism and postcolonial/ transnational feminism. This chapter identifies a selection of key theorists and main insights of each feminist strand. The insights identified in this chapter constitute the main frame of analysis for both the policy document analysis in chapter three and the analysis of the diaspora perspectives in chapter four.

2.1 Socialist feminism

Central to socialist feminist theorising is the intersection of gender with class. Early Marxist and socialist feminist theorists have drawn on classic Marxist writings such as Frederick Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Using a historical materialist approach, Engels provided an explanation for the emergence of women's oppression with the development of the social institutions of the patriarchal family and private property at a particular historic period (Brewer, 2004). Women being excluded from ownership of the means of production while converting household tasks into a private service in emerging capitalist societies, would have provided the basis for the systematic subordination of women (Idem.). Although the assertion that gender oppression finds its origins in capitalism has been largely abandoned – with current socialist feminists included – the entanglement of capitalist and gendered oppression continues to be emphasised by both feminist theories and movements such as Feminism of the 99% (F99). In their recent manifesto, Aruzza et al. (2019) maintain that far from being accidental, gender oppression is hardwired in the very structure of capitalist societies. By separating social reproduction – the labour and services that are needed to sustain human beings and social communities – from production for profit and assigning the former job to women and subordinating it to the second, capitalism in fact did *re*invent women's oppression.

An important characteristic of socialist feminism today can be found in its opposition towards liberal feminism. Whereas liberal feminists have pushed for the removal of barriers for women's equal participation in public life through legislative reform, integration in male-dominated institutions and equal opportunity politics, socialist feminists have sought to address the overarching system of social inequality in which gender inequality is embedded (Walby, 2001). These two perspectives stand in stark contrast to one another. Following the socialist-inspired F99 movement, "rather than seeking to abolish social hierarchy, it [liberal feminism] seeks to 'diversify' it, 'empowering' 'talented' women to rise to the top" (p.23). The elitist feminism that this liberal perspective provokes fails "to address the socioeconomic constraints that make freedom and empowerment impossible for the large majority of women" (Idem.). Such socioeconomic constraints, in turn, lie at the heart of socialist feminist analyses.

Apart from rejecting liberal feminism, socialist feminists have also taken a strong stance against the postmodern shift in feminist theorising. Feminist theory increasingly focused on culture, discourse, language and identity formations, a shift that coincided with the 'deconstructive, post-structuralist questioning of modernist social science' at large (Roseneil, 2012). Given its strong modernist foundations, socialist feminist theory was increasingly at odds with the dominant theorising of its era. As Nancy Fraser (2013) explains, whereas in the 1970s gender theory was still strongly influenced by Marxism, by the 1990s, most feminist theorists had taken 'the cultural turn' losing feminism's historic links to Marxism – and to social theory and political economy more generally. For Fraser, this is especially problematic because this academic turn has been accompanied by a shift in feminist politics: from 'the politics of redistribution' to 'the politics of recognition' (1995; 2013). Whereas the former was centred on the gender division of labour – addressing socioeconomic injustices such as gender-specific modes of exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation – the latter formulated less material aims such as (institutionalised) cultural domination, nonrecognition and disrespect relating to androcentrism. "In these 'post-socialist' conflicts", following Fraser, "group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilisation. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle" (1995, p.68). Different from certain socialist feminists, Fraser does *not* argue that cultural injustices are of lesser importance than socioeconomic injustices. In fact, she applauds the broadening of gender struggle, moving beyond reductive economistic paradigms which failed to recognise harms rooted in culture rather than the division of labour (Fraser, 2013). However, she condemns the *replacement* of the cultural struggle by the socioeconomic struggle, a trend that has "has dovetailed all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress socialist memory" (Fraser, 2013, p.160). Consequently, the recent gains made by the 'cultural turn' are "entwined with a tragic loss", that of feminism as a truly transformative project (Fraser, 2013, p.161).

Fraser 's argument is based on a theoretical model which distinguishes oppressions rooted in culture from oppression rooted in the political economy. Although the two dimensions interact and are mutually reinforcing, she notes that in capitalist societies "the institutionalization of specialised economic relations permits the relative uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige" (2013, p.177). As status and class can diverge from one another, also recognition and redistribution claims can have a degree of autonomy from one another. To illustrate the distinct logics of the two sets of claims, Fraser (1995) invites readers to, hypothetically, envision a conceptual spectrum of oppressed collectivities, ranging from ideal-typical victims of pure misrecognition to ideal-typical victims of pure maldistribution with a 'bivalent case' in the middle. She draws on the Marxian conception of the exploited class as being located at the maldistribution end of the spectrum while placing an ideal conception of a despised sexuality at the other end of the spectrum. (She emphasises that these are *analytical* distinctions, noting that in the real world, culture and political economy are far more imbricated with one another, yet they are useful to clarify central political dilemmas). Homosexuals, in this conception, occupy no distinctive position in the division of labour, but are distributed throughout the entire class structure of capitalist societies. Rather their 'mode of collectivity' suffers from institutionalised cultural devaluation of homosexuality, yet with very real material consequences such as harassment, violence, denial of legal

rights, as well as economic disadvantages. Gender, as well as race, however, are more bivalent categories, meaning that gender injustice is rooted in both cultural devaluation of traits associate with 'femininity', while also being rooted in the economic structure of society: gender informs the division of labour both by distinguishing paid productive from unpaid reproductive labour, and by structuring the division between higher-paid, male-dominated occupations and lower-paid female dominated occupations. Being criticised by postmodern scholars such as Judith Butler (1997) for presenting lesbian and gay struggles as 'merely cultural' and thus as secondary, derivative or even trivial, Fraser (2013, ch.7) reaffirms that in her account injustices of misrecognition are as serious as distributive injustices. Neither the politics of redistribution nor the political of recognition by themselves are satisfactory. Nevertheless, remaining faithful to a social feminist project while warning for the danger of neoliberal co-optation of struggles for social justice in the form of recognition politics alone, it is clear that for Fraser redistribution needs to regain its place on the feminist agenda. The intersection of gender and class, the prioritisation of social transformation over equal opportunity politics and redistribution/recognition dilemmas, will be discussed in the light of the WPS in the following chapters.

2.2 Postmodern feminism

Postmodernism is characterised by its scepticism towards the totalising nature of grand narratives in modernist thought. As Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) put it: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives" (p.xxiv). This includes the questioning of key assumptions in Enlightenment thinking, especially its attempt to find universal truth and to comprehend the totality of social reality. Instead, postmodernism embraces "situational, perspectival knowledge and a relational, constituted subject" (Hekman, 2001, p.5507). Drawing on 'deconstructive methodologies', among other approaches, postmodernism views language and discourse as constituting elements of social reality (Hekman, 2001). Although modernist critics often interpret the focus on language and the discursive in postmodern analyses as a prioritisation of the 'symbolic' over the material, real conditions of existence, postmodern scholars have rejected such oppositions. Instead, they emphasise how 'symbolic' and 'material' dimensions are necessarily intertwined (Roseneil & Frosh, 2012). In addition, postmodernism engages in critiques on modernist understandings of knowledge and the subject rooted in false binarisms.

A prominent theme in postmodern feminist scholarship is knowledge. Although various scholars have challenged knowledge claims from a feminist perspective, it was Donna Haraway (1988) who sought to think beyond both totalising notions of objectivity – "a view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (p.589)– as well as 'disempowering relativisms' – "ways of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally'" (p.548). In her essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), she asserts that all knowledge claims reflect the conditions in which they are produced and are therefore necessarily partial. Objectivity, then, is "about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (p.582-583). Although 'subjugated knowledges' may be preferred above claims to universality as they are least likely to deny the "critical and interpretive core of all knowledge", neither

are these 'innocent positions' (p.584). The alternative, for Haraway, are situated knowledges, or "partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Idem.).

Apart from rejecting totalising knowledge claims, postmodern feminists have sought to destabilise gendered binaries which construct men and women as diametrically opposed to one another, while the 'feminine' is discursively constructed as subordinate to the 'masculine' (Hekman, 2001). Typically, the 'masculine' symbolises strength and rationality, while the 'feminine' is associated with vulnerability and compassion. By challenging such binary and essentialist depictions, postmodern feminists oppose the subordination of women, as well as others harmed by these dichotomies. Judith Butler is best known for her deconstructive work on gender, as well as sexuality and sex. Most relevant for the purposes of this study is her notion of the 'performativity of gender' which she describes as "the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself", and secondly "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effect through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (p.32). To put it differently, performativity is the way in which discourse both produces *and* naturalises notions of a gendered essence. Such discourse, then, operates not through one single or unchanging act, but a continuous reiteration or 'performance' of such normative notions (2007). According to Butler, the discursive construction of gender, sex and sexuality are connected through the 'heterosexual matrix' which assumes that sexual identity is based on biological sex which causes 'gender development', which in turn causes sexual desire. This 'regulatory regime' inscribes a norm which renders other ways of living as unnatural, deviant and invisible.

Butler's understandings of sex, gender and sexuality have implications for feminist politics. Firstly, as she 'troubles' all three categories, it becomes harder to identify the 'subject' of emancipation. For Butler (2007), insisting on a stable subject of feminist politics is necessarily exclusionary. When a coherent subject is assumed *a priori*, it limits the scope of the project only to those who can be acknowledged as subject. Feminist politics focused on women as a category fail to take into account the fact that this category is "produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought "(Butler, 2007, p.78). In addition, given the different constitutions of gender historically and its intersection with race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and other discursively constituted identities, "it becomes impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler, 2007, p.79-80). In order not to reinforce the same regulatory and exclusionary logics, feminist political practice, for Butler, requires a radical rethinking of constructions of identity. Such rethinking may be done through 'critical subversion': "a political mode that is designed to produce a sense of alienation and discomfort in the reader so that newness may enter and alter a defamiliarized world" (Butler & Salih, 2004, p.15). This may be carried out through 'virtuous disobedience' and nonconformity by individuals, for example by 'doing drag'. She also sees potential in collective practice of gender subversion requiring only loosely overlapping connections among women, a coalition premised on their 'acceptance of divergence' (Stone, 2005). The formulation of such a political project, however, remains rather vague in Butler's account. Yet this is a deliberate choice. She leaves her theory open ended and prescriptive, believing that political decisions are made in a 'lived moment' that

cannot always be theoretically anticipated (Butler & Salih, 2004, p.64). Regardless of the precise format of such an anti-essentialist feminist project, for Butler it at least requires resisting and extending discursive norms by which subjects are currently defined.

Although the current 'politics of recognition' or 'politics of difference' (Fraser, 1995) – central to today's struggles over identity and difference – are not necessarily supported by postmodern feminists, this political current does draw on postmodern notions of difference, plurality and multiplicity. Postmodern feminists understand gender as a discursive and unstable category that cannot be separated from other identity markers. As DiPalma & Ferguson (2006) put it: "the postmodern move sees feminist inquiry as best served by understanding gender as always already intertwined with other analytical and political energies" (p.134). A potential danger of emphasising multiplicity and difference is that struggles for social justice gain an individual rather than collective character, thereby weakening its potential for transformation. While such arguments tend to be popular among socialist feminists, postmodern feminists highlight the complex functioning of power instead. Rather than being limited to certain actors, particularly the ruling class and the state, they do not consider power to "operate straightforwardly from the top downwards" (Butler & Salih, 2004, p.40). Instead they highlight how power works in micro-relations and everyday practices. Such understandings of power, then, open up new possibilities for resistance and agency, including the emancipatory potential of minority groups. In subsequent chapters, we will discuss how such a perspective may contribute to progressive WPS policy and practice. In addition, the analyses will draw upon other postmodern insights such as the value of situated knowledges, the deconstruction of gendered binaries and the implications of postmodern feminist views for politics more generally.

2.3 Postcolonial and transnational feminism

Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism intervenes into both feminism and postcolonialism. It challenges the overwhelming focus on Western, white and middle-class women in feminist theory and practice, as well as the gender-blindness of anti-colonial activism and postcolonial theorists (Zuckerwise, 2015; Bartels et al., 2019). A common concern among postcolonial feminists is that they seek to expose and/or challenge the lingering effects of Western (neo)colonialism on women and feminism in the South. Among postcolonial feminists, a range of different social and political convictions exist, as well as approaches to the subject. For the purpose of this study, this section will focus on the ways in which postcolonial feminist scholarship has complicated questions of women and gender rather than its efforts to bring gender into postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial feminism could be seen as an effort to reclaim feminism for women in the South. As Sri Lankan historian Kumari Jayawardena (1986) explains in her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, the concept of feminism in itself has been cause of much confusion and discussion in countries of the South:

> *It has variously been alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of 'decadent' Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie; and that it alienates or diverts women, from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other (p.48-49)*

According to Jayawardena, however, feminism was *not* imposed on the Third World and flourished in several Southern countries in previous decades and centuries, although not necessarily labelled as such. In her historical account she recovers early feminisms and women's mobilisation in a number of Asian countries sharing a common history of colonial rule. Focusing on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, she demonstrates that feminist struggles – which she defines as action against women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society – emerged in these countries against the backdrop of resistance to imperialism and foreign domination on the one hand, and to exploitative local rulers and traditional patriarchal and religious structures on the other. Whereas in many countries feminist struggles were dominated by the local bourgeoisie with varying degrees of involvements of the masses, in other countries feminism became a revolutionary force closely aligned with the workers movement. Jayawardena's historical account makes visible the distinct histories of feminism in the South, which in many cases are entwined with histories of colonialism and imperialism. By doing so, she provides a counternarrative to the Eurocentric belief that feminism is merely 'Western-import' without a history of their own. This 'feminist view from the South' became central in postcolonial feminist research.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1986) belongs to the paradigmatic texts of the field of postcolonial feminism. In this essay, Mohanty articulates a critique of Western feminist scholarship on 'third world women' via a discursive colonisation of their lives and struggles. By drawing on a number of feminist writings, she argues that the material and historical heterogeneities of women's lives in the third world are reduced to a composite, singular 'third world woman' in Western feminist discourse. The 'average third world woman', here, appears as leading "an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc.). This in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation (also discursive) of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions" (p.337). The methodologies these feminist writings rely on assume a cross-cultural validity and universality of women's subordination which are in fact profoundly Eurocentric, judging third world women's 'level of oppression' or 'progress' against Western standards. Inattentive to the complexities and contradictions which characterise the lives of different women in the third world, and by clinging on to universal, ahistorical images instead, Western feminist scholarship tends to reproduce a colonialist discourse "which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing first/third world connections" (p.352).

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod has developed a similar critique yet focuses specifically on Western representations of 'the Muslim woman'. In her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013),

Abu-Lughod points out that although many Muslim women in the Arab world live deeply gendered lives, these images are far from an accurate representation of their diverse and complex realities. This is especially problematic given that such images have informed the narrative of rescuing Muslim women after the 9/11 attacks, a narrative which justified all type of foreign intervention, including military invasion (Delphy, 2008; Abu-Lughod, 2013). As Laura Bush stated: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (qt. in Abu-Lughod, 2013, p.33). In *Sex and Secularism* (2018), Joan Wallace Scott seeks to challenge the false dichotomy which equals secularism with gender equality, while Islam is depicted as synonymous with women's oppression. One of the things she points out is that the grounds on which gender equality is championed in the West are fairly arbitrary and misleading. For example, the emphasis on sexual autonomy, which is symbolised by 'covered' and 'uncovered' bodies, is a very narrow measure of women's freedom, not mentioning its bias in the light of Western values.

Whereas many postcolonial feminist scholars have been concerned with the deconstruction of essentialised depictions of 'Third World' and Muslim women through highlighting diversity, others have sought to challenge Western frameworks by ethnographies of particular women groups. For example, Saba Mahmood's (2005) study of the women's piety movement in Cairo, which is part of the larger Islamic Revival that has swept the Muslim World since at least the 1970s. Her ethnographic account does not only demonstrate that any social or political transformation is always informed by local, contingent struggles, but also speaks back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature present in the bulk of feminist scholarship against which the Islamist movement is held accountable, including the belief of an innate desire for freedom and the understanding of agency solely as resistance to relations of domination. The women's piety movement challenges such assumptions and norms, demonstrating that rather than being innate or universal, they are in fact also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions. Such postcolonial feminist critiques have consequences for the possibility of a global feminist project. For Mahmood (2005), the prescriptive nature of a 'politics of global sisterhood', especially when it is imposed from above or outside, is likely "to be far worse than anything it seeks to displace" (p.36). Mohanty (1986) also notes that if feminist concepts are understood as universally applicable, they can "create a false sense of commonality of oppressions, interests and struggles between and amongst women globally" (p. 348). Nevertheless, she does not reject a cross-border feminist project on such grounds.

Despite having different agenda and vocabularies, postcolonial feminism overlaps in certain aspects with intersectional feminism. Both feminist currents resisted the Eurocentric bias of the white women's movement since the 1980s (Bartels et al., 2019). However, whereas postcolonial feminism focuses on discursive representations and adopts a transnational, historical approach, intersectional feminism is primarily concerned with different interlocking identity categories and adopts a more localised approach focused on present inequalities (Kerner, 2016). Rooted in black feminism and other feminisms of colour, the concept of intersectionality highlighted how different forms of oppression such as gender, race and class interact and reinforce one another rather than being isolated and distinct (Kerner, 2016). Whereas early intersectional analyses have focused primarily on the 'master categories' of gender, race and class, more recent analyses confront a wide range of different axes of social inequality and oppression including caste, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age (Bartels et al., 2019). Intersectional

analysis has increasingly been employed by postcolonial feminists as well. As Parashar (2018) points out, "the intersectional analyses pioneered by postcolonial feminists highlight the multiple marginalisations, inequalities, and injustice at the local, national, and international levels that shape women's experiences of insecurity and transnational feminism" (p.835). As certain critics argue, however, the focus on injustices and systematic oppressions gets lost in many intersectional analyses because of its focus on individual experiences of oppression (Bartels et al., 2019). By focusing, for example, on the marginalisation of black queer individuals or indigenous women with disabilities, the emphasis is placed on difference rather than commonality, on particular experiences of marginalisation rather than building solidarity for transformation. Such an approach may disrupt hegemonic narratives (characteristic of postmodern approaches),but is less likely to challenge systemic inequality and injustices (characteristic of socialist and certain postcolonial approaches). As part of the analyses in the following chapters, it will examine how intersectionality is understood in the context of WPS, while assessing other postcolonial feminist questions such as the representation of Southern women in WPS discourse and the possible identification of feminist perspectives from the South.

Transnational feminism

The term 'transnational feminism', according to one of the founders of transnational feminist studies Inderpal Grewal (2008), was used "to designate an approach to understanding and analysing the mobility of social movements in an era of intensified globalization, linking the impact of this intensification to post-structuralist deconstruction of the master narratives in knowledge production that were foundational to the hegemony of the West" (p.190). Rather than outlining a clearly defined framework for thought and praxis, transnational feminism provides a space to rethink the meanings and possibilities of collective feminist praxis. In fact, as Swarr & Nagar (2010) state in their collective work *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* (2010), "transnational feminist studies is necessarily an unstable field that must contest its very definition in order to be useful" (p.12). In their discussion of transnational feminism, in which they involve various prominent contributors to field – both activists and academics – they centralise three sets of dichotomies that are central to rethinking feminist praxis: 1) individually/collaboratively produced knowledges, 2) academia/activism, 3) theory/method. As far as a theoretical basis can be recognised, transnational feminism demonstrates traces of postmodern and socialist feminist theorising through its use of deconstructive methodologies and analyses of political economy, yet especially the influence of postcolonial feminism is notable. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Chandra Talpade Mohanty is a central figure in both frameworks. This section will share some of the transnational feminist insights of Mohanty relevant for the purposes of this study.

Mohanty's work focuses increasingly on challenges and opportunities for collective transnational feminist practice (although these essays may still be categorised as postcolonial feminist as well). In response to criticisms of the much-debated essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986), Mohanty wrote '*Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles* (2003). In this essay she reinstates her intentions of her 1986 essay, assesses some of the ways it has been read and misread, while further developing the theoretical framework for comparative feminist studies and politics across borders. She strongly rejects the reading of her work as postmodernist, stating that she does not privilege

difference over commonalities, the local over the systemic or the discursive over the material (p.502). Instead she emphasises the influence of historical materialism in her work which she employs to underline material reality in both its local and systemic dimensions. In this essay, then, she reemphasises the connections between these two levels: 'the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle' and the 'macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes', albeit against a changing global context. At the time of writing, she witnesses the increasing brutality of global capitalism, exacerbating economic, racial and gender inequalities:

> *Women workers of particular caste/class, race, and economic status are necessary to the operation of the capitalist global economy. Women are not only the preferred candidates for particular jobs, but particular kinds of women—poor, Third and Two-Thirds World, working-class, and immigrant/migrant women—are the preferred workers in these global, 'flexible' temporary job markets (p.525).*

Remaining strongly committed to building connections between feminist scholarship and political organising, Mohanty envisions a transnational anti-capitalist feminist politics by departing from the experiences of these 'Third and Two-Thirds women'[3], stating that "it is precisely the potential epistemic privilege of these communities of women that opens up the space for demystifying capitalism and for envisioning transborder social and economic justice" (p.529). Her text, then, informs a vision of feminist solidarity across borders by starting from the particular standpoint of marginalised communities of women. For this would provide, "the most inclusive viewing of systemic power" (p.511).

In a later essay *Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique* (2013), Mohanty elaborates her previous stances (including in *Under Western Eyes* and *Under Wester Eyes Revisited*) within the context of an increasingly neoliberal and postmodern intellectual climate with far-reaching implications for feminist theorising and politics. She warns that the dissolution of systemic critiques in postmodern feminist scholarship, focusing on rupture, fluidity and discontinuity instead, easily converges with the neoliberal depoliticisation and privatisation of social justice commitments and their insurgent knowledges (e.g. women-of-colour epistemology) in transnational governance practices. The danger of this convergence is that systemic projects of resistance – those challenging institutionalised systems of power and inequality, such as racism, classism, or (hetero)sexism – are transformed into commodified, private acts of rebellion. Somewhat similar to Nancy Fraser's critique on recognition politics without redistribution, Mohanty expresses concern about a shift to a politics of representation disconnected from the power and political economy of rule. "This representational, discursive politics of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation, disconnected from its materialist moorings, can thus be consumed more easily in institutional spaces" (p.972). Recognising that Mohanty is only one of the many contributors to this field, the transnational feminist component of this study is primarily meant to incorporate Mohanty's later works *and* to provide a space to critically reflect on key challenges in

[3] She uses the term 'Third and Two-Thirds', to refer to both a history of colonisation, which the distinction *Western/Third World* denotes, and to the marginalised poor in both the North and the South (*One-Third/Two-Thirds World*). The language of *One-Third/Two-Thirds World* moves away from misleading geographical and ideological binarisms, while focusing on the quality of life for distinguishing between social minorities and majorities (Mohanty, 2003, p.506)

transnational feminist praxis such as the gap between academia and activism, critical vision and critical practices.

3. The WPS agenda viewed against critical feminist theories

The aim of this chapter is to examine the WPS policy discourse through the lens of critical feminist theories. It will do so by analysing the ten United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on WPS and all statements of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NG WG) during the UN Security Council Open Debates on Women, Peace and Security (2000-present) in the light of the feminist perspectives discussed above. Although these two actors differ in terms of power and perspectives, both are central in shaping the WPS policy discourse. While the Security Council has the final say in deciding what is included in the agenda, the NGO WG had a key role in pushing for the agenda's adoption in 2000 and as *the* representative of global civil society is able to set the contours of debate at the highest level. Incorporating both, thus, will give a completer and more dynamic view of WPS policy discourse. The statements of the NGO WG are usually delivered by civil society representatives who work themselves in conflict areas. While these speakers come from different backgrounds and draw on their own experiences in the speeches, the NGO WG has a clear advocacy agenda that is adhered to by these speakers. The critical feminist lenses formulated in the previous chapter constitute the frame of analysis: socialist feminism (3.1), postmodern feminism (3.2), and postcolonial/ transnational feminism (3.3). After examining the agenda in the light of these theories, this chapter concludes with a section on what these insights tell us about larger challenges in bringing together policy perspectives and critical social science perspectives in the context of WPS and beyond (3.4).

3.1 Socialist feminist perspectives on the WPS agenda

Economic dimensions of WPS

The economic dimensions of gendered oppression central to socialist feminist analyses have remained underrecognised in the WPS resolutions. In fact, the first WPS resolutions (UNSCR 1325; UNSCR 1820) are completely silent on economic factors related to WPS. The two resolutions adopted in 2009 are first to refer to the need for economic reintegration services for victims of sexual violence (UNSCR1888) and women's participation and capacity to engage in economic recovery in post-conflict situations (UNSCR1889). In 2013, women's 'economic empowerment' is introduced in the agenda: first as central aspect, among political and social empowerment, for preventing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations (UNSCR2106), and second, as contributing to the stabilisation of societies emerging from armed conflict (UNSCR2122). Moreover, reference is made to the need for consultations with socially and economically excluded groups of women in the development of the agenda (UNSCR2122) and for recognising the economic and social marginalisation of pregnant survivors of sexual violence (UNSCR2467). The integration of economic arguments in the WPS agenda is characterised by a focus on women's 'empowerment' and specific disadvantaged groups – in particular victims of sexual violence – and often appears in conjunction with instrumental assertions emphasising how women's economic participation and empowerment contributes to economic recovery and the stabilisation of societies. What these passages do *not* refer to is wide-spread (gendered) poverty and economic inequality, on national and global levels, as structural issue implicated in the issues WPS seeks to address. Instead, by focusing on women's economic empowerment, the agenda reinforces a neoliberal logic which constitutes

individuals as self-responsible, making emancipation an individual task, not one in which states should intervene (Muehlenhoff, 2017). Similarly, by discussing economic issues in the context of particular marginalised and excluded women only, it does not confront those (male-dominated) areas in which wealth is concentrated and avoids the topic of redistribution. Rather than addressing the structural and political nature of economic issues in relation to WPS, women's economic empowerment is presented as positive contribution in rebuilding societies emerging from conflict.

In the statements of the NGO WG during the open debates, there are even fewer references to economic dimensions of WPS. When it is mentioned, economic factors are generally listed among social and political factors and do not include a specification of what such factors entail. One of their statements refers to economic deprivation and high levels of unemployment as contributing factors to women's vulnerability to violence (NGO WG, 2018b). 'Women's economic empowerment' is mentioned in two statements of the NGO WG. In one case, as an area to be invested in to address the "root causes of conflict and displacement" for conflict prevention (NGO WG, 2014b), and second, as a contributing factor to help victims of (S)GBV to "reintegrate into their communities as agents of change" (NGO WG, 2015b). These passages do not divert greatly from the resolutions' discourse. Although the NGO WG seemingly makes a more transformative statement by linking economic empowerment to certain root causes of conflict, these root causes are not understood as economic in nature, at least not explicitly. What these root causes entail is largely left in the middle, pointing in the direction of militarisation and arms proliferation as fuelling conflict, but emphasising rather the desired responses to such root causes. Consequently, economic empowerment remains, in the first place, a remedy to issues originating outside the economy.

Representation versus socioeconomic transformation

Socialist feminists have critiqued the focus on language, difference and discourse in current feminist theorising and practice, as it would substitute a 'politics of representation' for radical social transformation (Hekman, 2001; Fraser, 1995). In the WPS agenda, tendencies to prioritise discursive and representational issues can also be recognised. Whereas socioeconomic concerns receive relatively little attention, references to women's representation and inclusion can be found in each resolution of the agenda. The first agenda point on the foundational Resolution 1325 states: "Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making level in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict". Subsequent resolutions reinstate this 'action point' and specify particular areas of attention such as female representation in mediation processes (UNSCR 1888; 1889; 1960; 2242) and women in senior and leadership positions (UNSCR 2242; 2467). In addition, since 2013 there has been increasing emphasis on women's *meaningful* participation in decision-making processes in the resolutions. This concept describes that women should not only be present 'at the table', but that their concerns should be heard and taken onboard (UN Women, 2018). Especially the latest resolutions put specific emphasis on this concept, UNSCR 2467 mentioning it five times, and UNSCR2493 three times. The recurrence of this concept highlights the importance of specific language use in the resolutions, and implies an emphasis on issues rooted in misogynist culture – such as not be heard and listened to as a woman – rather than those being rooted in a gendered and sexist economy – including female poverty and economic exploitation.

Instead of diverting from this trend, the NGO WG has had an important role in pushing for inclusive representation and meaningful participation. For example, they state: "Peace talks must not merely tick the gender representation box, but instead meaningfully and holistically include women and civil society" (NGO WG, 2016a). Although this concern is on the agenda of both parties, the NGO WG further questions its feasibility in practice, for example by addressing obstacles to inclusive and meaningful participation such as not being a member of a warring party or lacking resources to obtain a seat at the table, or having family obligations that impede certain women from participating (NGO WG, 2008). In addition, they address the underrepresentation of women leaders within the United Nations (NGO WG, 2008) and emphasise the need to include different marginalised groups (NGO WG, 2014b; 2015a; 2016a). In short, we can deduce that the NGO WG addresses issues of representation and participation more critically than the Security Council, but they continue to share the same thematic focus.

Drawing on Nancy Fraser's (1995) recognition vs redistribution dilemma, it may be dangerous to prioritise this set of issues, especially when disconnected from socioeconomic justice concerns. The remedy for issues of recognition alone – this may include women's underrepresentation and lack of meaningful participation when understood as institutionalised form of cultural domination, nonrecognition and/or disrespect relating to androcentrism – is cultural recognition not socioeconomic distribution. Hence, when these issues are addressed in isolation, they do not require redistribution, which in turn neatly fits into a neoliberal politics. Again, the aim of Fraser's distinction between recognition and redistribution is not to prioritise one form of injustice over the other, yet to warn for the replacement of the 'cultural struggle' over the 'socioeconomic struggle'. Indeed, through highlighting 'culturally-rooted' concerns, while remaining silent on structural economic issues, the WPS agenda reflects this political shift, which may be especially concerning in the conflict-affected settings the WPS agenda is being implemented.

Elitist feminism

The focus on representation and meaningful participation in the agenda coincides with a focus on a specific set of women, typically those of higher classes. The following passage (which can be found in UNSCR 2242, 2467 and 2493) highlights the emphasis on women in high-level positions:

> *[…] remaining deeply concerned by the frequent under-representation of women in many formal processes and bodies related to the maintenance of international peace and security, the relatively low number of women in senior positions in political, peace and security-related national, regional and international institutions, the lack of adequate gender-sensitive humanitarian responses and support for women's leadership roles in these settings, insufficient financing for Women, Peace and Security, and the resulting detrimental impact on the maintenance of international peace and security*

The focus here is on the representation of women in formal processes, in senior positions in high-ranking institutions and on women's leadership in the formulation of humanitarian responses. Occasionally, in

other passages, references are made to leaders at the 'local level'. For example, by emphasising "formal and informal community leaders" as one of the groups holding an important role "in exerting influence over parties to armed conflict with respect to addressing sexual violence" (UNSCR2106).

The NGO WG also sees a central role for women's leadership in WPS. In one of the statements at the Security Council the Somalian activist speaking on behalf of the NGO WG states: "I am confident that transformative and fundamental change with relation women's leadership and participation can happen in Somalia" (NGO WG, 2015a). The rationale of women's leadership benefiting society at large can also be found in this statement:

> *The presence of women at the field level, particularly in leadership, encourages other women and girls to participate and lead; it demonstrates that peacekeeping missions are committed to including all voices; and it is shown to both decrease sexual and gender-based violence and to increase the reporting of occurrences of sexual violence (NGO WG, 2008)*

However, by focusing on women's political participation and leadership roles, even when this includes 'local leaders', a large part of the population remains unaccounted for. This leadership-centred approach to gender politics resembles what the socialist-inspired F99 movement has described as elitist feminism, 'the feminism of the female power-holders'. That is, a feminism that focuses on empowering the few at the top while excluding the large majority of women whose socioeconomic realities will not allow them to take advantage of such 'opportunities'. Although leadership, when truly aligning with the interests of the communities of concern, can be of value, it is necessarily insufficient as a political strategy from a socialist feminist perspective. It reflects the 'trickle-down' assumption that policies favouring the wealthy and privileged eventually benefit society at large as wealth will 'trickle down' to other layers of society. Evidence from around the world has disproven such assertions. Especially Southern countries have seen a dramatic increase in inequality instead (e.g. Arndt, 1983; Jaffe, 2013)

In short, a socialist feminist perspective to the WPS agenda lays bare that by addressing economic factors in the narrow sense of economic empowerment and support to a small group of disadvantaged individuals, the WPS framework as well as the NGO WG divert attention from poverty and economic inequality as structural issues embedded in issues of WPS. In addition, both parties clearly prioritise issues of representation over socioeconomic concerns. Although the policy preference for women's political participation and 'multi-level' leadership may be argued to instigate most transformative effects, it is destined to benefit the few rather than the large majority of women.

3.2 Postmodern feminist perspectives on the WPS agenda

Deconstructing gendered binaries

A key concern for postmodern feminists has been the destabilising of binary identifications in gender, sexuality and sex. The framework of WPS, however, reinstates such binaries rather than challenging them. It draws on a self-evident notion of 'women', while connecting this 'category' to a set of issues relating to peace, security and conflict. The issues the agenda identifies, especially in the first resolutions,

refer to women only in their role as victims of sexual and gender-based violence, as peacemakers and as mothers and nurturers, while implicitly portraying men as perpetrators of such violence, as fighters and absent in the domestic sphere (UNSCR 1325; UNSCR 1820). For postmodern scholars as Judith Butler, who insist that gender resides in repeated words and actions, these depictions in the agenda contribute to the shaping of gendered subjects in the South. The NGO WG reiterates similar gendered notions in their statements. For example, "…we spoke on behalf of the hundreds of women's groups and local organizations that struggle every day to prevent war and to bring peace and security to their ravaged communities" (NGO WG, 2000). This victimised and benevolent portrayal of women in conflict-settings, in turn, feeds into an instrumentalist argument for women's participation in peace and security processes: 'we need women for peace'. The argument made in Resolution 1325 is that by accounting for those adversely affected by armed conflict – the majority being women – and by engaging them in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, women can contribute to durable peace and reconciliation. This line of thought is also drawn on by the NGO WG:

> *As I know from my experience in Somalia, women have the potential to add immense value to peace processes and negotiations. The women I worked with brought tolerance, compassion, forgiveness, and practical solutions that are the basic tenets of reconciliation. In the Somali process, women often represented and spoke for the silent majority; for the unarmed civilians, who are mainly women and children (NGO WG, 2008a)*

At the same time, however, the NGO WG critiques a solely victimised portrayal of women in conflict. In 2008, they state that "it is particularly important that women, as active agents of change, are empowered by any new Security Council resolution on sexual and gender-based violence and are not reflected as passive victims and mere recipients of assistance (NGWG, 2008b). In addition, the NGO WG has advocated for a survivor-centred approach to sexual violence (NGO WG, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2019), which was incorporated in the WPS agenda only in 2019 (UNSCR2467). This approach emphasises the agency of those affected by sexual violence while centralising their rights and needs. Later resolutions also fragment essentialist representations of women by highlighting their diverse roles, such as female leadership on community level (UNSCR2493). Neither the Security Council nor the NGO WG, however, challenges the benevolent portrayal of women which contributes to the naturalisation of this image. However, this can also be explained by the fact that the agenda is partially legitimised by the notion that women can positively contribute to peace. Hudson's (2009) study on the securitisation of women's rights in WPS agenda confirms the importance of this legitimising aspect. As the various interviews with politicians and UN officials clarify: "Instrumental arguments are the only arguments that work with policy-makers" (p.59).

Moreover, by focusing on women as an isolated group, the agenda's first resolutions ignored the relational aspects in the construction of gender (as well as sex and sexuality) by focusing exclusively on women. However, in Resolution 2106 (2013) references on men and boys were included. The resolution emphasised the need to include men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women and acknowledged the fact that while sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations

disproportionately affects women and girls, it also affects men and boys (UNSCR2106). The NGO WG goes a step further in recent contributions by not only involving men and boys, but also addressing 'harmful gender norms' in relation to notions of masculinity and femininity:

> *One feature of the violence targeting men and boys, and a reason for its stigmatization, are the deeply entrenched assumptions about male invulnerability. Challenging harmful gender norms and attitudes applying to both masculinities and femininities is therefore essential for addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and militarization. (NGO WG, 2019a)*

Although the NGO WG continues to employ certain essentialised depictions of women and men, their recent statements, as the one above, highlight the socially constructed nature of gender and provide opening for further deconstruction of gendered notions. Such understandings cannot (yet) be find in the resolutions.

With respect to sexuality, both the Security Council and the NGO WG have long been silent on issues relating to sexual orientation. As Hagen (2016) points out: "Those vulnerable to insecurity and violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity remain largely neglected by the international peace and security community" (p.313). For her, "this neglect is in part result of the heteronormative assumptions in the framing of the WPS agenda" (p.313). In 2016, the NGO WG first referred to threats specific to LGBTI persons in conflict-affected settings in their statement to the Council:

> *Documentation of combatant violence committed against all marginalized persons must be supported. For example, in Iraq and Syria local and international groups are documenting human rights abuses committed against women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI persons, and other minorities who defy gender stereotypes (NGO WG, 2016a)*

The Security Council, thus far, has not challenged heteronormative assumptions in its resolutions. This issue cannot be separated from increasing conservativism in the Council. In 2018, the Trump Administration was working to remove the word 'gender' from UN documents, and the WPS agenda specifically received pushback on language on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the resolutions (Allen & Shepherd, 2019). In one of the latest resolutions (UNSCR 2467), the United States, threatening to use its veto, insisted on the removal of explicit SRHR language that had been agreed on in earlier resolutions (Idem.).

'Localisation', multiple identities and inclusion

Corresponding with the postmodernist emphasis on difference and the disruption of universalising narratives, in both the Security Council resolutions and the statements of the NGO WG there is increasing attention for context-specific responses and the inclusion of local actors in WPS formulation and implementation. Such 'localisation strategies', which have gained increasing popularity in development discourse more generally, are generally based on the premise that "local ownership and participation leads to more effective policy making and policy implementation" (GNWP, 2018). Early contributions of

the NGO WG already referred to the need to not only take into account the global and the national, but also the local level (NGO WG, 2000). From, 2014 onwards their statements start to systematically refer to local (civil society) actors, their role as 'first responders' and in formulating answers appropriate to their contexts. Responding to the call for localisation, the Security Council also expressed the need for context-specific WPS responses:

> *Decides to integrate women, peace and security concerns across all country-specific situations on the Security Council's agenda, taking into account the specific context of each country, expresses its intention to dedicate periodic Security Council consultations on country situations, as necessary, to the topic of Women, Peace and Security implementation, progress and challenges, and reiterates its intention to ensure Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups; (UNSCR2242)*

In addition, local actors are increasingly recognised as source of knowledge. For example: "Local women's rights groups often have the strategic and political knowledge to end sexual violence, and are usually the first to respond to survivors" (NGO WG, 2014a). It is this 'lived', experience-based knowledge which is gaining increasing value in WPS discourse. In a way, this reflects Donna Haraway's (1988) argument for the privilege of partial perspectives, or situated knowledges, indicating the embodied nature of all vision and knowledge claims. However, whereas Haraway makes a radical claim for partial perspectives as only possible form of objectivity, in contrast to totalising notions of objectivity promising transcendence, the statement of the NGO WG does not mean to challenge authority in such a manner. Rather, local 'knowledges' are understood as a resource for more effective responses to sexual violence and exist next to gender experts and technical advisors who are typically located in the Global North (Basu, 2016).

Moreover, especially in the NGO WG's contributions, there has been more and more attention for the inclusion of different identity groups. Whereas the first statements do not make special reference to the background of the speakers, later contributions build their speeches from particular 'lived experiences'. In the last few years, speakers included representatives and activists particularly involved with LGBTI, black and indigenous struggles. In addition, since 2014, the NGO WG also started referring to specific marginalised groups within WPS contexts such as female internally displaced persons and refugees (NGO WG, 2014b), people with disabilities (NGO WG, 2015a), LGBTI persons (2016a), refugee women in a wheelchair and LGBTI refugees (NGO WG, 2017a), indigenous and Afro-descendant women (NGO WG, 2017b) and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) (NGO WG, 2019d). The centrality of identity in the discourse of the NGO WG is especially notable in the following passage:

> *As the FFM [UN Fact- Finding Mission] also found, transgender Rohingya women have been doubly persecuted and deliberately targeted for gender-based violence because of their ethnic and gender identity. Given the persistence of xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in these and*

other contexts, it is critical to increase attention to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and girls, people of diverse SOGIESC, and older women are fully integrated into WPS implementation by all actors. Member States and Security Council members must speak out publicly against attempts to undermine the human rights of all women, girls and gender-non-conforming people, and strongly signal that such attacks are unacceptable" (NGO WG, 2019d)

Identity categories are an important sight of investigation for postmodern feminists. Although postmodern feminists tend to criticise identity politics for it fixes identity categories rather than destabilises them, they have drawn attention to the multiple, diffuse and discursive nature of these categories. The above contribution reflects such a postmodern understanding. Instead of focusing on totalising, essentialist understandings of women as a coherent group, it shifts the focus to particular experiences of discrimination women face based on multiple and intersecting identity markers. Frankfurt School theorist Nancy Fraser (1995) has characterised such forms of discrimination or oppression as rooted in cultural devaluation rather than the economic structure of society. Without devaluing the importance and very real consequences of such 'culturally-rooted oppressions', she warns for the prioritisation of cultural over socioeconomic struggles in the current neoliberal context. The NGO WGs growing concern with diversity and inclusivity in the absence of a firm socioeconomic agenda from their side, suggests that their focus is indeed skewed towards the former set of concerns.

The Security Council, however, is far less outspoken on their support to different marginalised identity groups. They have adopted certain inclusive terminology such as "the specific needs of persons with disabilities" (UNSCR2106), yet there are no references to marginalised ethnic and sexual identities, nor to any intersecting disadvantages certain groups may experience. This in part, again, is related to conservatism by the Council's members as well as the political nature of such issues. This is a main area of divergence between the discourses of the Security Council and the NGO WG.

3.3 Postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives on the WPS agenda

The Southern woman in WPS discourse

Looking at the WPS agenda from a postcolonial feminist perspective shines further light on the essentialised portrayal of women in the agenda. The image of women in conflict areas as essentially living truncated lives, lacking political power and under constant threat of sexual violence, does not only provide a one-sided image but fits into a larger colonial (feminist) narrative. In this narrative, the West appears as highest point of women's emancipation and as saviour of the 'poor Third World woman' who falls victim to 'cultural' or 'traditional' gender-discriminatory norms and practices (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Parashar, 2019). The emphasis on sexualised violence in the agenda (six out of the nine added resolutions are specifically concerned with conflict-related sexual violence) further confirms colonial images of sexual barbarism far removed from the realities in the West. Although cruel forms of violence as 'rape as a weapon of war' (UNSCR 1820 and reinstated in later resolutions) certainly need to be addressed, several scholars have argued that the majority of conflict-related sexual violence does not

fit this narrow criterion which assumes sexual violence to be strategically and/or rationally employed (Buss, 2009; Kirby, 2015; Meger, 2012). In addition, the focus on sexual violence would tend to ignore the larger continuum of violence against women and girls in times of insecurity (Meger, 2012; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016). Consequently, the agenda misrepresents gender-based security concerns in the South, while less exceptional, more prevalent forms of violence experienced by women and girls, do not receive the same scrutiny.

At the same time, gender issues under discussion in countries of the North or other Security Council member states are watered down or removed. A clear example of this is the removal of language calling on states to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights for sexual violence survivors from the final version of one of the latest resolutions (UNSCR 2467) under pressure of the United States (Allen & Shepherd, 2019). By focusing on excessive forms of gender-based violence in conflict areas in the South while remaining silent on more controversial gender issues occurring in both these areas *and* the West, the agenda upholds what Joan Wallace Scott (2018) refers to as the 'civilisational polemic'. This polemic makes gender equality synonymous with the secular West, while the South, and the Islamic South in particular, represent gender *in*equality. This view is not only problematic for it provides a distorted view of reality and may misallocate resources as a result, it has also been used to legitimise all types of foreign intervention, including military invasion (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). For this reason, the fact that there is no clear critique on the continued militarised approach of the Security Council or any mention of efforts towards complete disarmament in the resolutions is particularly concerning from a postcolonial feminist perspective (Gibbings, 2011; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011).

The NGO WG challenges several of these aspects. In their statements, they have critiqued the focus on sexualised violence for it would come to overshadow other issues on the agenda (2019c), taken a strong stance on sexual and reproductive health and rights for sexual violence survivors, including access to safe abortion services (2014a; 2016a; 2019a) and addressed the issue of militarisation and arms proliferation as a root cause of conflict, displacement and human rights violations against women (2012a; 2012b; 2014b; 2019a). However, the framework in which the NGO WG operates, remains in the first place liberal and uncritical towards Western bias in the agenda. This is demonstrated, for example, by the following passage:

> *"It has also taken extraordinary courage to fight for basic rights – to wear trousers, to leave their hair uncovered, to voice their opinions on social media without fear, or to share a meal with male friends – all of which were criminalized by the former regime's public order laws" (NGO WG, 2019b)*

In this quote, gender equality or emancipation is clearly measured against a Western, liberal standard. It highlights a rights-based framework, freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of dress. While being key values in liberal democracies in the West, these are typically the 'rights' curtailed under repressive Islamic regimes. In this manner, the Islamic regime appears as a primary enemy of women's rights. In addition, the reference to the right to leave one's hair uncovered reflects a liberal feminist focus on sexual autonomy, one which according to Scott (2018) is often symbolised by 'uncovered' bodies. She

points out that highlighting this particular aspect of women's freedom or emancipation is in fact a very narrow measure of gender equality and fairly arbitrary. In addition, it fails to take into account other feminist perspectives, including Islamic feminist perspectives on veiling. As Parashar points out in her postcolonial critique of the WPS agenda, the agenda "does not accommodate women's agency that does not seek individual emancipation/ empowerment, or work within secular liberal frameworks" (p.834). Hence, although the NGO WG is a critical watchdog for harmful and exclusionary WPS policies, neither they nor the Security Council seem to be able to truly accommodate alternative, non-Western (feminist) perspectives and reinforce rather than challenge gendered binary identifications between the West and the (Islamic) South.

Depoliticising the political

Central to postcolonial and transnational feminist scholarship is its political character and critical examination of global power relations, aspects that tend to be denied in both the WPS resolutions and the NGO WG discourse on WPS. In fact, both the Security Council and the NGO WG seem to actively depoliticise aspects of the agenda through specific language use. Examples of this includes their employment of concepts as 'empowerment', 'intersectionality' and the notion of addressing the 'root causes of conflict'. Although postcolonial and transnational feminists have drawn on these concepts and terms in their work, they have also become subject to critique within these feminist strands. As these concepts have been mainstreamed and introduced in development and policy discourse, they would be watered down to such an extent that they lose their political edge (Cornwall & Eade, 2010). First of all, the term 'empowerment' is common to the discourse of the Security Council and the NGO WG. In fact, the term is not new to the field of international development and has been widely used over the past decades. The way in which the term is employed in development discourse, however, diverts from its original meaning. As Batliwala (2010) explains in her article *Taking the Power Out of Empowerment*, whereas the concept was first adopted by radical social movements – including black and feminist movements – as a means for societal and systemic change, the 1990s witnessed a co-option of the term by conservative movements and corporate management. Empowerment was robbed of its original, collective meaning: "From a noun signifying shifts in social power to the verb signalling individual power, achievement, status. 'Empower yourself!" (p.119). Although this individualised understanding of empowerment is in fact an altered and depoliticised version of the original concept, it is this version that both the Security Council and the NGO WG treat as self-evident. This is demonstrated by the following example:

> *When empowered to advocate for themselves and be part of the decision making on providing safe environments and work opportunities, refugee women become the bedrock of peaceful and sustainable communities (NGO WG, 2017a).*

> *[UNSCR2242] encourages empowering women, including through capacity-building efforts, as appropriate, to participate in the design and implementation of efforts related to the prevention, combating and eradication of the illicit transfer, and the destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (UNSCR 2242).*

Similarly, 'intersectionality' finds its origins in black feminism and other feminisms of colour and meant to describe interlocking *systems* of oppressions, especially those of gender, race and class. The concept has become more complex and came to incorporate a series of other identity categories, such as sexuality, ethnicity and disability. Recently, the term intersectionality has been used in the statements of the NGO WG to speak to the particular experiences of Afro-descendant and indigenous women in Colombia (2017b) and indigenous women in Libya (2019a). These statements refer, among other things, to the importance of ongoing participation of women from diverse communities in peace processes, the protection of territories and territorial rights, the need to address sexual violence targeted at indigenous women and the necessity to respond to the needs, values and rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. With these statements, the differential needs and perspectives of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples were first articulated in the Security Council. They also touch upon politically sensitive issues such as territorial rights. However, the statements are formulated in such a way that they do not directly confront or criticise powerful systems, states or actors which has been at the core of the initial concept of intersectionality, as well as postcolonial and transnational feminist understandings of the term. For example, although indigenous struggles tend to have a strong anti-capitalist and decolonial character no such references are made and none of the Security Council members are directly hold accountable for their role in the conflicts or racialised oppressions. This suggest that the term intersectionality, in this context, is primarily employed to raise awareness about the experiences and perspectives of particular marginalised groups, while lacking a deep systemic critique and demanding accountability. Unsurprisingly, such an understanding is easier to digest within powerful institutions.

Moreover, in recent years, the resolutions and the NGO WG have started referring to the need to address 'the root causes' of gender inequality, sexual violence and armed conflict, implying an aspiration towards transformation and overcoming structural issues. Although this is a powerful term, many of the references to such 'root causes' in the resolutions do not clarify what such 'root causes' consist of. For example:

> *Recognizing that consistent and rigorous prosecution of sexual violence crimes as well as national ownership and responsibility in addressing the root causes of sexual violence in armed conflict are central to deterrence and prevention as is challenging the myths that sexual violence in armed conflict is a cultural phenomenon or an inevitable consequence of war or a lesser crime (UNSCR2106)*

In the first reference '*the* root causes of sexual violence' are posed as a self-evident set of causes central to deterrence and prevention, while suggesting that the challenging of myths about sexual violence are not part of these root causes. To the contrary, however, a recent resolution includes a long list of 'root causes of sexual violence':

> *Recognizing that the disproportionate impact of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls is exacerbated by discrimination against women and girls and by the*

> *under-representation of women in decision-making and leadership roles, the impact of discriminatory laws, the gender-biased enforcement and application of existing laws, harmful social norms and practices, structural inequalities, and discriminatory views on women or gender roles in society, and lack of availability of services for survivors, and further affirming the importance of promoting gender equality by addressing these and other root causes of sexual violence against all women and girls as part of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, (UNSCR 2467)*

As the wording 'and other root causes of sexual violence' suggests, the list above all constitute root causes of sexual violence. It is hard to identify what is specifically 'rooted' about these casual factors as a variety of different issues are mentioned, including culturally and socially rooted norms, institutionalised gender bias as well as representational issues such as lack of women in decision-making and leadership roles. All can be categorised as causal factors, but not all identify and seek to address systemic or structural issues *per se*, such as the under-representation of women in certain positions. Although the NGO WG has often referred to such 'root causes' in equally ambiguous terms, in a recent statement they do refer to the root causes of conflict, gender inequalities and impunity to make a critical statement towards the international community:

> *Sexual violence in conflict does not happen in a vacuum. It is a result of systematic failures by the international community to address the root causes of conflict, gender inequalities and impunity. This must end. (NGO WG, 2017a)*

They hold the international community accountable for failing to address the root causes of these larger issues through 'systemic failures'. After identifying these systemic failures, however, the statement continues with a list of action points for the Security Council and Member States which is largely limited to a call to adhere to existing international laws and (gender) frameworks, the most controversial point being a call for the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty. This suggests that addressing the root causes of conflict and gender inequality is primarily a matter of adherence to international frameworks. Possible problems rooted within these very frameworks, such as those relating to unequal relations of power, are not called upon. As a result, the suggested transformation through addressing 'root causes' of the issues in the agenda is meant to be within rather than beyond existing structures.

WPS as a platform for transnational feminist activism?

Despite the many limitations to transformative politics in relation to the WPS agenda elaborated above, the resolutions do increasingly open up space for civil society. Whereas Resolution 1325 did not include any specific reference to civil society, later resolutions note their 'critical contributions' in WPS efforts and the need to create safe and enabling environments for civil society actors:

> *Taking note of the critical contributions of civil society, including women's organizations to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding and in this regard the importance of sustained*

consultation and dialogue between women and national and international decision makers (UNSCR 2122)

Strongly encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them; (UNSCR2493)

The NGO WG acts as main representative of WPS civil society on the global level. The group encompasses 19 INGOs working in over 50 conflict-affected countries and partner with over 200 NGOs and 75 networks of civil society actors and activists. A main part of their efforts is to "bring the voices of women's rights defenders and peacebuilder into policy discussions in New York" (NGO WG, 2020). As noted above, these voices are increasingly diverse and represent women from different marginalised communities, such as black, indigenous and LGBTI communities. Looking at the speakers representing the NGO WG over the past years, however, there women share a number of characteristics. Most of them are highly educated, often with degrees from the United States or Europe, some are closely affiliated with UN institutions and more grassroots-oriented representatives tend to have a strong liberal advocacy agenda. This suggests that the speakers are carefully selected to align with Western norms and values. Gibbings (2011) study confirms that agency among gender advocates at the UN is limited to the strict cultural norms at the UN. She draws on an example of two Iraqi women who spoke at an informal meeting about WPS at the UN. When they denounced the US- and UK-led invasion of Iraq and used terms like 'imperialism' they spoke outside these norms and consequently caused embarrassment. She explains that "in the corridors of the UN, discourses that are uplifting, positive and present women as peacemakers are the most valued. Those who work at the UN deploy this master narrative, and citizens' success at being intelligible in this space depends on their capacity to reproduce the master narrative" (p.526). The NGO WG act as a mediator in this process, instructing speakers how they can best express themselves in ways that accord with the UN's speech styles and master narratives (Gibbings, 2011). These passages suggest that activism within the UN is only possible as far as the framework goes. Rather than being a challenge in the context of WPS alone, the limited space for activism tells us more about the fundamental differences between policy perspectives on the one hand, and critical social science perspectives on the other.

3.4 Competing knowledges: policy perspectives and the critical social sciences

WPS as epistemic community

A key insight identified by the above analysis were the striking similarities in discourse encountered in the Security Council documents and the NGO WG statements. Socialist feminist critiques highlighted the elitist character of both discourses and their tendency to formulate individual-focused (empowerment) responses rather than systemic ones. Despite the NGO WGs distinct emphasis on the inclusivity of different identity groups, also postmodern feminist reflections underlined the common pattern among

both 'actors' to portray women and men in an essentialised manner. While the postcolonial feminist lens shed light on some of the critical visions held by the NGO WG alone, it also demonstrated that both operate within a framework that remains liberal and uncritical towards Western bias. These commonalities could be explained by the fact that both perspectives emanate from the same 'epistemic community'. The concept of 'epistemic community' coined by Peter Haas (1992) refers to "a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area" (p.3). Although such epistemic communities may consist of professionals from a variety of different disciplines and backgrounds, they have a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, shared causal beliefs, shared notions of validity and a common policy enterprise (Idem.). A good representation of the larger epistemic community of WPS may found in the recent 920-page *Oxford Handbook on Women, Peace and Security* (2019) which includes analyses of scholars, advocates and policymakers of the WPS agenda. Rather than debating the agenda's beliefs and assumptions, the handbook's key focus is on implementation gaps, taking stock of what has been achieved and what remains incomplete and unfinished. In this manner, disagreements may exist between NGO WG and the Security Council about specific components and ways of advancing the agenda, meanwhile, in principal, the broader framework is still assured.

However, it should be noted that especially in the complex process of international policymaking, epistemic communities are vulnerable to interference by individual states, especially those holding high levels of power. While epistemic communities are important in guiding international policymaking, "the extent to which state behaviour reflects the preferences of these networks remains strongly conditioned by the distribution of power internationally" (Haas, 1992, p.7). Indeed, the ways in which the WPS agenda has evolved over the past years demonstrates such 'interference' of powerful states in the Security Council. In particular the Council's permanent members, given their veto power, can exercise significant control over the agenda (Shepherd, 2008). For example, the NGO WG has condemned the backlash on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the WPS agenda, as the United States used its veto to exclude specific SRHR language in a recent resolution which had been included in earlier resolutions. It may be especially in the ways the resolutions divert from the epistemic community of WPS where the NGO WG focuses its critique.

Policy knowledge versus critical social science knowledge

Although the epistemic community of WPS is based in extensive research, knowledge production in the academy differs from the knowledge that such communities tend to produce. For example, as Stone (2001) points out in relation to global think-tanks and policy research institutes, "their strong policy focus differentiates them from university research, which is often more academic, theoretical and less amenable to general consumption" (p.114). Policy research being pragmatic rather than critical and theoretically sound results in divisions between policy perspectives and academic perspectives, also in the context of WPS. For example, instrumentalist arguments such as 'we need women's participation and leadership for sustainable peace and stability', are accepted causal beliefs in the WPS policy environment. However, from a critical academic perspective such causal notions are misleading and potentially harmful as they reproduce essentialist notions of women. Although such an instrumentalist argument may be

employed primarily to' legitimise' or convince powerful actors of the need for women's participation in peace and security processes, this pragmatic approach to theory is at odds with academic theorising, and particularly with the critical perspectives employed in this research.

In addition, as Stone (2001) points out, while striving for intellectual independence, think-tanks often have to be sensitive to the interests of donors and patrons (Idem.). This further runs counter to critical social sciences, which seek to expose unequal relations of power and challenge the contemporary social world. While politics is central to both 'knowledge communities', the 'political' is understood in different, or even conflicting ways. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's (1999) distinction between 'the police' and 'politics', it may be argued that while 'politics' is a central point of inquiry in critical theories, the WPS community is involved with 'policing' rather than politics. Rancière's describes 'the police' as following:

> *…first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doings, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise (1999, p.29)*

Hence, rather than understanding police in the narrow common understanding of the petty police, he defines it as a broader, all-encompassing order of bodies which dictates what can and cannot be said and done, who can and cannot be seen and heard. Rather than being rooted in physical force, its power lies primarily in its constitution of the 'natural' order of society. Those dictating bodies typically include, but are not limited to, state functions. Important to note is that the 'the police order' should not be read as inherently bad. As Rancière (1999) puts it: "the police can procure all sorts of good, and one kind of police is definitely preferable to another… [however] it does not make it any less the opposite of politics" (p.31). Politics occur when there is a rupture in the police order on the basis of equality, an event which makes visible those whose existence had been denied by the police. Political activity "makes visible what had no business being seen and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" (Rancière 1999, p.30). Hence, politics, in this understanding, may still take a variety of forms, "spectacular or otherwise", as long as it 'undoes' the divisions dictated by the police in some (temporary) way (Idem.).

While such an understanding of politics, as dissent, as challenge to the contemporary social world (see chapter 2) has been central to the critical theories drawn on in this thesis, this chapter has demonstrated that it is this political dimension that often conflicts with the WPS discourse advocated by both the Security Council and the NGO WG. Their discourses do not allow for critiques that run counter the epistemic community of WPS, which is based on a number of shared beliefs and assumptions. Consequently, there is no room for politics. While the Security Council most clearly represents the 'police order', also the NGO WG fulfils a policing function. As part of the same epistemic community, the NGO WG legitimises the 'natural' order of society rather than challenging it. As noted in the previous section, it appears that the NGO WG selects speakers which align with Western norms and values and instruct them how best to express themselves in ways that accord with the UN's speech styles and 'master narratives'. Narratives that are typically apolitical in nature. In fact, the NGO WG's position may best be described by

the following quote of Rancière (1999): “most of the measures that our clubs and political ‘think tanks’ relentlessly come up with in a bid to change or revitalise politics by bringing the citizens closer to the state or the state closer to the citizen indeed offer the simplest alternative to politics: the simple police” (p.31).

These fundamental differences between critical social science perspectives and policy perspectives pose great challenges for a more critically informed and progressive WPS agenda. However, as several scholars have suggested, WPS is not limited to the resolutions alone, nor to its politics at the highest level. For example, Basu (2016) emphasises that ‘the South writes 1325 too’ through various local interpretations of the agenda, as well as through ‘non-implementation’ of WPS resolutions. She draws on examples of Southern actors who contest parts of the global agenda or use other mechanisms found more useful in strategising for women, peace and security. Given the more dynamic nature of practice, the next chapter seeks to explore in what ways critical feminist theories may feed into WPS practice by examining the perspectives of diaspora practitioners.

4. Women, Peace and Security in practice: perspectives from the diaspora

This chapter analyses the perspectives of four Dutch-based diaspora practitioners on women, peace and security with the aim to further the critical discussion on the WPS agenda and explore ways in which the practical application of the agenda may allow for politics beyond the WPS policy framework. The diaspora constitutes a particularly interesting site of investigation given that they are characterised by a certain ambiguity: being transnational per se, while typically focusing on local agendas, and combining both institutional and confrontational means to advance their agendas. It is this characteristic of working both with and against the grain that provides an interesting setting for exploring progressive ways forward for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. At the same time, however, the notion of 'diaspora' has come to include such a wide and diverse group of people that any attempt to generalise is a dangerous enterprise. The focus in this chapter, then, is not so much on making any definite claims about 'the diaspora' in relation of WPS. Rather its main aim is to explore transformative pathways for WPS, while incorporating the views of set of practitioners who, in contrast to other non-state actors, may be more inclined to question and challenge parts of the agenda. Whether this assumption is valid however, is also a question asked towards the end of this chapter. The analysis in this chapter is based on four individual interviews of approximately one hour. The critical feminist lenses discussed in chapter two formed the starting point of these interviews, examining ways in which the participants' views and reflections may relate to these theoretical concerns. At the same time, however, it aimed to explore their understandings of WPS also beyond these concerns. Therefore, while making sure to cover at least some questions relevant to each feminist frames in the interviews, it also left space for the participants to change the direction of these conversations. After an introductory section on the participants' personal trajectories and some of their reflections on diaspora involvement in WPS politics (4.1), this chapter continues with observations about socialist feminism and the diaspora (4.2), language, discourse and postmodern feminism (4.3), feminisms from the South and postcolonial critiques (4.4) and transnational feminism and activism (4.5). It will conclude with some final reflections on the diaspora as critical actor and transformative potential in WPS politics (4.6)

4.1 WPS and the diaspora in the Netherlands

Introducing the participants[4]

The four women who participated in this study are founders of different diaspora organisations in the Netherlands. All four are members of a prominent civil society lobby group for gender, peace and security and are signatories of the current Dutch National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (abbreviated as NAP). This demonstrates their close involvement with the WPS agenda. Although the four women share a number of characteristics, in terms of organisation type and areas of expertise, their perspectives and approaches differ significantly, also in relation to the WPS agenda.

[4] For privacy considerations certain details have been left out and names have been anonymised.

The first participant (**P1**) is originally from South Sudan and has lived in the Netherlands since 1996. She came to the Netherlands for a master's degree in Development Studies after she planned to get back to teaching at a women's university in South Sudan. Because of the insecure situation in her country and her sudden illness she found herself unable to return. In 2000, she founded her own organisation in the Netherlands which initially focused on supporting Sudanese refugee orphans in Northern Uganda through education. She quickly found out that women also needed to be supported in this process as the orphans usually do not lives in orphanages but are taken care of by female relatives. In later years, the organisation further expanded its activities to include (economic) empowerment, capacity building programmes, health care projects in Southern Sudan and broader youth and women-focused projects in Northern Uganda. Women, Peace and Security, for her, is necessarily entwined with the themes her organisation works on. Rather than determining the organisation's agenda, however, she describes the WPS agenda as providing a form of guidance and focus, and primarily as one among several funding instruments. She considers dialogue as necessary path to peace, while also identifying as activist.

The second participant (**P2**) is originally from Darfur, a large region in Sudan plagued by armed conflict since 2003. She first came to the Netherlands for her studies in 1982 (MA Development Studies and Public Policy and Administration). After finishing her degree, she lived partially in Sudan and partially in the Netherlands teaching at universities in both countries. When conflict arose in 2003, she fled to the Netherlands. Two years later she founded a women's organisation together with other Darfurian women living in the Netherlands. While starting with general women-focused projects in Darfur, since 2008 their work became more focused on the WPS Agenda. Their activities include trainings for women in leadership and political participation with the WPS resolutions at its core. In addition, an important activity for the organisation has been the creation of women mediation committees in the region where the participant herself has acted as mediator. The organisation joined the community for the Dutch National Action Plan for WPS (NAP) in 2007, where they thought along with other civil society organisations and the Ministry about the first Dutch NAP (2008-2011). Until today the organisation is one of the pioneering signatories of the Dutch NAP. The participant describes the WPS Agenda as the main focus of their work, a measure and a means of empowering women. In their projects, the organisation draws explicitly on the WPS resolutions and seeks to make these documents accessible to the communities in which they work.

The third participant (**P3**) fled from Palestine to the Netherlands in 2000 after the second intifada broke out. She earned a master's degree in Development Studies in the Netherlands, specialised in gender and conflict. In the Netherlands she first worked as programme manager at a Dutch NGO platform for human rights and justice for Palestinians. In 2011, she founded her own organisation which centralises justice as necessary condition for sustainable peace in Palestine. Her organisation pushes for the inclusion of Palestine on the Dutch and international agenda, targeting especially those policies that can have a direct impact on the situation in Palestine. Other activities include working on public opinion about Palestine in the Netherlands. All activities centralise the rights and interests of Palestinians, with a particular focus on children's and women's rights. This includes issues of women, peace and security. Even though WPS are not the only issues the organisation addresses, the participant emphasises the importance of WPS in conflict situations and in Palestine in particular. Not least because this participant

herself was very active in a Palestinian feminist movement who worked on issues of peace and security. However, she does not consider herself as 'working on the WPS Agenda based on the agenda'. Rather she is working with the agenda based on her own perspective. She takes an activist stance in WPS debates.

The fourth participant (**P4**) fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the Netherlands in 2008. At that time, she was internally displaced, had been living in poverty for several years and had fallen victim to gender- based violence. From the moment she left, she promised herself that when she would be in a place where she was safe and free, she would remain the voice of those who did not make it. In 2009, she founded a women's network in the Netherlands, which she describes as "a network for women who make change rather than as a group of women who needs help". At the core of her work is providing space for those who have lived in conflict and insecurity to tell their own story and evaluate their own understanding of gender, peace and security, and of the needed support. Based on these stories and understandings, the organisation seeks to influence Dutch (WPS) policy from a 'victim point view'. In addition, her organisation specifically pays attention to fighting poverty and economic empowerment. Rather than basing her work on the WPS agenda, her organisation seeks to challenge and influence the framework to better align with the perspectives and needs of those who have lived it. She identifies as an activist.

The role of the diaspora

When diaspora organisations are invited at the table in discussions about global political and developmental agendas, they are often described as bridging actors, or translators between the local and the global (PRIO, 2008; Bond, 2015). Some of the participants describe their role in the context of WPS indeed as such. The second participant, who works extensively in both international policy environments and with local communities 'on the ground', makes a clear distinction between 'the Dutch and Western perspective' on the one hand, and the local perspective in Darfur on the other. It is in the link between the two where she sees the 'added value' of the diaspora in WPS policymaking in the Netherlands:

> ***P2**: […] the context there is different and of course the things are here thought and formulated from this perspective of Dutch and Western perspective. So you can imagine the environment there is different, the context is different, the way people are thinking is different […]*
>
> ***I**: OK, so you do think that the whole UN agenda [referring to the WPS Agenda] is Western focused you would say?*
>
> ***P2**: Yes, it is thought by Western people. So I think also that our added value is that we are here [in the Netherlands] where we participate in the negotiations and in the development of NAP. Of course, we come with our perspectives […] I mean the NAP is formulated and worked out by the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the NGOs and also by diaspora and smaller organisations. So, our opinion also has to do with the development of the NAP and I think that is a positive point. That is really the value added to the whole thing.*

The third participant, who has been committed to 'the Palestinian cause' at the grassroots level in Palestine and as diasporic actor in Dutch policy environments, confirms that this bridging role is important as a diaspora organisation. Nevertheless, she disagrees with a description of diaspora organisations only as such, since they are also 'full-fledged organisations in the societies they live'. In fact, looking at the diaspora solely as a bridge to their societies contributes to their marginalisation. As a result, their participation is limited mostly to diaspora-related topics, while being left out of other relevant discussions:

> ***P3****: I think it's true that diaspora organisations are a bridge between the local and the global. However, I think it is a little bit dangerous to look at diaspora organisations only as such. Because diaspora organisations are that, but they are more than that, because they are full-fledged organisations in the societies that they live in as well. So, we are not only a bridge to our societies. We are not only a bridge to women in the South. We are not only a bridge who translate the issues from the South into an agenda here on WPS. No! We also work here and we know the issues and so on and so forth. So we cannot be dealt with as only the bridge and you know we can participate on that level only. […] You know there are all these fora and debate meetings and so on and so forth. We are pulled in when there is something about the diaspora, because we can be the bridge and we will make sure there is the diversity which is requested, but when there is a critique or a discussion about, for example, the national domestic WPS Agenda in the Netherlands, it is very difficult to have migrant women participate on equal footing.*

Rather than seeing the role of diaspora organisations only as 'translator', this participant emphasises their role in a later contribution as both bridging and critical. This critical aspect she describes as "one in challenging these notions, perceptions and perspectives that have not enough eye to the other perspective". This 'other perspective', she clarifies, refers to "people in war, in conflict, in the South" whose perspectives are often very different from "the way liberal and neoliberal societies look at peace and security". Liberal societies, such as the Netherlands, tend to see WPS issues as only 'out there', while 'we' are only there to help 'them' do it 'the right way'. Such a perspective fails to reflect on the responsibility these societies have themselves in the situations as they are:

> ***P3****: […] what I miss in Dutch foreign policy and I see that also reflected in the WPS agenda and organisations in the Netherlands is the fact that…it tackles the issues of WPS, women's empowerment, women's leadership as something that is happening there in the South and that we, our role from here is to provide assistance, to provide… It is in a sense patriarchal also, because we will help them do it in the way we do and what I miss, and this is my biggest point of critique, what I miss is reflecting on one's own responsibility and role in the situations as they are and one's history, colonial history, which makes a very important base or underlying…which informs these policies and these notions as they are at the moment and that is my experiences in the Netherlands working with different kind of organisations on agendas of WPS, on gender issues.*

The above contribution reflects a postcolonial (feminist) perspective, laying bare the effects of (neo)colonial discourse on WPS policy and practice. Bringing in such a critical perspective, for her, is an important function of the diaspora in WPS politics and beyond. Other participants also suggested that the role of the diaspora includes having a 'critical eye'. The fourth participant, for example, challenges aspects of the agenda from a 'beneficiary-centred' point of view, something that is often missed by policymakers:

> ***I****: And how would you say your work relates then to the WPS agenda? If it does.*
>
> ***P4****: It does, because I think it's the WPS agenda that does not actually do what they are supposed to do. They have a very narrow intervention at what should be women, peace and security, right?*
>
> ***I****: So it's more about challenging the agenda as it is now that you see as your function than taking the agenda as a reference point?*
>
> ***P4****: Yes…not take it and then just go and…if you say women, peace and security, you don't have to define how people are going to do that, right? You should let people be the one to…there should be different views, right? For when we used to say economic empowerment, nobody wants to listen. 'No, no, no, we have to go do trainings and we have to do this', but now it is coming on the agenda. So where did it come from? Because you learn from your mistakes, but you have people who can tell you how it works, because they are the living proof and that's the beneficiary.*

This perspective also echoes a postcolonial (feminist) view, pointing out the hierarchical organisation of the agenda and the marginalisation of the perspectives of the people that it concerns. The pattern of imposing 'from above' reflects a neo-colonial relation between those receiving help and those formulating what needs to be done. However, rather than uncovering unequal power relations as the third participant emphasises, this participant interprets her critical role rather as providing local experiences and perspectives as counterforce for the prescriptive and universalising WPS agenda. For this participant, in fact, local and experiential knowledge is the biggest value of the diaspora in WPS politics. This is what makes them experts:

> ***P4****: You [referring to the diaspora] are telling the story of your life. You are not going into some hypothetic situation and analysing and having educators. It's just you lived it. You have been raped…You have been beaten. You have lived domestic violence. You have lived…myself I am a victim of gender-based violence.*
>
> ---
>
> ***P4:*** *Because we are experts, if I can conclude, because we tell the stories of our lives. That's the diaspora contribution.*

The above contributions suggest that the role of the diaspora in WPS, and development agendas more generally, is necessarily entwined with their contextual perspectives and experiences. However, whereas

some interpret their role primarily as bridging between different 'worlds', others think their role extends beyond being mere connectors and translators. Their backgrounds also equip them with the capacity to act critically towards international policy making, either by pointing out alternative visions from a victim-point of view, or by challenging neo-colonial aspects of the agenda that are reproductive of unequal global power relations.

Marginalisation of diasporic actors

As the third participant highlighted above, framing the role of diasporic actors only as 'bridging' in fact contributes to their marginalisation. All participants said to have experienced marginalisation in relation to their work. Although inclusiveness, both in project design and in terms of the organisations receiving funding, has been a priority in recent WPS discussions, this has done little for the inclusion of diaspora organisations in WPS work. Despite rhetorical commitments to inclusion and diversity, funding frameworks tend to be constructed in such a way that smaller and less 'professionalised' organisations cannot compete. Two of the participants emphasise that they usually cannot meet the requirements and 'skills' needed to apply for funding, while bigger organisations often do not want to work with them:

> ***P1:*** *But in most cases, let's give you an example, they're talking about the inclusiveness. We diaspora here in the Netherlands, we can't even apply for the next whatever it is, because we don't meet the requirements. It is open, saying yes you can apply but in principal they know that we cannot! […]. And then at the same time the big organisations say no we don't want to work with these small organisations, maybe because of our poor performance, maybe because of our whatever…*
>
> ---
>
> ***P1****: So and that was why we diaspora organisations maybe cannot fit into the bigger structure of the funding of WPS. In terms of ideas, I can contribute ideas, but when it comes to writing those things, I may not have that kind of ability or capability to do it.*
>
> ---
>
> ***P2:*** *We are really out of participation now. I mean in terms of having a project funded. So I don't know if we can get any funding from now on. The threshold is very high, so we cannot compete, and we try to partner up with bigger organisations, but they all declined, so it is very difficult.*

Consequently, bigger organisations continue to receive the bulk of the funding for WPS programs. Following the third participant, these organisations often are institutionalised, have years of experience and the 'technical expertise' required by governments to manage such programs. Because of this focus on technicalities, these programs fail to tackle root causes of conflict and do not take Southern partners onboard as equal partners:

> ***P3****: […]the fact that big civil society actors like X and X, and by the way none of which is a feminist organisation absolutely not, and issues of WPS agendas are seen as one program for them, like any other program they are dealing with, but they're big and institutionalised and have credibility with the government and can manage big programs and have created along the years and their work*

expertise, technical expertise and you know I put two lines under technical expertise, on how to deal with mainstreaming gender, how to deal with empowerment of women, how to deal with…and I am saying it like this because I see it as a technical thing that they deal with, but not looking at the root causes, looking at the relations of power, taking the partners in the South serious enough…you know as equal partners. And that is also impossible, because of the dependency on that level as well.

This sentiment of not standing a chance as diasporic organisation in the WPS playing field is shared by others participants as well:

***I:** […] For example, do you think that within the United Nations during the annual meetings of WPS, is this a space where you as diaspora organisation could have a voice?*

***P2:** I think if we are given the chance then of course. Then we can reflect on the lessons learned from our experiences with implementing the resolution and sometimes you see that there are very good examples which deserve to be heard but you just don't get the chance.*

***I**: But this thing you say about challenging policies and institutions, do you feel that there is room for you as a diaspora organisation to do that within WPS-related policies or frameworks?*

***P4**: There is none. Because when I give an example, NAPIV again, is going to have a national pillar for the first time. So which tells you that the Netherlands was never looking at WPS from their own country! So if they don't see WPS from the Netherlands, then which place will I have me the diaspora, none!*

The marginalisation of the diaspora in WPS politics, however, may not only be caused by their lack of resources and needed skills. As the following contributions suggest, the ambiguous position of the diaspora lays bare the truly transnational character of conflict:

***P4**: [this quote is a continuation of the previous quote by P4] So it means you see WPS of those over there, but the NAPIV is telling you: hello, those famous refugees are now sitting as asylum seekers in your country and do they have access to peace? Do they have relief? Do they have access to policy? To justice? No! Because the Ministry of Justice, do they have a NAP? Do they know WPS? Do they know 1325? No! Does the police know? No! Does the municipality know? No! So those are the basic people who take care of your population. So there is no room [for the diaspora in Dutch WPS policy], and that's what we are hoping, to fight for.*

***P3**: I mean one of the problems that I see also, and I was one of the people who were pushing towards a domestic agenda on WPS in the Netherlands, and even when we tried to delve in what does that agenda mean, what are the elements of this agenda, it boiled down again to migrants and refugees and how the Dutch deal with migrants and refugees and not as much into what is the role,*

responsibility or wrongdoings…of the Dutch policies… I mean on issues that are relevant for peace and security in the world and WPS in the world.

These passages break with the narrative of conflict as only 'out there', as well as the narrative of Western countries as benevolent and unambiguous actors in these conflicts: "those famous refugees are now sitting as asylum seekers in your country" and what will you do to help them? It seems that there is little support for such perspectives in prominent WPS circles. Whether purposively deterring such perspectives or not, the current 'technical' focus and competitive funding availabilities in WPS-related work has proven effective in doing so.

4.2 Socialist feminism and the diaspora

Drawing on socialist feminist critiques, I explored how the participants look at the role of economic factors in WPS agenda. In most interviews, poverty and class disparities came up naturally.
When this happened, I asked follow-up questions to gain further clarity on their perspectives with respect to economic dimensions and WPS. In addition, I sought to find out whether the participants recognised a certain tension between recognition and representation issues on the one hand, and economic issues on the other, in relation to WPS. This section will elaborate on these findings.

WPS, poverty and class disparities

Similar to the centrality given to economic factors in socialist feminism, the four participants underlined poverty as primary source of suffering. Indeed, looking at the most recent numbers of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) – which measures poverty across the dimensions of health, education and standard of living – the countries of origin of the participants score high. South Sudan (P1) shows an overall poverty incidence of 72.2%, while the numbers for Sudan (P2) are comparably lower: 48.9%. However, in the conflict-torn regions of Darfur in Sudan – where the second participant has fled from – this number lies between 65 and 77% (Ballon & Duclos, 2015). In Palestine (P3), the poverty incidence in 2017 was 24%. Nevertheless, also here, large regional differences exist ranging from 11% in the West Bank and 45% in the Gaza Strip which houses the majority of refugee camps (PCBS, 2020). In the Democratic Republic of Congo (P4), the number is highest with a 74% in the latest figures of 2013/2014 (UNDP, 2019). These numbers are expected to further increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the UNDP (2020) suggests that, if unaddressed, progress on MPI figures across 70 developing countries could be set back 3 to 10 years as a result of the pandemic (UNDP, 2020). Given these alarming figures, it is unsurprising that the participants suggest that many WPS efforts are fruitless when they fail to address wide-spread poverty:

***P1**: You cannot tell people that are hungry, who are illiterate, who are living in shelters to sit at a negotiation table for peace. What kind of peace are you talking about? Do you have peace of mind when you can't sleep, because you don't have food?*

***P2**: I mean we're discussing the NAP, the Dutch NAPIV and we are emphasising to put economic empowerment as something essential. Because I mean if you are poor and you need to survive, then you don't care about if your voice is heard. So you need also to survive. This should also receive big attention.*

***P3:** […] Actually when you see how the WPS agenda is translated into projects and programs, it is translated in programs creating leadership of women, empowering women to give them a voice and you know, but it barely talks about changing the socioeconomic situation looking at really what makes it impossible for women to change their situation, changing at the real root causes of what created this in the first place.*

***P4**: I wanted to do the economic part, because I thought that with poverty, if you don't have access to minimum income, there is no need to speak of peace, because most of the time people fight because of inequalities and inequalities also go with… So women don't only suffer from getting men to rape them, I mean that's a reality but it doesn't stop there.*

Consequently, as some participants suggest, WPS projects tend to favour higher classes:

***P4**: So where you realise when you look at 1325 that they take care of the big women, I mean the women who can voice and go to politics […]*

***I**: And do you think that differences in class, poverty and economic inequality inside the countries you work play a role in these issues of WPS?*

***P2**: Yes, of course, a role. They could empower favoured classes, or even in Europe I mean when you see the programs, they also favour the classes always with invitation and things you know so that brings inequality.*

***I**: So you think that higher classes are prioritised in the agenda?*

***P2**: Yes, sure.*

The favouring of higher classes is not only related to the agenda's thematic focus. As these same participants describe, given the complexity of funding applications, funds can only be accessed by the country's elite:

***P4**: […] if you look at most of the instruments. Applications for funds for civil society, they are too complicated! The people who will get the money are the people who are the new elite in the civil society of those countries, so you are actually creating new elites you see…*

> ***P2**: […] But because those who are less privileged, they also have a lack of education, of training, they don't reach, because they cannot write good proposals, they cannot write a good report and monitoring and those things. So they cannot reach the funding…*

Consequently, the WPS framework seems to sustain a vicious circle in which funding can only be accessed by elites – those who are educated and know how to write proposals, monitor and report – while community-based organisations are not taken into consideration *a priori*. The fourth participant further highlights this exclusionary dynamic, drawing on the context of Sudan.

> ***P4**: […] If I remember we had UN Women in Sudan in the past now I think they changed, but in the past if us like community-based organisations and if you are coming from those remote areas you cannot access them, absolutely, you cannot call, you come to their door, you cannot enter, they don't accept you and they work with the government. It is not supposed to be like that. They work with the elites. And if you are really coming from a community-based organisation, there is no way […]. So that picture is… I mean what is the meaning of… you are talking about something for conflict areas, for women in IDP camps, for rural areas, for poor… So we have to change this.*

As the funding remains in more privileged circles, poor women, women in rural areas and IDP camps are left out. However, as she states earlier, this is not only the case in Sudan, but in Europe more generally. As discussed in the previous section, diaspora organisations in the Netherlands are marginalised in similar ways, which further reinforces the elitist character of the agenda. This elite-centred approach to gender politics resembles what the socialist-inspired F99 movement has described as liberal, or lean-in feminism, 'the feminism of the female power-holders': a feminism which "seeks to ensure that a few privileged souls can attain positions on par with the men *of their own class*", while refusing to address the socioeconomic constraints making such 'emancipation' possible for the vast majority of women (Arruzza, et al., 2019, p.23). Although the above participant (P4) identifies elitist feminism as a problem and emphasises the need to address poverty, she does not call for redistribution or take an anti-capitalist stance as the F99 movement does. Rather, she advocates for greater attention to 'economic empowerment' for the ones most in need. For her, economic empowerment refers primarily to providing women with entrepreneurial skills and economic support:

> ***P2**: […] I mean we're discussing the NAP, the Dutch NAPIV and we are emphasising to put economic empowerment as something essential.*
>
> ***I**: And then you are talking about economic empowerment?*
>
> ***P2**: Yes, for women.*
>
> ***I**: So what you mean by that is giving them more individual skills?*

> ***P2**: Yes individual skills and also to help them. There are so many just having trivial work and so they can be helped and become better entrepreneurs for example. Give them advise, give them you know to start a capital, for example in group cooperatives. Things like that will help a lot. Especially if I am thinking about the women in the IDP camps they really need a lot of help. There are so many NGOs who are distributing humanitarian aid, building schools in the camps, for the children, but still these women need economic help. Because they go out every day to look for survival and the humanitarian what is distributed is not enough absolutely so they need more help.*

Focusing on individual skills and support to disadvantaged women as a way to address economic marginalisation without addressing the 'capitalist source of crisis', then, still reflects a liberal feminist approach rather than feeding into socialist feminist or F99 agendas. None of the participants takes a strong anti-capitalist stance. The visions of the third participant would most closely align to the transformative agendas of socialist feminist projects. Coming from an activist background in Palestine, she advocates for a feminism that includes social, political and economic dimensions *and* seeks to transform unequal power relations. In any case, all participants argue in favour of a stronger economic dimension in the agenda, albeit in different forms.

Representation politics and neoliberal co-optation

Both socialist and postcolonial feminist scholars have raised concerns about the current trend of recognition and representation politics abstracted from economic concerns, a trend which neatly aligns with neoliberal depoliticisation and privatisation of social justice commitments (Fraser, 1995; 2013; Mohanty, 2013). After having explored the participants' perspectives on possible economic dimensions in the agenda, I asked how they felt about the NGO WG's focus on inclusive language and representation of marginalised groups and minorities – such as ethnic minorities, displaced people, sexual minorities and people with disabilities – as a way to explore whether they experience a certain trade-off here. Only one of the participants suggested that economic dimensions should be centralised in a definition of marginalisation, rather than 'lumping all marginalised groups together'. Her argument coincides with what Fraser (2013) describes as the relative uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige in capitalist societies, where, for example, being sexually marginalised does not necessarily mean that one is also economically deprived. What the participant suggests based on this, however, is that the identification of 'layers of marginalisation' is more useful than pre-fixing disadvantaged groups:

> ***P1**: For me, I think we need to redefine certain terminologies. Like if we talk of a marginalised, minority. Let's talk about homosexuals, the LGBT's. They call themselves a marginalised group, but within there are very rich people, highly educated people! So they are marginalised because of their sexual orientation, but financially, economically they are OK. […] Look at the women. If you talk in black in white. Women are the majority, women are underpaid, and this and that. But if you look at some of them, highly educated, highly working, actresses, politicians… So if you lump them together like this then they become the marginalised but then when you break it down, you break it further and further, then you get this layers of marginalisation. […] So I believe in opportunities and space*

for the people to do those things, because everybody becomes marginalised. So maybe because I am black, because I am a woman, because I am a Muslim, or because I am a refugee… So if you start breaking down those groups… No one is even marginalised. We are all marginalised.

I: *But would you then say that that economic dimensions should be at the core of a definition of marginalisation?*

P1: *Yes, I think so […]*

Others disapproved uncritical, all-encompassing calls for diversity, but without referring to such an economic dimension. When being asked if all marginalised groups, whether based on class, ethnicity, disability or sexual identity, should receive equal attention in the context of WPS, the third participant responded:

P3: *I think everybody needs attention if you want to represent, but it depends on the framework. It is not diversity for the sake of diversity and then we name them all together. You have to see based on what you are talking about, you have to make it diverse. […] You can have representation of sexual minorities while you do not take their perspective into account or you just have them in order to have one little sentence in a thing that says: 'and the rights of the LGBT'. You know you have representation, you have them speak, but you don't take them into consideration.*

The fourth participant also criticises the superficial adoption of diversity language, in which she implies the neoliberal co-optation of such language:

P4*: And then they are creating this 'oh we need diversity' and it becomes like a brand. Like drinking chocolate or whatever, but it is not something we live.*

The uncritical and superficial calls for inclusion and diversity the three participants identify in the context of WPS is characteristic of the neoliberal depoliticisation of social justice commitments postcolonial and socialist feminist have warned for. Most of the participants, however, do not directly link this issue to the absence of economic dimensions in the agenda or disproportionate attention for recognition and representation concerns more generally. In fact, for the third participant, representational policies should be taken further to be meaningful for marginalised groups:

P3*: Well, I think it is very very important [the increased attention for the representation of minorities and marginalised groups]. It is a good thing to do and I think this was something that was pretty much missing, but again representation is only one level of it. You can have representation but not open your mouth, you can have representation but not on equal basis, you can representation but without a voice or with limited voices or with dependency. […] So I think the implementation of it as a theory it is excellent and a first step, but it is not the only step and it's not*

enough as a step and the way this step is being practiced or implemented might mean a lot of things, are either harmful effects or good effects.

For one of the participants, there is no issue with the current focus on the representation of minorities and marginalised groups, nor should there be a distinction made between different marginalised groups:

***P2**: I think it is very valid and very good [the increased attention for the representation of minorities and marginalised groups] It is a very good development. It will help a lot.*

***I**: OK, and do you think that all these groups that I mention deserve equal attention?*

***P2**: Yes, sure. They are marginalised so they deserve equal attention.*

***I**: OK, and do you think that people that are marginalised because of their class should receive equal attention as those being marginalised for their sexual identity or disability for example?*

***P2**: Yes.*

Generally speaking, the above contributions suggest that the neoliberal depoliticisation of social justice commitments affects WPS in practice as well through empty inclusion and diversity claims that have little practical value. Rather than rejecting representation politics on such grounds, the main challenge seems to redefine representation concerns in such a way that it necessitates critical reflection and effective responses in practice. The arguments in this section in favour of both increased attention for the economic dimensions of WPS, as well as effective incorporation of representation concerns, reflects part of Fraser's argument. For her injustices of recognition are as serious as distributive injustices. What we need, therefore, is a politics that addresses both these sets of concerns.

4.3 Language, discourse and postmodern feminism

Compared to the other feminist lenses, postmodern feminism had the least points of contact with the perspectives of the diaspora women. In fact, as this section will demonstrate the participants tend to reproduce essentialised gendered depictions present in the WPS framework rather than challenging them. Looking at postmodern theoretical concerns in a broader sense, especially their focus on language and discourse as constitutive elements of social reality, however, does allow for the discussion of certain concerns addressed by the participants. Therefore, after looking into the participants' views with respect to gendered binaries, this section will look into their perspectives on the role of language in WPS, as well as the specific discursive constructions of peace and security.

Gender and essentialism

Postmodern feminists seek to deconstruct false binaries in terms of gender, sex and sexuality. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the WPS agenda reinstates binaries rather than challenging them. Although not deconstructing the notion of 'women' *per se*, the third participant (with a feminist activist background) does argue for a *feminist*, peace and security agenda instead of *women*, peace and security agenda. The main difference for her being that the WPS Agenda is limited to 'women's concerns', whereas a feminist perspective allows the inclusion of several other aspects, such as social, political, economic and social justice concerns:

> ***P3****: But what I want to say is actually WPS…using the word women is to me a little bit tricky, because a feminist perspective goes beyond only looking at women, peace and security. A feminist perspective has a look at all aspects: social, political, economic, issues of justice, social justice, peace and human security and so on and so forth and if you say…putting the word women in front of it is as if…it limits it to how can we involve women, how can we include women, and how can we take into consideration women's needs when we talk about peace and security. That's what the agenda is in 1-2-3 at the moment. And that's why I's rather have a debate or a dialogue on a feminist peace and security agenda rather than a women, peace and security agenda and that's what I am missing. If you ask me what are you missing, that's what I am missing. It is not women, peace and security it's a feminist peace and security agenda. It should be, but at the moment it's not the case.*

This contribution highlights that by focusing on 'women's concerns' in isolation, the agenda fails to address the multiple and complex ways gender oppression is linked with social, economic and political concerns. Anti-essentialist considerations may play a role but are at least not the main motivation of this participant for moving away from a 'women's agenda'.

Although, most participants critiqued the homogenisation of women in the South in Western and UN discourses (see next section on feminism & postcolonial feminist critiques), they seem less concerned about essentialist depictions of women more generally. In fact, most participants reinstate such essentialist notions rather than challenging them. For example:

> ***P1:*** […] *How can these women, as mothers, as sisters, as aunties, as wives try to mitigate this kind of activities that drive people to war?*

> ***P2****: I think it should be explicit, a clear critique on arms trade in the resolution because this is affecting women very much. I mean men are buying and taking arms and they are fighting. But who are the victims? They are women. I mean mostly. Also they are robbed from their homes, from their belongings, they are raped, they have things like that, harassment, and all because of arms. So this link should be made very clear in the resolution.*

> ***P4****: As a woman you can have your period, you can have a child, you have all kind of things that makes it difficult and a guy just wakes up and then he doesn't even think and then he goes to a*

meeting, and he didn't fight you, he didn't beat you, but the body even in itself makes it challenging for a woman to attend certain activities compared to other activities. So the fact that women do not participate in activities is not only related to that they don't know, that they don't give them space, no! It can also be that your biological and your cultural environment doesn't necessarily make it easy or doesn't even excite yourself to go there.

The first contribution draws on the assumption that women are peacemakers and the ones who seek to prevent war, whereas the second participant constructs women exclusively as victims and men as fighters. The fourth participant portrays women as mothers and caretakers (in contrast to men who do not have to be bothered with such tasks) and as constrained by cultural and biological factors such as having a period. Although this may be a reality for many women, in her contribution these factors appear as fixed rather than culturally constructed and historically contingent and thus, possible to be challenged.

The role of language in WPS

Drawing on 'deconstructive methodologies', among other approaches, postmodernism views language and discourse as constituting elements of social reality (Hekman, 2001). Postmodern theorists, therefore, pay close attention to language use. The WPS Agenda is an agenda based on written documents and its textual base continues to increase as new resolutions come to complement earlier ones. The language in these documents has been subject to debate. For example, with the adoption of one the latest resolutions, Security Council members disagreed about the inclusion of explicit language on sexual and reproductive health and rights, which eventually was removed under pressure of the United States. At the same time, the NGO WG has been pushing for more inclusive language in the resolutions, for example on gender and sexual identities and people with disabilities. Modernist critics have argued that the 'overemphasis' on language and the discursive in postmodern thought tends to downplay material realities. Especially in poor and conflict settings, prioritising language over material conditions could be harmful. Postmodernist have denied such accusations, emphasising instead the disentanglement of material and 'symbolic' dimensions that their theorisations highlight (Roseneil & Frosh, 2012). To explore how such academic debates may play out in practice, I asked the participants whether they thought it is important to focus attention on language use in the resolutions by drawing on the above examples and whether it affects their work. The third participant described language as crucial in the context of WPS. In global governance, language use is not merely language, but a game of power that is played on paper:

P3: *I think language use is extremely important, because you know the political game in all these international and global governance bodies is language. But language when implementing these resolutions can make it or break it. And me as a Palestinian specifically is very very aware of that. There are so many human rights resolutions on the violations of Palestinian human rights have been watered down just to have more government accepted and go with it to the extend they became meaningless. Therefore, I think language use is not mere language. It is much more than language. It is power. It is a game of power that is played on paper through this language use and therefore it is a very important aspect to take into consideration.*

This contribution highlights the very real material consequences of shifts in language. It defines when human rights are being violated, which is especially pressing given the systemic human rights violations of Israeli troops in occupied Palestinian territories, including limiting access to basic necessities, unlawful attacks and destruction of Palestinian homes causing wide-spread displacement (Human Rights Watch, 2019)

While being of great importance for upholding rights and holding states accountable, other participants stated that the linguistic revisions at the highest level do not necessarily impact the work being carried out 'on the ground'. Instead, a main language-related challenge that was brought up is that the language used in the resolutions is not accessible for most of the people that it concerns. The WPS Agenda now contains ten resolutions. These are wordy documents, with political and diplomatic language use that are often not available in the languages of the communities of concern. One of the participants points at the contradiction of encouraging local strategies and actors while the WPS framework does not allow these very actors to adopt their own approaches or write in their own languages:

> ***P1****: So you see there is so much call now. We want local women's organisations. We want this and that... If you define WPS in their local language, they will tell you. […]. I mean, if you want a women-led grassroot organisation then let them write in their own languages! So they are able to write what they understand, but they cannot use their own capacities to write as women-led. Someone has to do it for them.*

Another participant explains that in order to make the WPS resolutions workable on the ground, her organisation would summarise the resolutions, making it as simple as possible before disseminating it to the people. In response to the question whether changes in language as those listed above (in terms of SRHR and the inclusion of marginalised groups) impacts her work, this participant stated:

> ***P2****: Actually not really, I mean when we work with these resolutions we give it to the participants those who can understand and we tell them to make a summary and discuss the language of it and make it as simple as possible and then with that simple document we disseminate it to the bigger group. So we try to make it simple, because it is difficult, not everybody can understand what is there. So with our training with the women, we give it to them and say please read it, make it simpler, summarise it and then we come together with a summarised version and that version we copy and distribute it to the communities and also with the recent program with the youth they have done the same.*

Whereas the inclusive language pushed for by the NGO WG deals with representation of marginalised groups in WPS documents, the two participants above emphasise linguistic accessibility for local communities more generally to put the agenda to their own use. In addition, as language is reshaped and simplified to fit local contexts, the language politics on the global level does not seem to carry the same meaning 'on the ground'. This is not to say, however, that linguistic revisions in the resolutions do not

have local implications. International frameworks can be an important means of support for the protection of citizens. Considering the different contributions in this section, the question is not so much whether language use should receive more or less attention in the context of WPS. Rather it should be clarified which and in what way language-related issues are addressed. When language is only a matter of discussion between high-level representatives, results may in certain cases be symbolic rather than material in nature. However, when these discussions are expanded to, for example, the possibility to read and contribute to the agenda in local languages, the symbolic and material are more closely aligned.

Deconstructing peace and security

AS postmodern feminists approach gendered notions as constructed in specific cultural, historical context, postmodern scholars also deconstruct other discursive constructions. Corresponding to such efforts, many of the participants questioned the conceptual understandings of peace and security in the WPS agenda. Although WPS has broadened notions of peace and security by bringing in a gendered perspective, these notions would still be understood in a restricted way. By deconstructing and/or challenging these notions, the participants make visible the narrow interpretation of peace and security in terms of absence of war and violence, as well as the exclusionary dynamics of such interpretations.

According to the first participant, security cannot be discussed as disconnected from questions of health, education, the environment and one's economic situation, among other things:

> ***P1****: So what is security? If you don't have access to economic, you are insecure, you don't have access to health, you are insecure, you don't have access to whatever, you are insecure. So you have to look at health, environmental, education and all other things. Because if you don't have money, if you have too much money, you're insecure and if you don't have a piece of land, you're insecure. So you have to look at security in its totality. Don't look at security in the absence of war and guns.*

The third participant critiques the fact that security in Dutch foreign policy, including WPS, is not understood as *human* security, but, again, is primarily looked at as 'lack of war':

> ***P3****: Well if you take the whole trends in International Relations at the moment and the way peace and security are being looked at and specifically if you take the foreign policy in the Netherlands. Security is interpreted in a very limited way once… It is not human security. It does not go beyond you know peace in as lack of war. Peace is lack of war and security is looked at in the hard sense of it. The human aspects of security are not taken into consideration.*

Given the human rights violations in Palestinian context, the absence of human-centred approach to peace and security is concerning. Moreover, notions of what peace and security entails also informs who is able to benefit from such policy, as well as who is excluded. In this vein, the participants questioned *whose* peace and security is targeted in the WPS agenda. Peace and security may not have the same meaning or require the same set of measures in liberal and non-liberal societies, and for different groups (of women) in these societies:

> ***P3**: […] And therefore I question the whole issue of security. When you're talking about security, security for whom? And when we are talking about peace. What are the conditions for peace and peace for whom? And these are the…in my analysis, in the current world as it stands at the moment, in the current world order, we have a big divide between the way liberal societies and neoliberal societies look at peace and security and people in conflict, in war and in the South see the issue of security and peace. There is a gap, a big gap between these two perspectives and I don't think that, to jump into your topic, the current WPS programming in the Netherlands bridges that gap in the right way, at least not enough.*

> ***P3**: I think the definition of peace and security in Palestine to actors in the Netherlands is very much linked to the mainstream discourse on Palestine through the eyes of the Oslo Agreement. And not only that it is also determined by how security is being identified at the moment you know: terrorism, the issue of peace as lack of war and so on and so forth. In Palestine it doesn't work like that you know. Security is not only for one party or not the other and so on and so forth.*

> ***P1:** […] And then which kind of women are you talking about who are able to have that kind of peace and security you are talking about? Is it the rural women? Is it the educated women? Is it the politicians? Is it the parliamentarians? Is it those who are also carrying guns, killing others? So whose peace are you talking about? And what kind of security are we talking about?*

Apart from differences in terms of understanding of peace and security between power-differentiated groups and societies, the dominant framing of these concepts in the WPS agenda is potentially harmful. As the third participant argues, the WPS agenda *de*politicises issues of women, peace and security, leaving out relations of power and colonial histories which are a root cause of the conflict in Palestine, and conflicts in the South more generally. Consequently, she argues, "the end point of 1325 does not necessarily ensure social justice and does not ensure equality". Following her interpretation, the absence of these issues in the agenda does not stand on its own, but is aligned with the geopolitical and economic interests it serves:

> ***P3**: And that is when I keep saying like looking at the role our foreign policies and the role of the international community intervening politically, economically, but also militarily as a role in the situation as it stands in these countries for these women and men who are living there. So and that's why I also mentioned the whole issue of it [the WPS agenda] serves a geopolitical and economic interest of the powers that be. And it probably looks very critical when I say that, but I think as long as this agenda…I mean it is doing more harm…you know we're just tackling it on the surface and at the end what it does…instead of contributing to changing the situation these women live in, it in a way is kind of an arm in the foreign policies and geopolitical interests and economic interests of the biggest powers.*

This participant connects deconstruction of dominant notions of peace and security to a critique of unequal power relations in the global political economy, an approach that is often found in postcolonial and transnational feminist analyses.

4.4 Feminisms from the South and postcolonial feminist critiques

A variety of interpretations exist about what feminism means and what its political agenda should entail. Whereas some identify feminism primarily with Western notions of individual progress and emancipation, others consider feminism as a broader struggle against women's oppression which takes different shapes across different locations. Drawing primarily on postcolonial feminist insights and critiques, this section explores whether the participants consider their work feminist and on what grounds. It seeks to gain insight into what this means in relation to the 'feminist' framework of WPS and whether certain southern feminist perspectives can be identified. It also analyses such matters in the participants' contributions not explicitly dealing with feminism.

A feminist vision?

When being asked whether the participants considered their work as feminist, some were reluctant to categorise their work or personal involvement as such. For others, the feminist character of their work was self-evident. Interestingly, all women interpreted the concept feminism somewhat differently, and either supported or rejected the concept based on this conceptualisation:

> ***I:*** *Do you consider your work feminist?*
>
> ***P1****: I think it depends… I already look at it from two sides of the coin. What is feminist? It is like always when we use the word 'empowerment'. Like empowerment is an ultimate goal for getting a job, for being free. Empowerment, empowerment…. But in reality, maybe you be empowered, maybe you're empowerment may be disempowering, because you are 'overempowered' to be accepted in certain things. So being empowered doesn't mean that it's an ultimate goal to achieve all the things you want to achieve. […] Personally, I don't know if I am a feminist or not, but what I know is I am an activist. I am someone who always wants to promote women. I am always there for the community. I am more a community-based person. But I don't know if I am feminist or not…*

The first participant links feminism to the concept of empowerment, a concept that today is very much associated with individual progress and widely used within liberal feminist discourse and the development sector. As discussed in the previous chapter, whereas the concept empowerment was first adopted by radical social movements, including black and feminist movements, as a means for societal and systemic change, the term was co-opted and popularised as a verb signalling individual power, achievement and status. Indeed, the participant interprets empowerment, and feminism more generally, as the achievement of individual goals such as getting a job and being free, while one of the reasons she is

reluctant to use the term feminism is because she identifies rather as a 'community-based person'. This understanding of feminism resembles a liberal feminist approach.

A liberal interpretation can also be recognised in the contributions of the second participant who equally uses terms as 'empowerment' and 'equal opportunities' and describes women's rights as the main aspect of feminism. In contrast, the second participant seems to understand feminism in a broader sense than the first participant, as a loosely defined concept which ties women together in the quest for women's rights:

> ***I****: Would you consider the work you do as feminist?*
>
> ***P2****: Yes, we are helping women of course. We are for the women's rights, for peacebuilding and women's rights. So in that sense of course… and it is exclusively a women organisation. We are led by women, we are working with women and so in that sense of course yes…*
>
> ***I****: So, you would link feminism to women's rights. You see that as the main part of that?*
>
> ***P2****: Yes.*

This conceptualisation of feminism harmonises with the feminist perspective in the WPS agenda. The fact that this participant works closely together with the government on the Dutch NAP may partially explain why she defines feminism in such a manner.

In contrast to this participant, however, who has no problem describing her work as feminist in relation to this liberal conceptualisation, the first participant is more sceptical. She questions whether empowerment – which for her is the central aspect of feminism – should be the ultimate goal. As in Saba Mahmood's (2005) postcolonial feminist account of the women's piety movement in Cairo, the participant challenges some of the normative liberal assumptions in feminism. Is empowerment necessarily a good thing? Does it benefit all women? Or may it even have adverse consequences in some cases? Interestingly, rather than expanding, challenging or appropriating the concept of feminism, she avoids using the term: "I don't know if I am a feminist or not, but what I know is I am an activist. I am someone who always wants to promote women". It is interesting to note that especially this participant – with a background in women's studies and who has taught at a women's university in South Sudan – seems to link feminism to an exclusively liberal understanding of the concept.

Similarly, when being asked about feminism in her work, the fourth participant states:

> ***P4****: Hmm…well maybe…I don't see that [my work] as feminist maybe, because I don't like to lock myself in some translation. I am doing what I am supposed to do. I am a woman and I recognise that many women go to certain challenges that we have to address that we have to take on an equal level as the men. For the rest, whoever can do what they want, but the basic of life is that we are equal, right?*

This participant does not want to label her work as (exclusively) feminist. The concept, in her understanding, does not seems to cover that what needs to be done for women *per se*. Referring to feminism as being 'locked in some translation', she implies that a feminist agenda may be experienced as narrow or restrictive. Feminism, it is implied, is not a field where intersecting issues that are social, economic or political in nature can be addressed. Her perspective on feminism, then, also points at a liberal one in which 'feminist issues' are largely addressed in isolation.

The third participant, coming from an activist feminist background herself, is most outspoken about the role of feminism in her work. Yet her understanding of feminism is not tied to a liberal or Western-centred concept. Instead, it is informed by her experiences as a feminist activist in Palestine:

> ***P3****: We work with a lot of Palestinian women's organisations also in Palestine, because they are very active on issues of peace and security from a feminist perspective of the South and for me that is basically… I have been very active in that scene in Palestine and that's why when I founded this organisation here WPS was a very important aspect from it and then with our perspective as women from the South who are active and who are feminist.*

Postcolonial feminist critiques

Postcolonial feminism seeks to expose and/or challenge the lingering effects of Western (neo)colonialism on women and feminism in the South. Several women expressed critiques on feminism or feminist practices corresponding with this framework of thought, albeit in different ways. In agreement with certain postcolonial feminist scholars, some of the women questioned feminism given its Eurocentric bias. For the fourth participant – having lived herself under conditions of poverty, displacement and gender-based violence in DRC – feminism is likely to prescribe, or even impose, interventions that are ill-suited and ineffective.

> ***P4****: If you want to take away the culture of somebody and say 'oh harmful gender norms' just because you define it as gender norms that doesn't mean I see it like harmful gender norms. So it is better to use the traditional leaders to first see what is positive in that tradition! And then give the people the time to make the voice. There are things your mother sees differently than you! But you are not just going to take your mother one day and then expect her to think as someone who is born in 1990 for example.*
>
> *[To be equal] means that they [women] don't have to walk 9 kilometres to fetch for water and then not go to school. What do you do? You just put the damn water so she can read that. Do not try to translate that she should be able to go to school. No! She needs the water! […] and you want to teach them 'oh no the woman has to go to school and not fetch water'. It doesn't go that way.*

In a similar vein, Mahmood (2005) critiqued the 'politics of global sisterhood'. For her, such a project, especially when it is imposed from above or outside, is likely to do more harm than good. However, whereas Mahmood, alternatively, outlines a radical reinterpretation of feminism in an Islamist context,

this participant – whose organisation is active in several African countries – rejects the possibility of African feminisms:

> ***P4****: I don't think there is any African feminism really. Because those type of things that come with it, nobody really cares about. They come from Europe or whatever. From people who have time. That's how we say, because if you are a mother and you go 9 kilometers, let me give you that example again, to fetch for water, do you really care about feminism? What does it mean? What you know is that, because you are not complaining that you do the house choirs, you never complain to nobody that you don't want to do the house choirs which is to go to fetch for water, right? So what we complain is that we have to do 9 kilometers to fetch for the water, but the same thing the guy has to do 9 kilometers to go to look for money and you are not the one to look for the money so it's actually feminism is a luxury for the poor people. […] And also the poor people, when I came from poverty… I've been a translator for over 14 years, I came to the Netherlands after I was 30 and really I can tell you that feminism is the least of the worries on the African continent.*

Hence, it is a luxury to only think about 'women's issues', about whether or not to do house choirs (referring again to a liberal feminist understanding of feminism: the private/public divide), especially when you are poor. Only those not facing such struggles of daily survival – the elite, women in the West – have the time to think about issues as such. This perspective reflects an observation of Jayawardena in her study of women struggles in Asian countries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For many women in these countries, feminism was seen as a product of 'decadent' Western capitalism with little relevance for Third World women outside the local bourgeoisie. Interesting to note is that the strongest critique on feminism comes from this participant who also comes from the least privileged background of the four women interviewed.

Although the third participant describes her work as fundamentally feminist, she critiques the feminism she encounters in the WPS Agenda. For her, the framework does not sufficiently take into account the perspectives of Palestinian feminists and draws on a depoliticised understanding of feminism, one which is blind to unequal power relations:

> ***P3****: […] There is a very limited acceptance to the way Palestinian women analyse their situation. The Palestinian feminists deal with issues that they have at hand in Palestine and the agenda which they have set for themselves when they talk about WPS.*
>
> *---*
>
> ***I****: : […] And do you feel that there is no space for such a political understanding of feminism in the agenda?*
>
> ***P3****: No, one of the biggest problems and it is good that you bring up this point, cause in my opinion one of the problems of the WPS agenda internationally is depoliticising it and that was what I wanted to work towards. The whole issue of like gender in general it becomes a tool, something that you need to apply and then you forget the relationship of power and you forget to analyse it based*

on knowledge that we are not talking about equal parties, there is a specific dynamic there that makes it impossible for people to talk and to participate on equal basis and so on and so forth, you cannot equate the Israel and the Palestinians because of this relationship of power, the issues of occupation, of colonisation, of history, of colonialism are all stripped out of the analysis of the WPS agenda as it is looked from here. And if all these are stripped out of the agenda then of course there will be gap. Then, you won't be able to serve the agendas of the people on the ground as they see their needs are.

This participant's push for a Palestinian-centred feminist agenda combined with a larger theoretically-informed systemic critique on unequal power relations reflects her academic and activist feminist background. Despite the seemingly different standpoints of the third and fourth participant with respect to feminism, they do share points of critique. Both are sceptical of the feminism as it is understood in the WPS framework, and global gender frameworks more generally, and critique its disregard for local perspectives, wants and needs.

Another postcolonial feminist critique I explicitly asked most participants about is Mohanty's critique on the discursive colonisation of 'third world women' in Western feminist discourse, in which their lives are reduced to a composite, singular, 'third world woman' who is essentially a victim, sexually oppressed, uneducated and tradition-bound. In the three conversations in which this question was posed, all women recognised such falsely homogenising tendencies. The first participant emphasised the diverse positions women occupy in Southern societies and the complex realities of conflict in which clear-cut distinctions between groups are used to attract funding rather than reflecting the realities on the ground:

***P1**: You have women who are in opposition also fighting and we're talking about the 35% [referring to quota for women in government pushed by women's group in South Sudan]. That number the 35 for South Sudan is women. So do we talk about the women in the government, are you talking the one in the movement and you have all these splits. So those are areas we need to look at…Yes, if you look at Rwanda after the genocide, Rwanda has the highest female members in the parliament compared. So I think sometimes we use this language to leverage for resources like when we're fighting, when Sudan was still fighting, the Northern will say: the South is Christian, the North is Islam and then you lose the reality of the cause of the war! Because the Muslims want to attract what? Support from the Islamic countries. The Christians want support from Christians, being killed because they're Christian, they're marginalised and so on. So then it becomes black and white and then you lose the reality on the ground. So yes, I disagree with the homogenisation of women in the South.*

The second participant, being Muslim herself and regarding religion as essential to her work, challenges the opposition that is often implied between women in Western and Islamic countries. Similar to views elaborated by Abu-Lughod (2013) in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* or Scott's (2018) critique on the false dichotomy between secularism as bearer of gender equality and Islam as synonymous with women's oppression, this participant critiques the biased portrayal of Muslim women and emphasises

that women's oppression is a struggle everywhere, including the West. In addition, she underlines how Muslim women are active in the struggle for their rights (read: agency) and usually can decide freely about the way in which they decide to dress:

> ***P2****: In general I mean women in the whole world we are still looking for our rights if that is in America or Europe or in Saudi Arabia. It is the same struggle as women and it is going on so in that sense it is equal. I think it is not right to think that because of Islam women are oppressed or to reflect it like that. It is not right because in the whole world the women are still struggling. I mean I don't think the women in Europe they have the rights 100% so they're still struggling. So it is the same. Maybe it is at different levels, but I mean in Sudan I think the women participation is almost like here. It is not too bad but we are still struggling to have better things. We are struggling to repair the constitution. For instance, I mean we have some interpretation in the Sharia usually women are fighting very hard to amend that and they succeeded somehow. Some verses they amended, and some are still there. So I mean the struggle is the same in the whole world and it should be put in that context and not say peoples of Islam they are because of that obliged to dress like that, no it is not, it is not actually by patriarchal society. It is most… I don't know any statistics, but for my feeling like 80% has free choice. Nobody asked me to wear veil, but because of my religion I am doing it. I am not obliged. I put any time […] especially because I am living in Holland. But I am doing it as a free choice entirely. And most of the women, if you are a good religious person you make that choice and if you don't you don't do that so there is no problem. I mean I don't want UN or any authority to think that way that because of Islam they are suppressed.*

Finally, the third participant recognises the homogenisation of 'third world women' in her experiences as migrant women in the Netherlands, in which one migrant woman is to represent the needs, problems and interests of all migrant women in the country. In much the same way, the Southern women is seen as homogenous group that is in need of help of the West:

> ***P3****: Ah, Mohanty, yes! I do agree absolutely and I see that I mean I told you a little while ago that I feel that we are as migrant women here in the Netherlands are here seen as a bridge or are seen as a token of diversity now and then, but we are not seen as who we are as women, for what we stand as individual women and so on and so forth. We are all seen as a homogeneous group. All of us, so let's choose one to represent migrant women. And I agree with that as well 100% and this is one of the reasons why the analysis of what needs to be done to help women in their situations there is based on this stereotype ideas of what women are there. So first of all they think of us a homogeneous. So we have the same needs. We have the same problems. We have the same way of doing things. There is no diversity, no particularities. And also we all need the help of the West…and women groups and so that creates a problem for being able to dialogue and to debate together. So we're not dialoguing.*

Southern feminist perspectives

Identifying feminist perspectives from the South in the context of Women, Peace and Security was an important objective for this research. During the conversations with the diaspora women, however, it soon became clear that for many of them the concept of feminism did not extend beyond liberal or Western-centred understandings and is not a concept they draw on in their work *per se*. Only the Palestinian participant elaborated on a locally informed feminist politics. Central to this Palestinian feminist perspective is the interconnectedness of the feminist struggle and struggles for justice in the context of the occupation in Palestine:

> ***P3****: If you talk to Palestinian feminists, Palestinian women, the way they see the WPS agenda when you talk to them about their issues. The biggest issue that comes out is in addition, and of course it is very important to talk about the social agenda of Palestinian feminists, but you cannot look at that outside the framework of the occupation, outside the framework of Palestinians in resistance and occupation which has now been more than 50 years, and outside justice to women. Social justice in Palestine is linked 100% to justice that has to do with the occupation, so self-determination and so on and so forth.*

When being asked to elaborate on what she earlier referred to as a Palestinian feminist perspective, she emphasised the plurality of perspectives that exist within the country, yet explained that a coalition for Palestine's National Action Plan on WPS exists which, among other things: highlights the link between the social and the political; differentiates between the position of the oppressor and the oppressed; challenges the prevailing, narrow conceptions of peace and security; and understands justice as fundamental aspect of peace:

> ***P3****: You also have to know that Palestine is like any other country and there is not a Palestinian feminist perspective. There is Palestinian feminist perspectives. There is debate within the Palestinian civil society and the Palestinian women's movement on these perspectives. So there are still different perspectives there, but there is a coalition of Palestinian women…let's say agreed upon points of different elements of the Palestinian women's movement on issues of WPS and these are put together in the Palestinian NAP. So and the perspective on WPS, for example the whole issue of linking the social and the political is one of them. Basically looking at security in a far broader sense then you know security in an army sense… a militarised sense, so human security, the whole issue of not equating the position of the oppressor with the position of the oppressed, security for whom and in which way, the issue of justice, that peace is an empty word if it is not based on justice. So all these are elements of the perspective of Palestinian feminists towards peace and security.*

Interestingly, none of the issues on the Palestinian feminist agenda she lists are exclusively 'women's issues'. In fact, for her, the distinction between a 'women's agenda' and a 'feminist agenda' is exactly that:

***P3**: But what I want to say is actually WPS…using the word women is to me a little bit tricky, because a feminist perspective goes beyond only looking at women, peace and security. A feminist perspective has a look at all aspects: social, political, economic, issues of justice, social justice, peace and human security and so on and so forth and if you say…putting the word women in front of it is as if…it limits it to how can we involve women, how can we include women, and how can we take into consideration women's needs when we talk about peace and security. That's what the agenda is in 1-2-3 at the moment. And that's why I's rather have a debate or a dialogue on a feminist peace and security agenda rather than a women, peace and security agenda and that's what I am missing. If you ask me what are you missing, that's what I am missing. It is not women, peace and security it's a feminist peace and security agenda. It should be, but at the moment it's not the case*

Feminism, then, gains a broader signification. If understood in such a way, alternative 'feminist' perspectives from the other participants could also be explored. For example, the two contributions below demonstrate a 'feminist' vision beyond its interpretation in WPS, and prevailing Western understandings more generally. For example, the contribution of the first participant below provides a vision of what she understands as most pressing in the context of WPS. She provides a list of themes in the interest of women, which includes solidarity, education, distribution of government resources and safety in terms of food, clothing and health:

***P1**: So for me, I look at women's access education, women helping each other not trying to bring others down, the government sharing resources, creating that environment that can give them the safety they need whether it is in terms of food, clothing, or in terms of medical. For me that would be my understanding of what security is and peace is.*

This vision could be described as a broader socialist project including government distribution and service provisions where feminist concerns are integrated. The fourth participant highlights the importance of a 'grassroots' and victim-centred approaches in contrast to the ever further 'technicalisation' of WPS. Her perspective could be interpreted as a bottom-up 'feminist' project which takes the stories of those (Southern women) who have lived through insecurity and conflict as a starting point:

***P4**: So my organisation I would say is really like an open book to see, to evaluate our own understanding of support, of gender, of peace, but from the voice of people who have been victim ourselves, from lack of peace. And all those terminology they are using we may not understand them, but we have lived them. So how do you talk with somebody who has all this technology and like how I hear the organisations speak about innovation and monitoring and evaluation and you are like no! People need relief!*

***P4:** So I always find it interesting to see how the ministry understands what it takes to develop us, so the African and the other women who needs to be…who's coming from a developing country, and the space they give to people themselves to say 'this is my problem and this is how it should be*

resolved'. So those are really the core of the vision of our organisation…is really which place do we give to the people to tell their own story and also to be part of saying what are the solutions.

As this section has demonstrated, there is no such thing as the Southern feminist perspective. Although common denominators may exist among the participants in their opposition towards prescriptive, falsely universalising and (neo-) colonial agendas, they translate this in their work in different ways and in correspondence with their contextual understandings. Whereas some have relatively few objections to the WPS agenda and global feminism more generally, other seeks to challenge these frameworks, either by focusing on personal stories and small-scale changes, or by seeking to address larger structural issues. The form the critiques of the four different women take, cannot be abstracted from their personal trajectories and educational backgrounds, among other things. In addition, looking beyond visions and projects labelled as feminist provide openings for further discussions on locally informed projects that are both transformative *and* feminist.

4.5 Transnational feminism, epistemic privilege and politics

The diaspora and epistemic privilege

In her quest for a transnational anti-capitalist feminist project, Mohanty (2003) has argued in favour of a politics starting from the 'epistemic privilege' of oppressed communities of women. Drawing on their standpoints, their experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, would provide "the most inclusive viewing of systemic power" (Mohanty, 2003, p.511). Could diaspora women play this role in WPS politics? First, if the premise for epistemic privilege is a subjugated standpoint, it is important to ask to what extent diaspora women occupy such a position. The diaspora is often portrayed as the voice of those suffering in their 'home countries', or as the fourth participant put it "'the voice of those who were not able to make". However, as Østergaard- Nielsen (2001) points out talking about diaspora mobilisation, despite an increase in grass-roots transnationalism recently, historically mainly political elites have undertaken transnational political activities. As the first participant points out, not all diasporic actors may sufficiently understand the different forms of suffering and oppression in their countries:

***P1**: Who are these diaspora? And we also need to look at the background of this diaspora. Whether it is men or women, whoever they are. Who were they before they came? Do they understand where they're coming from and where they're going and why they're here? Do all the diaspora really understand their cultures, what is going on even in the fighting. Because some of us may come from a government who is oppressive. So if your father is in the government, your husband, or you are involved, the ones who are actually implementing some of these laws that create suffering. Have you ever gone through what these people are going through for you to understand that this is not OK? Some of us, have they ever lived in the rural areas to understand gap between the women in the rural areas and in the town and in the social classes?*

Apart from sufficient understanding of different realities, the question for epistemic privilege would be whether they have lived it. Most participants in this research, most of them highly educated (except the fourth participant) and with resources and/or a network to settle in the Netherlands, then, may not necessarily represent such a subjugated standpoint. To be sure, this is in no way to downplay their experiences of insecurity and in some cases extreme violations they have suffered. In addition, perhaps they are not the most disadvantaged, but they do experience marginalisation, not least in their 'host countries'. Does this allow them a more inclusive viewing of systemic power? Some of the previous contributions indeed suggest that being in the position of the diaspora and taking a critical stance towards power dynamics coincide. Especially, the third participant draws a clear link between the diaspora and the critical questioning of power. At the same time, however, the often theoretically informed contributions of this participant cannot be abstracted from her academic background in Development Studies in which critical inquiry is a central aspect. Of course, not all diasporic actors share this background. In addition, the contributions of the other participants further demonstrate that these two characteristics do not have to coincide. Especially the second participant seems to have relatively few objections to the current course of events:

> ***I**: What in your opinion would be the best way forward for the WPS agenda?*
>
> ***P2**: I think if what I can see now from this negotiation from the National Action Plan if I put it now just local for Holland, the NAP, I think we are going to the right direction. It is much better now. The themes we are discussing than before and if the whole thing can go like this it can achieve better results than before. So I hope the whole agenda can go this direction, because now we are trying to correct many things from the past.*
>
> ---
>
> ***I**: And is it also sometimes difficult because as you said the WPS agenda is mostly a Western formulated agenda, to connect it with certain religious ideas or do you not experience that?*
>
> ***P2**: No, I didn't experience that. I just connect it smoothly with religion so I didn't experience any discrepancies with the values of the two things.*

Although there may be several reasons for this participant not to express herself more critically – among them her close collaboration with the government on the current NAP – it does demonstrate that diaspora organisations do not necessarily position themselves in a critical manner. For Donna Haraway (1988), critical positioning, situated knowledges, "where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard" is a necessary condition for all knowledge claims (p.589). Although according to her, there is good reason to prefer the view from the subjugated above those of the powerful, subjugated knowledges also require the act of critical positioning. The diverging perspectives of the participants confirm the view that position or standpoint in itself is a limited predictor of a critical or transformative vision.

Different political modes

While three of the women describe themselves or their work as activist, their political agendas and aspirations for WPS vary. Whereas some focus more on what Mohanty (2003) has called the 'micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle', others place greater emphasis on 'the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes'. The former can be recognised in the fourth participant's plea for centralising the lived experiences of victims in WPS:

> ***P4****: I always like to say the conclusion is the story of my life, because I don't claim to have the answer and I do not claim to be the sole person who knows and the other don't know. I'm speaking from a victim point of view, somebody who lived it. I lived in poverty and I have overcome poverty so you may want to listen how I overcome poverty, right? So instead of imaging how people can get out of poverty…So it's giving ownership to the people to tell their stories.*

Although this participant is highly critical of WPS politics in the Netherlands, she does not 'claim to have the answer' or 'be the sole person who knows'. Rather than aspiring systemic transformation or an alternative politics, she focuses on local struggle and demands recognition of lived experiences in those places where decisions are being made. Despite the fact that this participant does not provide a deep systemic critique, this does not necessarily mean that her approach less political. In Rancière's (1999) understanding, 'politics' can occur in a variety of forms as long as there is a rupture with the 'police order', that is the order of bodies that shapes society according to its norms, beliefs and social divisions. If this victim-centred view breaks with this order in some form, politics may occur. In addition, it could be argued that the ways in which this same participant has spoken out in formal settings is another example of such disruptive acts. For example, one of the participants challenged the norm of using standardised international wording in a conversation with the ministry on WPS by referring to the standpoint of a victim:

> ***P4:*** *In the discussion we had with the ministry they were like 'we have to try and stick to the international word use' and then I asked the lady at the ministry 'but you think the lady who is raped care about the international use of words?'. Because you need her to understand those words. It is not about you the civil servant's understanding which is fine, but it is making sure that the person who you are protecting understands what you are saying, that should be your problem!*

Another example this same participant came up with was a letter she wrote with a group of diaspora women to a Dutch minister in which they expressed their discontent with the current state of affairs of WPS and their marginalisation in the framework. Consequently, the civil society platform they are part of and who usually communicates with the Ministry on their behalf became upset. The women did not conform to the hierarchical WPS structure by directly entering in contact with the Ministry.

The third participant was most pronounced in term of systemic critiques and the need to formulate transformative solutions. However, her contributions also suggest that transformative vision does not necessarily translate in transformative action. Although she identifies several problems inherent

to the current WPS framework, she explains that it is extremely hard to work outside the dominant framework and still be effective:

> ***I**: But even though you say in some…if you look at it in such a way it [the WPS Agenda] may do more harm than good.*
>
> ***P3**: Yes.*
>
> ***I**: But you still choose to work with the agenda, right?*
>
> ***P3**: Ehm…yes, this is…yes, I do. Although many many times I have been questioning myself whether I am doing the right thing to do it or not […].In fact I don't agree with you that I, I not not agree with you, but I do not see myself as working on the agenda based on the agenda. I am working with actors on the WPS agenda with my perspective of what needs to be done and I think it is very difficult to push the agenda in the way that I think it needs to be heading towards. But on the other hand, I found it very difficult in the Netherlands to work as an outsider to the actors there are and still be effective. So this is a dilemma which I think many of us have. Do you want to work from within the framework that is there and try to reform from within…although I think reform is not even the right word…to basically try to question and challenge the agenda, or do you think the agenda as it is and the actors as they are will never change and therefore there is no effect and impact of what you do so you step out. What is the alternative?*

This quote demonstrates that there is no easy answer to the question of whether transformation can best be instigated through challenging the WPS framework from within or by abandoning it and formulating an alternative project instead. Although highly sceptical towards the current WPS framework, this participant does not abandon the agenda. However, neither does she work within the WPS framework *per se*. Instead of drawing on the agenda as it is, she pushes for her own interpretation of WPS, while still being able to occupy space provided by the framework. However, for this participant, working with the WPS framework is not ideal. Rather she sees it as the best alternative in the absence of a strong independent civil society who truly challenges Dutch policymaking. Part of the problem, she states, is the blurring of the lines between the Dutch government and civil society actors, in which critique only takes place within an established framework:

> ***P3**: […].And that is why I told you at one point, I find it very difficult, because I don't see diverse enough feminist movement in the Netherlands, because I mean if you choose not to work from within this framework which is set there to discuss these issues and to work on these issues, I wouldn't know what the alternative would be for me as a migrant woman here who wants to work on this.*

***I**: Would you say that most feminist or at least feminist organisations in the Netherlands then very much work within a liberal frame?*

***P3**: Absolutely and there are only a few who work from outside that frame and I think they might be very active, but they are put aside in relation to policymaking. I don't hear their voice basically. Just to put it maybe bluntly. I don't hear their voice! I don't hear their voice in a genuine, internal Dutch debate and what does this WPS agenda mean for us here, as women and women's movements, as feminists in the Netherlands. And one of my biggest critiques to the whole thing is that I feel that the lines between Dutch official policymakers, Dutch government on this, and civil society actors is blurred. I don't see the civil society as a very strong actor questioning, you know…providing…a real watchdog to the policies of the Dutch government. They try to do it in a limited way, but I don't see…It is as if there is a kind of understanding between all actors that this is the framework and critique and discussions within that framework are acceptable and any critique that goes beyond that is undone.*

This demonstrates that for those with transformative political aspirations in the context of WPS, there are a number of practical barriers. Whereas systemic change is easy to advocate for in theory, such a pathway is less clear-cut in practice. Moreover, the efforts of practitioners that may appear as less 'political' in nature should not be downplayed either. Through (individual) disruptive acts, powerful frameworks are being called into question and space for change is being created. Overall, what these contributions confirm is that the WPS framework in itself does not provide space for 'politics'. Instead, practitioners and activists themselves creates such spaces on the borders of the existing framework in a variety of different ways.

The diaspora as transformative actor?

While an element of ambiguity could be recognised in the perspectives of all four diaspora women, this did not amount to a common critical vision. Whereas some described critical questioning as inherent to the diaspora's role in WPS politics, others emphasised their function as connectors and translators instead. Nevertheless, while holding the participants' views against the critical feminist theories, the perspectives of all four women showed commonalities with one or several theories. For example, coherent with socialist feminist views, all four critiqued the lack of attention to economic factors in the agenda. Many of them described central issues in the agenda – such as women's participation and having your voice heard – as being of little value for women living in poverty. In addition, consistent with the argument against 'lean-in feminism', several women criticised the elitist character of the WPS agenda. While postmodern feminism was harder reconcile with the views of the women, postcolonial feminist critiques were reflected in the contributions of all four women in some way. They recognised falsely homogenising tendencies of Southern women in the agenda, which they perceived as problematic or even harmful. In addition, while often unfamiliar with postcolonial feminist vocabularies, most of the participants critiqued colonial and Eurocentric aspects of Western feminism in their own ways. Overall, this suggests that the diasporic actor may indeed be likely to hold certain critical notions.

However, 'critical' can still be understood and translated in different ways. Whereas some of the diaspora women tended to focus on instigating change locally, others focused on systemic transformation. This does not necessarily make one strategy more political than the other. Following Rancière (1999), 'spectecular or otherwise', politics can occur in a variety of forms as long as there is a rupture with the 'police order'. In other words, the order of bodies that shapes society according to its norms, beliefs and social divisions. Disrupting this order may be done through making visible unequal relations of power implicated in the WPS agenda, but also through introducing a victim-centered perspective that makes visible those who may not have had a place, or voice in the WPS policy framework before. Nevertheless, the interviews also showed that it is possible to hold certain critical notions with respect to WPS, while still conforming to the 'police order'. For example, while denouncing the absence of economic dimensions in the agenda, some of the women uncritically support economic empowerment policies as a way to address poverty and the marginalisation of lower classes in the context of WPS. The concept of 'economic empowerment' is part of the WPS policy framework and is used to describe policies focused on gaining individual skills and often presented as positive contributions to larger WPS aims. The concept does *not* challenge economic inequality, nor widespread poverty. From a socialist feminist perspective, such policies still feed into the traps of neoliberalism. In Rancière's (1999) words, then, such apolitical responses may be described as "the simplest alternative to politics: the simple police" (p.31). In addition, this further demonstrates that, drawing on Haraway (1988) there is no such thing as epistemic privilege without critical positioning. The 'subjugated' perspectives of diaspora women may be put to use for challenging systemic oppressions, but this is only possible when these perspectives coincide with critical positioning.

Important to note is that while some of the critical reflections of the diaspora women are 'political' in nature, this does not necessarily mean that all such visions are translated into political actions. As one of the participants explained, while encountering a number of 'political' issues in relation to the agenda, it is extremely hard to work outside the framework and still be effective. While working partially within the contours of the frame, however, she seeks to challenge the framework where she can. This suggests that even when diaspora practitioners position themselves critically and seek to disrupt non-egalitarian elements in the WPS agenda, politics cannot be easily anticipated. In addition, different views exist on what kind of politics is desirable. Rather than seeking to provide an answer to this debate, however, this thesis has sought to map out different critical feminist interpretations of the WPS agenda, while exploring ways in which these theories may find traction among a specific set of practitioners.

5. Conclusions

This thesis has sought to examine the challenges and opportunities for progressive WPS policy and practice drawing on critical feminist theories and the insights of four diasporic practitioners active in the Dutch WPS community. It has demonstrated how key feminist debates are applicable to global gender agendas like WPS and how critical feminist theories can help guide the agenda in a just and progressive manner. While each of the selected theories challenged elements of the agenda and indicated focus areas for progressive change, some theories found greater resonance with the diaspora practitioners than others. In addition, it provided insight in the role and position of diaspora actors in relation to WPS and the possibility of politics beyond the WPS policy discourse. This thesis will conclude by listing the main challenges and opportunities for transforming the WPS agenda:

Socialist feminism

Examining the discourses of the Security Council and the NGO WG through the lens of socialist feminism demonstrated that both the Security Council and the NGO WG fail to incorporate economic factors in a way that account for the systemic and intersecting nature of gender and class oppression. When reference is made to economic factors, they typically refer to economic support for specific disadvantaged groups (e.g. victims of conflict related sexual violence). In this manner, economic deprivation is portrayed as an isolated issue requiring individual rather than systemic responses (read: economic empowerment). Moreover, the fact that issues of representation and meaningful participation receive greater attention than socioeconomic concerns in the WPS resolutions, and even more so in the strong representation-focused discourse of the NGO WG, is concerning from a socialist feminist perspective for it would dovetail all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism. Following the Feminism for the 99% movement, this trend would feed into an elitist feminism focused on a small group of 'female powerholders' rather than a feminism that aims to benefit the majority of women.

While the policy discourse analysis indicates that socialist feminist concerns are hard to reconcile with WPS policy discourse, the diaspora practitioners did share a number of these concerns. For example, all diaspora women critiqued the lack of attention for economic factors in the agenda and have pushed for incorporating this element within the upcoming National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security in the Netherlands. Moreover, several of them critique the elitist character of the WPS agenda and were warry of superficial diversity politics. However, none of them took a strong anti-capitalist stance which is central to socialist feminist critiques. In fact, some of the women uncritically support economic empowerment policies as a way to address poverty and the marginalisation of lower classes in the context of WPS. The absence of such a critique may, in a socialist feminist perspective, still feed into the traps of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, important socialist feminist concerns do seem to find its way on practitioners' agendas.

Postmodern feminism

A central criticism on WPS policy discourse from a postmodern feminist perspective is its essentialised portrayal of women (and men). Women are portrayed in a benevolent and victimised manner,

particularly as mothers, peacemakers and victims of sexual violence, while men (often implicitly) are pictured as oppressors, fighters and perpetrators of sexual violence. None of the diaspora women expressed themselves critically in relation to such notions. In fact, most of the women reinstated such gendered notions. This challenge seems hard to be overcome since the agenda is partially legitimised by such notions (e.g. we need women's participation for sustainable peace). However, the fact that none of the four women seemed particularly concerned with countering essentialism in the agenda, poses questions regarding the significance of these postmodern feminist concerns in the context of WPS. Indeed, in the context of wide-spread poverty and severe injustices, an anti-essentialist politics of gender does not appear to be a first priority.

Apart from its critique on gendered essentialisms, postmodern (feminists) have been concerned with difference and the disruption of universalising narratives more generally. The increasing emphasis on context-specific responses, local actors and multiple identities in WPS policy discourse reflects such postmodern concerns. This is also true for the inclusivity narrative that is especially prominent in the NGO WG discourse. While these developments are welcomed from a postmodern (feminist) perspective, many of the diaspora women questioned the application diversity and inclusivity claims in practice. This ties into the larger (modernist) criticism of postmodern theory's focus on language and discourse and therewith on the 'symbolic' rather than the material. While it became clear that rhetorical commitments had limited value for the participants, they did identify pressing issues in relation to language and discourse. For example, some of the women emphasised the exclusions resulting from specific (in particular liberal and Western-centred) discursive constructions of peace and security.

Overall, the main disconnect between postmodern feminist perspectives and the views from the diaspora practitioners seems to lie with the abstract nature and unclarity about its practical value. Scholars as Judith Butler, who has been at the fore front of the anti-essentialist current in gender studies, write in scholarly language and tend to have few answers to the practical application of their theories. For example, Butler prefers to leave her theories open-ended and nonprescriptive, believing that political decisions cannot always be theoretically anticipated. In the absence of such a political component, postmodern (feminism) seems to primarily feed into the representational discourses in the agenda that are sensitive to neoliberal co-optation.

Postcolonial feminism

Whereas the postmodern feminist perspective highlighted the essentialised portrayal of women in the agenda, the postcolonial feminist perspective made visible the specific portrayal of *Southern* women in WPS policy discourse. While being an agenda focused on conflict areas in the South, focusing on women as essentially living truncated under constant threat of sexual violence feeds into larger colonial narratives. In this narrative, the West is portrayed as highest point of emancipation and as saviour of 'the poor women in the South'. Corresponding to this postcolonial feminist critique, all four diaspora women recognised falsely homogenising tendencies of Southern women, one specifically in relation to Muslim women. Some emphasised the diversity of Southern women's positions and lives, while others emphasised the fact that women's oppression is a struggle everywhere, not only in the South. Although

most of the diaspora women did not discuss the colonial aspect of these depictions *per se*, they all described this portrayal as problematic, and according to some even harmful.

Whereas a postcolonial feminism starts from the assumption that feminism occurs in a variety of forms in the South, three of the four diaspora women understood feminism primarily in a Western and liberal sense and either supported or rejected the concept based on that understanding. However, those who critiqued the concept based on this Western interpretation resembled postcolonial feminist critiques. For example, one participant described feminism as being unfit to the lives and priorities of women living in the South, and as likely to prescribe or impose interventions being ill-suited and ineffective. Another participant questioned women's empowerment, which she linked to feminism, as ultimate goal. This feeds into the depoliticised understandings of such feminist notions identified in the document analysis in chapter three. As only one of the diaspora women understood feminism also outside dominant Western conceptions, only this participant elaborated on a Southern feminist WPS politics. Interestingly, the feminist aspect of the agenda she aspires lies in the incorporation of social, political, economic, justice and human security issues. Feminism, for her, concerns those issues going beyond mere 'women's issues' (characteristic of liberal feminist agendas). While her perspectives align best to postcolonial feminist vocabularies, key postcolonial feminist critiques can be found in the contributions of all women. Nevertheless, the four women formulate very diverse visions for an improved WPS agenda, which again highlights the fact that there is no such thing as a Southern feminist perspective. The fact that the postcolonial feminist frame allows such different projects to exist next to each other, while centralising a critique on the lingering effects of Western (neo-)colonialism, implies that there is high potential for increased collaboration between postcolonial feminist academics and diaspora practitioners in the context of WPS and beyond. Where postcolonial feminist theory could provide diaspora practitioners with critical vocabularies and theoretical substantiation for the formulation of projects beyond liberal feminist understandings, academics could improve their relevance for critical feminist practice across borders.

Transnational feminism, the diaspora and 'politics'

In particular recent writings of Mohanty were highlighted within the transnational feminist 'frame'. This included her notion of 'epistemic privilege' of marginalised communities of women and the distinction between the 'micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle' and the 'macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes'. While it may be argued that the diaspora, given their backgrounds of oppression and/or marginalisation in the host-state, speak from a subjugated perspective, this research showed that this did not necessarily translate in a critical vision. This confirmed Haraway's argument that there is no such thing as epistemic privilege without critical positioning. Although the diaspora does not occupy a natural position of epistemic privilege, their contributions did appear to provide space for politics in WPS practice, either in the form of 'micro-' or 'macro-politics'. In contrast to the apolitical nature of the epistemic community of WPS adhered to by the Security Council and NGO Working Group, the heterogenous character of (diasporic) practice appeared to provide space for politics to sneak in sideways" (Rancière, 1999, p.31). While holding several views corresponding to those of the epistemic community of WPS, the diaspora women also questioned the agenda's foundational beliefs and

assumptions. With respect to the 'diasporic position', these findings suggest that the diaspora may, first and foremost, still be defined by its ambiguity. Being critical and uncritical, political and apolitical all at once. Rather than assuming a certain epistemic privilege in advance, the distinction between 'politics' and 'the police', proved valuable to assess the potential of the diaspora to contribute to a transformative and progressive WPS agenda. Perhaps it may not be a coincident that the participant most closely working together with the Dutch government on WPS was often less 'political' in her contributions. Organisations as these may have more chances to influence the agenda. However, this study also demonstrates that more political organisations *do* get the chance to participate. Although this participation may still be far from satisfactory – judging by the experiences of marginalisation the diaspora women have faced in WPS spaces – their presence does suggest that there are openings for 'politics'. This further suggests that (diasporic) WPS actors may benefit from closer collaboration with critical theorists to substantiate their political agendas. At the same time, critical theorists may learn about understandings of politics beyond their frameworks. Future research may explore the opportunities and conditions for such cross-fertilisations in the context of international policy settings and beyond.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Interview guide

Introduction:

1. Could you introduce your organisation briefly? What is the vision of the organisation and what's your agenda?

2. a) How does your work relate to WPS?

   b) What does the agenda mean for your work?

3. What's the role and value of diaspora organisations in WPS-related work, in your opinion?

Postcolonial and transnational feminisms:

4. As diasporic organisation you are located at the interface of the local and the global. Do you experience mismatches/discrepancies between local and global agendas and/or perspectives? If so, could you give an example of this?

5. a) An issue that came up several times during the lobby meetings as well is that although the WPS agenda is a global agenda, not all countries and actors have the same level of influence on the agenda (then you can think of agenda setting, formulation but also implementation). As diaspora organisation, what are the spaces in which you can exercise more or less influence?

   b) What challenges do you encounter (in exercising influence/being heard)?

6. a) Do you consider your work feminist? In what way?

   b) Does your work connect to feminist movements or organisations in the countries you work with?

7. Is there a relation with religion in your work?
   (e.g. in values or working with religious groups) How? Is there something specifically relating to WPS? (leave the question open if you reconcile this with WPS)

8. WPS, and UN gender agendas more generally, have been criticised by certain scholars for portraying women from the South in a uniform/ monolithic way, as victims, sexually and economically oppressed, uneducated and tradition-bound not doing justice to the diverse realities of women. What do you think of this critique?

9. Do you think that larger structural issues such as militarisation, global economic inequality and the exploitation of natural resources in conflict areas should be linked to WPS issues? Or other issues you consider important to link up with WPS?

Socialist feminism:

10. Do class differences, poverty and economic inequality play a role in WPS issues? (e.g. in participation of peace processes or being vulnerable to violence. (Opt. How do you incorporate this in the agenda/work of your organisation?)

11. Do you think that the WPS agenda pays enough attention to such economic dimensions?

12. For some people the WPS agenda prioritises the discursive over the material. The discursive refers to for example being represented, gaining a voice, being heard, whereas the material refers the concrete conditions in which people live. What do you think of this?

Postmodern feminism:

13. a) Within the NGO Working Group for WPS there has been increasing attention for the representation of diverse voices in peace and security processes (but also at international WPS events). Especially minorities and marginalised groups should be represented: women's groups, civil society, but also of ethnic and religious minorities, displaced people, as well as sexual minorities and peoples with disabilities. What do you think of this development (emphasis on diverse representation)?

    b) And should, for example, discriminated ethnic groups receive equal attention as people with disabilities, or sexual minorities (LBGTI community)?

14. a) There have been quite some discussions about language use in the resolutions. A good example is the discussion over the inclusion of explicit language on SRHR which has been removed under pressure of the US in one of the latest resolutions, and we see the NGO Working Group pushing for more inclusive language on marginalised groups and minorities. Do you think it is important to focus attention on language use in the resolutions?

    b) Does this impact your work?

Concluding:

15. What, in your opinion, is the best way forward for WPS?

7.2 Participant information sheet and consent form

Are you interested in taking part in this research project?

"Critically Examining the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: perspectives from the diaspora and theoretical reflections"

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to investigate the challenges and opportunities for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in the light of critical debates. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The main objective of this master thesis project is to examine the challenges and opportunities of the WPS Agenda through an inquiry into feminist theories and conversations with diaspora women working with WPS in the Netherlands. Apart from theorising progressive ways forward for the WPS Agenda, this thesis explores elements of convergence and divergence in academic and practice- oriented WPS circles and seeks to expand the contours of critical debates on WPS theory and practice by involving diaspora practitioners in these discussions.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The *Norwegian University of Life Sciences* (NMBU) is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Participants for this research have been selected based on their active involvement in the Gender, Peace and Security lobby group coordinated by the Dutch Gender Platform. Four women from four different diaspora organisations have so far been included in this research project.

What does participation involve for you?

Participation involves taking part in an individual skype conversation of approx. one hour which involves questions about your work and experience with WPS, as well as specific questions about existing debates relating to WPS, including topics such as possible discrepancies between local and global WPS agendas, the politics among different WPS actors and the agenda's potential for transformative change, while leaving ample space for you to raise additional points. The latter is in fact encouraged and much appreciated. Depending on the information gained from these conversations, as well as your availability and willingness, I may like to further the discussion in a group session with all four participants (either online or in person) where we can explore points of agreement and disagreement. This will be communicated with you after the individual sessions. Your answers will be recorded electronically.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

Your personal data will only be used for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). In order to make sure that no unauthorised persons are able to access the personal data, I will replace names and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

This also means that for your personal privacy, your name, and the name of your organisation will be anonymised in the written master thesis. However, note that background/contextual information provided in the interviews could indirectly be traced back to you. You can request insight into the collected data at any time. In case you do would like to have your name/organisations mentioned with your contributions this is, of course, also possible.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end *17 August 2020*. Digital recording will be deleted, as well as the list of names, contact details and respective codes.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the *Norwegian University of Life Science*, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *The Norwegian University of Life Sciences* via Harriët Meiborg or Esben Leifsen (Associate Professor/ Supervisor)
- Our Data Protection Officer: Hanna Pernille Gulbrandsen
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Harriët Meiborg

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "*Critically Examining the WPS Agenda"* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in an individual conversation (digitally, approx. 60 minutes)
- ☐ if needed, to participate in a group session (digitally or in-person, approx. 90 minutes)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 17 August 2020

(Signed by participant, date)