

(En)gendering Peace: A Queer Feminist Analysis of South Africa's (2020-2025) National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*

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Received: March 27th, 2022 · Accepted: August 19th, 2022 · Modified: October 7th, 2022
<https://doi.org/10.7440/res83.2023.06>

Abstract | This research paper presents a queer feminist analysis of gendered discourses in South Africa's (SA) (2020-2025) National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). It builds on an extensive field of WPS scholarship by using the case study of SA's NAP to illustrate how policy can be used to harness critical gendered language and create possibilities for radical (re)imaginings of *gendered peace*. While a considerable knowledge base that explores the gendered discourses of NAPs on WPS already exists, a key gap in the literature —that has only more recently begun to be explored with greater rigor— is the bridging of queer and feminist theories to further push the boundaries of discursive policy analysis. Against this backdrop, feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) was applied to the NAP case study to surface dominant and counter-discourses on gender and their possible inclusionary/exclusionary effects. Key findings centre the potential value of policy discourses which, in their fragmentation, ruptures, continuities and ambivalences, can facilitate opportunities for queer peace at the instrumental level and beyond.

Keywords | discourse analysis; gender; NAPs; peace and security; queer feminist perspectives; South Africa; women

Paz con género: un análisis feminista *queer* del Plan Nacional de Acción sobre Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad de Sudáfrica (2020-2025)

Resumen | Este artículo de investigación presenta un análisis feminista *queer* de los discursos de género del Plan Nacional de Acción (PNA) sobre Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad (MPS) de Sudáfrica (2020-2025). Se basa en un amplio campo académico sobre MPS y usa el estudio de caso del PNA de Sudáfrica para ilustrar cómo se pueden emplear las políticas para aprovechar el lenguaje crítico de género y crear posibilidades para (re)imaginar radicalmente la *paz de género*. Si bien ya existe una base de conocimiento considerable que explora los discursos de género de los PNA sobre MPS, una brecha importante en la literatura —que solo se ha empezado a explorar con mayor rigor recientemente— es el de la unión de las teorías *queer* y feministas para ampliar todavía más el alcance del análisis discursivo de políticas. En este contexto, se aplicó un análisis crítico del discurso (ACD) feminista al estudio de caso del PNA para sacar a la luz los discursos dominantes y los contradiscursos sobre género, así como sus posibles efectos incluyentes/excluyentes.

* This research paper was written under the 'Research and Evidence' strand of the 'Strengthening Practice through Collaboration' project, with support from the Embassy of Ireland in South Africa.

Los hallazgos clave resaltan el valor potencial de los discursos sobre políticas que, en su fragmentación, rupturas, continuidades y ambivalencias, pueden facilitar oportunidades para una paz *queer* a nivel instrumental y más allá.

Palabras clave | análisis del discurso; género; mujeres; paz y seguridad; perspectivas feministas *queer*; Plan Nacional de Acción; Sudáfrica

Paz com gênero: análise feminista *queer* do Plano Nacional de Ação sobre Mulheres, Paz e Segurança da África do Sul (2020-2025)

Resumo | Este artigo de pesquisa apresenta uma análise feminista *queer* dos discursos de gênero do Plano Nacional de Ação (PNA) sobre Mulheres, Paz e Segurança (MPS) da África do Sul (2020-2025). Está baseado num amplo campo acadêmico sobre MPS e usa o estudo de caso do PNA da África do Sul para ilustrar como podem ser utilizadas as políticas para aproveitar a linguagem crítica de gênero e criar possibilidades para (re)imaginar radicalmente a *paz de gênero*. Embora já exista uma base de conhecimento considerável que explora os discursos de gênero dos PNA sobre MPS, uma lacuna importante na literatura — que somente começou a explorar com maior rigor recentemente — é a da união das teorias *queer* e feministas para ampliar ainda mais o escopo da análise discursiva de políticas. Nesse contexto, foi aplicada uma análise crítica do discurso feminista ao estudo de caso do PNA para trazer à luz os discursos dominantes e os contradiscursos sobre gênero, bem como seus possíveis efeitos inclusivos e exclusivos. Os achados principais salientam o valor potencial dos discursos sobre políticas que, em sua fragmentação, rupturas, continuidades e ambivalências, podem facilitar oportunidades para uma paz *queer* no âmbito instrumental e mais além disso.

Palabras-chave | análise do discurso; gênero; mulheres; paz e segurança; perspectivas feministas *queer*; Plano Nacional de Ação; África do Sul

Introduction

Since the watershed passing of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda a little over two decades ago, an extensive body of scholarship has been developed that explores not only the landmark document itself, but also its National Action Plan (NAP) corollaries (Hudson 2017; Newby and O'Malley 2021; Shepherd 2020). Perhaps the most significant contribution of these scholarly developments is an explicit recognition and theorisation of how women's gendered experiences and identities matter to peace and security (Björkdahl, Hall and Svensson 2019; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011). Against this theoretical backdrop, a key gap in the literature —that has only more recently begun to be explored with greater rigor— is the bridging of queer and feminist theories to further push the boundaries of discursive policy analysis in the WPS field (see, e.g., Edenborg 2021; Hagen 2016, 2017, 2019; Jayakumar 2022).

In this research paper, I set out to make a unique contribution to this growing body of work by presenting a queer feminist discursive analysis of South Africa's (SA's) (2020-2025) NAP on WPS (Burger 2020). Bacchi (2009; 2010), in her work on policy-as-discourse, notes that the practice of selecting specific texts to analyse is in itself a symbolic, discursive act that warrants reflection. Several factors motivated my decision to explore SA's NAP on WPS as a case study in this paper. For one, I write as a critical social and psychological researcher with a vested interest in the military-gender nexus and its particularities in the South African context¹. For three years, I have also managed a research project within the local gender and development sector that collaborates with eight civil society organisations across SA and Zimbabwe to

1 Refer to Pinheiro and Kiguwa (2021) for more details on my work in this area.

enhance their praxis related to gender justice². The themes centred in this Special Issue on queer peacebuilding thus offered an opportunity to put these experiences —as well as my previous knowledge of working with queer and feminist theories and methodologies (see, e.g., Pinheiro and Harvey 2019)— to work.

To my knowledge, at the time of writing, there have yet to be discourse analyses published that focus on this NAP and so the research has the potential to make a novel contribution to the already well-established literature on WPS policy analysis, including the existing literature on discursive NAP analyses (refer to Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020). Existing discourse analyses of NAPs (see, e.g., Drummond and Rebelo 2020; Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020) have surfaced the importance of studying the language of peacebuilding policy documents as a means not only to understand the local gendered conditions from which these texts emanate, but also as a critical site for the potential rupturing of gendered power relations to work towards more holistic and enduring experiences of peace and equality for all citizens, including and especially those who identify outside of traditional gender binaries and whose gender and sexual identities intersect with other axes of oppression (Haastrup and Hagen 2021; Henry 2021).

Theorising about SA's NAP from *the local* (see, e.g., Basu 2016; Shepherd 2020), I situate the policy analysis against the backdrop of WPS's rootedness on the African continent and the existence of an already-extensive African WPS architecture that spans continental, regional, and national frameworks (Burger 2020; Hendricks 2017 as cited in Madsen and Hudson 2020). The case of SA facilitates rich opportunities for a queer feminist analysis of policies related to peace and security because of its unique historical background: the country entered its democratic dispensation in the late 1990s with myriad possibilities for queering law and policy related not only to peace and security, but to all systems presiding over the safety and well-being of its citizenry (healthcare, education, etc.). After a decades-long struggle against racialised oppression, into which the struggle for gendered and sexual equalities were intimately woven, opportunities for policy reform and a potential radical reimagining as to what equal citizenship could look like were prioritised in the journey to rebuild a “new SA” (Burger 2020; Judge 2021). The security sector, with its long history of operating from male memory and of policing different racial, gendered and sexual identities in the service of colonialism and apartheid, was poised to turn inwards on itself and to engage with possibilities for its own transformation with respect to racism and sexism, in particular (see, e.g., Lamb 2018; Nkenkana 2015).

At the time of writing, the policy context characterising SA's national frameworks for gender equality, in particular, creates enabling opportunities for challenging historic continuities with respect to socio-political inequalities and for imagining peacebuilding in more gender-transformative terms. Against this backdrop, the discourse analysis presented in the paper illustrates how policy can be used to harness critical gendered language and generate possibilities for radical (re)imaginings of *gendered peace*. It centres the potential value of policy discourses which—in their fragmentation, ruptures, continuities, and ambivalences— can facilitate opportunities for queer peace at the instrumental level and beyond.

The body of the paper is structured as follows: to begin, I present a discussion of key themes and debates in WPS and NAP-related literature, before turning to an outline of the methodology used in this research. Thereafter, I present the discourse analysis, a summative discussion of the key findings and, finally, key recommendations for future work.

2 The “Just Gender” project is funded by the Embassy of Ireland in SA. To learn more about the work, visit: www.justgender.org

Literature and Background

National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security

NAPs on WPS provide a key mechanism through which to domesticate global United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 instruments such as the WPS agenda. NAPs started to be developed in 2007, when member states were called upon by the UN secretary-general to design and implement their national peacebuilding activities through a gendered lens. Since then, 100 UN member states have developed their own NAPs on WPS, with the majority of NAPs being developed in countries from the global south and most predominantly, from countries on the African continent, primarily because many African countries have witnessed conflict throughout their histories, are currently grappling with conflict, and/or are emerging from periods of conflict into what are commonly called “postconflict”³ conditions (Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020).

NAPs are typically developed alongside a range of representative state and civil society stakeholders, including actors from Ministries of Defence, Security, and Justice but also those working in community-based organisations. The process of conceptualising NAPs is thus not only technical, but highly symbolic and political. Multifaceted collaboration and interactions between WPS stakeholders in a given country may establish spaces in which to address state-society fragmentations and fractures whilst also enhancing local peace infrastructure including the capacities of civil society groups working to address gendered violence. Because it is locally-driven, NAP-making can also shift national discourses on justice, reparation, transformation and healing beyond the instrumental domain to a broader range of spheres including the social, the economic, and the political, particularly if it is intentionally participatory by design and implementation (Basu 2016; Hudson 2017; True 2016).

NAPs are thus critical aspirational documents for translating the wider WPS framework into locally-situated strategies intended to address particular needs, experiences, and realities on the ground (Fritz, Doering and Gumru 2011; Hudson 2017). Whilst they are not ends in and of themselves, NAPs may therefore serve the important functions of 1) signalling national policy commitments to gender-sensitive peacebuilding; and 2) providing accountability measures for civil society, state, and other WPS stakeholders at a more granular level (Hudson 2017; True 2016).

Since the adoption of the WPS agenda a little over two decades ago, and the subsequent formation of numerous NAPs across different countries, an expansive and multidisciplinary body of scholarship focussing WPS has developed (Newby and O’Malley 2021). While there is general consensus amongst gender and development scholars that the WPS agenda and its associated NAPs challenge dominant international discourses on peace and security by formally recognising that sustainable peace cannot be realised without prioritising gender, WPS remains a highly-contested policy and practical field (Basu 2016).

Much of the contestation around WPS policies and practices centres questions related to discourses of gender and representation (Hudson 2017). For Kirby and Shepherd (2016, 374), language lies “at the heart of what the WPS agenda is, and what it might become”. The making of WPS and its associated NAPs is thus an inconsistent, ambivalent, discursive, symbolic, and political act that occurs in particular contexts (Basu 2016). The section below outlines some of the key tensions characterising the discursive fields of WPS and NAP-making. Drawing from queer feminist theories on gender and sexualities, I explore

3 Terms such as *postconflict* have not been hyphenated, so as to show the continuities that blur the lines between “peace” and “violence” in the grand narratives of peacebuilding (see Klem 2018).

central debates around the language of gender and representation in these fields and show how queer peacebuilding is poised to enhance policy analysis.

WPS Discourses: Fragmentation, Ambivalence, and Possibilities

Language is a key entry point for understanding the ways in which WPS and its associated NAPs convey *gendered perspectives* of security and peacebuilding (Cóbar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018; Hudson 2017; Kirby and Shepherd 2016). A wealth of scholarship exists that offers discursive analyses of WPS and its related policy and practical fields (Basu 2016; Newby and O'Malley 2021). This extensive body of work is moulded strongly by feminist post-structural methodologies, which offer the tools to analyse the discourses and possible counter-discourses of gender within policy documents (see, e.g., Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2021). Increasingly, queer theories have been placed in conversation with feminist work in order to push the boundaries of critical gendered analyses beyond their existing forms (Hagen 2016; 2017). Opportunities for this bridging together of queer and feminist theories in peace and security work (from theoretical and activist perspectives), however, have only recently begun to be explored in more detail (Hagen 2017).

Queer and critical feminist theories take the post-structuralist view of *gender* as constituted within and through language and thusly as a psycho-social and discursive constellation of ideas and practices that organise societies along identity-based fault lines (Ahmed 2014; Butler 1988; Hollway 2004). In this reading, gender is more than an essential identity category. Rather, it is cast as a “constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986, 1056). Language is a conveyor of plural and contested meanings, and thus plays a key part in the construction of multiple gendered identities and practices, with considerable power to shift material realities and social configurations over time (Foucault 1980; Hudson 2017). Discourses (and the discursive act of policy-making) (re)produce systems of “exclusionary practices and structures, not just labels, but assumptions, absences and social expectations” (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2015, 4).

From a queer feminist standpoint, the discursive conception and contents of policy documents such as NAPs are significant co-constructors of gendered knowledge regimes and material-social conditions in spaces where they are designed and implemented (Hagen 2016). For these reasons, Basu (2016) notes that NAPs should be considered not as static, but as flexible instruments open to multiple (re)interpretations that (re)inscribe and generate particular conditions for citizenship and personhood on the ground.

The field of critical WPS studies has thus surfaced and continues to tease out key discursive debates and common language traps characterising the field (Newby and O'Malley 2021). While WPS policies are widely deemed gender-responsive documents, they tend to operate through a particular discursive gender logic which, broadly speaking, sees gender as a descriptor of sex (Hudson 2017). (Re)conceptualising *gender* as a discursive power relation rather than a sole and fixed identity marker reveals the ways in which gender essentialism operates in UNSCR 1325 (Basu 2016).

The dominance of neoliberal feminist UN discourse in WPS policies has been problematised by radical queer feminists who argue that gendered rights and norms have been co-opted to serve international development and security interests at the expense of other (e.g., queer) feminisms and a more holistic, critical gender perspective of peacebuilding (see, e.g., Drummond and Rebelo 2020; Hudson 2017). At a broad level, the hegemony of neoliberal discourses in WPS has tended to equate women's inclusion and participation in peace efforts with positive change by assuming that policy developments will naturalise normative shifts and more accountable and gender-sensitive security governance (Cóbar,

Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018). These policy practices, however, often treat women's participation as synonymous with a "gender perspective", meaning that a sex-based headcount is still regularly accepted as a sufficient condition for inclusive and gender-sensitive peacebuilding (Cóbar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018).

Critical gender scholarship (e.g., Hagen 2016) further problematises the superficial "add women and stir" approach to gender-responsive peacebuilding because of the resultant "gender equals women" discourse that conflates "gender" with "sex" and reinforces binary systems. This common discursive trap casts all women as homogenous and reinforces stereotypical gendered dichotomies by essentialising women as victims and peacemakers, versus men as perpetrators and protectors. For Pratt (2013) and Shepherd (2016), the essentialist discourses characterising WPS policies treat women as both the inevitable victims of violence and the simultaneous sources of its resolution because of assumed *inherent qualities* linked to their ascribed sex as women.

Shepherd (2016) calls further attention to the negative implications of reproducing normative gendered binaries in WPS policies: for one, the "gender equals women" discourse effectively reproduces women's subordination to men and thus fails to be radically transformative of wider gendered power relations. Secondly, when "woman" serves as a proxy for "gender", the language may seem progressive, but is instrumentalist in that it may also be used to divert attention away from the actual needs and priorities of women themselves, and from deeply-embedded gendered power relations and the more radical interventions required to overcome gendered oppression.

A simultaneous consequence of the "gender equals women" discourse prevailing in WPS policies is a relative silence on issues relating to men and masculinities in peacebuilding efforts (see, e.g., Hearn *et al.* 2021; Wright 2020). Wright (2020) aptly observes that in the international policy framework on WPS, boys, men, and masculinities are conspicuous by their absence; that they have always featured in policy discourses (literally) as policy-makers and diplomats and (implicitly) as perpetrators of violence, but are still treated as an unmarked category in the fixed, biological parameters of mainstream WPS discourse. This discursive framing invisibilises the multiple ways in which men themselves are impacted by violence and conflict within the broader project of militarism (Enloe 1993).

Critical feminist and men and masculinities studies (see, e.g., Hearn *et al.* 2021) have both highlighted that neglecting to consider where male-identified people fit into the conversation on gender and security ultimately sustains unequal power relations, legitimises militarism, and undermines gender equality. A more critical and expansive view of gender reveals that masculine identities are expressed in plural and fluid ways; that dominant and stereotypical performances of masculinity not only cause problems for women and girls, but also undermine the well-being and safety of men and boys who express and live their identities in myriad ways (see, e.g., Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2019 as cited in Hearn *et al.* 2021; Connell 1995; Ratele 2016 as cited in Hearn *et al.* 2021).

These discourses trouble the dominant notion of men as perpetrators engaged in violence, aggression, and risk-seeking behaviours and are important not only for resisting essentialist, homogenous representations of men, but also as a potentially powerful resource for working with men towards gender transformation and a more fundamental reconceptualization of *peace* and *violence* (Hearn *et al.* 2021; Wright 2020). While more recent policy instruments, such as the UNSCR resolutions 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019) have started to grapple with issues related to men and masculinities in peacebuilding more explicitly, further work is required in this area to challenge dominant framings of men and gender in WPS more rigorously.

In her work on queering WPS through an intersectional lens, Hagen (2016) extends these critiques, pointing to the “gender equals women” discourse as a major limitation of the ways in which gender tends to be constructed in peacebuilding efforts. The sole focus on women, she argues, operates under the assumption that every person experiencing violence and/or conflict is cisheteronormative⁴ in their identification with and performance of their gendered identity. What this suggests is that those who have non-heteronormative gendered identities and/or sexual orientations remain largely unserved and invisible in mainstream peacebuilding efforts, despite considerable evidence to suggest that sexual orientation and gender identity have major influences in shaping one’s experiences of violence (Cóbar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018). Among women, lesbian and trans individuals, for example, tend to be at greater risk of experiencing sexual violence during wartime and beyond because of the broader structural inequalities and differential power dynamics within their communities, families and societies at large (Human Rights Council 2011 as cited in Jayakumar 2022).

Noting some exceptions (e.g., Hagen 2016, 2017, 2019; McEvoy 2015; Shepherd and Sjoberg 2012), grappling with the insecurities of women’s sexual orientation and/or plural gender identities in the context of peacebuilding has been relatively limited (Hagen 2017). Cisprivilege, which operates under the assumption that all people’s gendered identities align comfortably with their assigned sex at birth, is partly to blame for this oversight, but the gaps between policy rhetoric and people’s variant and overlapping lived experiences of gender also come into play (Hagen 2016; Hudson 2017).

Hagen’s (2016) bridging together of queer and intersectional theories serves to highlight the multiple ways in which gendered identities may collide with other identity vectors, most notably sexualities, to produce wide-ranging differences as to the security and peace-related needs and concerns of different people: particularly those who are queer. It also signals the potential usefulness of combining queer and feminist theories in analyses of WPS policies. Ultimately, then, the WPS field calls for further queering in order to generate more sophisticated *gendered perspectives* of peacebuilding (Cóbar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018; Hagen 2017).

There is considerable overlap between queer and feminist conceptions of security and peace, but queer theories are positioned (perhaps more expansively) to surface and challenge prevailing power relations and the binaries that undergird them. Queer theory brings added value to critiques of WPS policy fields because of its explicit insistence on unsettling orthodoxies of all kinds, on rooting gendered analyses in the realities of lived experience and shattering dichotomies long held dear by masculinist truth regimes (Otto 2020; Thiel 2019).

At the level of identity, queer theory advocates for a radical re-imagining of gender as plural, fluid and ever-evolving, creating discursive possibilities for non-cisheteronormative identities to be visibilised more meaningfully in peacebuilding processes (Edenborg 2021). Queering a gendered perspective of WPS also problematises the very definitions of *peace* and *violence*, showing how neat, traditional distinctions between the two do not speak to the lived experiences of many queer people (Thiel 2019). Cockburn’s (2004) invocation of the continuum of violence, for example, highlights such a construction of the temporal and spatial aspects of violence that people of different gendered identities experience during wartime and in the everyday.

4 ‘Cisheteronormative’ refers to the assumption that heterosexuality and being cisgender are the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society.

Similarly, Enloe's (1993) work on peace and security challenges the common split between so-called public and private manifestations of violence in prevailing discourses on "violence" and "peace": for many women and other marginalised groups, quotidian experiences of discrimination and violence blur these lines. Expanding on these important points, Simic (2014 as cited in Otto 2020) observes that for LGBTQIA+ people, peace too must often be survived because structural and overt violence collude in unique ways to delegitimise and silence queer identities. To this end, Butler's (2020, 40 as cited in Otto 2020) description of *peace* as an "aggressive form of non-violence" for queer people aptly captures the urgent need to queer WPS fields and (re)imagine peace and equality in more radical terms. Critical queer and feminist readings of the *peace* (e.g., Hagen 2016) thus foreground key questions as to personhood, belonging, participation, citizenship and legitimacy in relation to peacebuilding processes. These dimensions are especially important if one considers the possible exclusionary effects of conventional peacebuilding rhetoric for subjects on the peripheries of their societies and that language has tangible impacts (Hudson 2017).

The above discussion surfaces two key points: firstly, that the language characterising WPS policy is dissonant, ambivalent and contested. Within this field, radical thinkers caution against celebrating "gender-sensitive" language that, through its repeated conflation of "sex" with "gender" often works against the project of radical gendered transformation in peacebuilding efforts (Hudson 2017). Against this backdrop, a second key point is that a more intentional bridging together of feminist and queer theories is well-positioned to articulate more nuanced and wholesome gendered perspectives of peacebuilding (Edenborg 2021).

With these points in mind, I turn my attention to examples of ways in which this important work is already being done across certain NAPs that speak directly to queer realities. Given the fragmented discourses on WPS, more broadly but within and between NAPs themselves, discourse analysts working on analysing NAPs (e.g., Hudson 2017) promote the importance of locating these texts in their specific contexts and "letting them speak for themselves". I thusly also refer to a growing body of (decolonial) queer world-making scholarship (see, e.g., Nakayama and Morris 2015) to frame the discussion about discursive dissonances in WPS policies, with particular reference to ways in which peacebuilding discourses may be inflected by nationalism and statecraft (refer also to Hagen 2019; Newby and O'Malley 2021). Ultimately, what emerges from the discussion is a reiteration of the fragmentary, inconsistent and ambivalent status of WPS discourses which in turn establish critical opportunities for contestation and radical expansion across the field.

Discursive Analyses of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security

While neither Resolution 1325 nor any of the subsequent WPS resolutions speak explicitly to LGBTQIA+ people, civil society actors have long advocated for a queering of WPS policies and practices (Hagen 2019). As highlighted in earlier sections of this paper, the WPS architecture provides some flexibility as to how individual countries design and implement their peacebuilding activities by creating NAP platforms for collaborative engagement with civil society stakeholders (Fritz, Doering and Gumru 2011; Hudson 2017). These platforms have provided essential opportunities for queer activists to represent those often side-lined in mainstream peacebuilding efforts, and to define their own needs, on their own terms (Hagen 2017).

However, NAPs (like the broader WPS architecture from which they emanate) tend to be designed and implemented in multiple, inconsistent and even contradictory ways. While the creation of a NAP tends to involve input from civil society actors, it should also be noted that civil society organisations are themselves heterogenous (Hudson 2017). In this reading, numerous analyses of NAPs on WPS (e.g., Fritz, Doering and Gumru

2011; Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020) have illustrated that NAP discourses tend to vary widely. Moreover, different NAPs subscribe to and/or subvert the common gendered language traps and their inclusionary/exclusionary effects to varying degrees. Some NAPs (examples of which are discussed below) have taken on more explicit queering discourses in their constructions of gender, peace, and security, whilst others have tended to conform to more mainstream peacebuilding rhetoric on gender (Hudson 2017). In between, there are also NAPs that fall somewhere in the middle of what could be identified as a spectrum of WPS queering.

Of course, these discursive dissonances should be attributed partially to the fact that different countries have necessarily taken quite varied approaches to NAP-making. However, a more critical way to understand the fractured extents to which existing NAPs have (or have not) been queered is to refer to a growing body of work on the role of nationalism in peacebuilding, and on (decolonial) queer world-making in particular (Hagen 2019; Manchanda 2020 as cited in Newby and O'Malley 2021; Nakayama and Morris 2015).

Much feminist scholarship (e.g., Cockburn 2004; Enloe 1993; Hassim 2014) has pointed to the masculinisation of statecraft, citizenship and nationalism. Through a (decolonial) queer lens, normative worldmaking and the making of states are themselves the making of heterosex through a distinct (re)inscription and standardisation of white cis-heteropatriarchal norms and values (Peterson 2014). Weary of “the nation”, queer theorists (e.g., Hagen 2019; Nakayama and Morris 2015) surface how states often play particular roles in fostering hetero normative structures in societies that reify traditional notions of security (usually taken to mean the security of the nation).

One result of this prevailing state of affairs is that NAPs on WPS are often ‘captured’ or co-opted by statist (especially militarist) approaches that serve the project of cis-heteropatriarchal nationalism, meaning that state security is championed over the security of a state’s citizenry (Manchanda 2020 as cited in Newby and O'Malley 2021). Further, state values (such as traditional family values and/or faith-based values) often collide with imperatives to expand the scope of WPS to include LGBTQIA+ people (Hagen 2019; Newby and O'Malley 2021). Nakayama and Morris (2015) argue that queer world-making perspectives are well-placed to address these issues through bottom-up, ‘everyday’ engagements with normative truth regimes that play out in the projects of nationalism, statecraft, and national security.

NAPs that are conceptualised within and through a more critical gender perspective can amount to broader movements for addressing the gendered aspects of violence and peace, and have the potential to be fed back into and advance wider WPS frameworks. In 2018, for example, the LGBTQIA+ rights group Outright International joined the NGO Working Group for WPS, marking the first collaboration of its kind (Hagen 2019). The Canadian (2017-2022) NAP on WPS, as well as those of countries including Argentina, Albania, Japan, Sweden, the UK, and the US speak explicitly to the security concerns of LGBTQIA+ actors (Hagen 2019).

The 2016 Colombian Peace Deal (see, e.g., Cobar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018; Hagen 2017; Maier 2020) and the 2014 Mindanao Peace Agreement (see, e.g., Cobar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018) are examples of national-level policy documents that adopt more radically-inclusive gendered discourses in their frameworks for gender-responsive peacebuilding. Each of these texts challenges traditional binary conceptualisations of *peace* versus *conflict* and *man* versus *woman* by engaging directly with the unjust structural conditions and myriad forms of violence that queer people experience in the everyday. The critical gendered language of the texts is also carried throughout, culminating in measurable indicators and outcomes (Cobar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018).

These developments have not been achieved easily, however, and with backlash against the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ identities having been witnessed with particular intensity in Colombia's case, for example. This resistance reinforces the idea that in many cases, statecraft continues to protect heteropatriarchal nationalism that may be threatened by what are often considered non-traditional and treasonous identity politics and practices (Hagen 2019; Hassim 2014; Nakayama and Morris 2015).

Several critical takeaways emerge from the above discussion on discourses in NAPs on WPS. Firstly, that the "messiness" of gendered discourses within NAPs on WPS points to their entanglement with complex national contexts that are themselves ambivalent and always in flux. What this means is that the language across NAPs is more than Manichean "facilitator" or "impediment" (Hudson 2017). As such, NAPs should be read not as if their discourses were fixed, whole narratives; rather, as organic, open-ended documents that articulate possibilities for change at policy level and beyond. As Shepherd (2011) observes about the power of language: its transformative potential rests in the very fact that it cannot be pinned down, in its ambiguity and its fragmentation that blur discursive and normative fields. As conceptual openings, NAPs on WPS thus invite us to explore possibilities as to what might constitute a meaningful gendered perspective, in what context, and for whom (Hudson 2017).

Methodology

SA's NAP on WPS is freely available to the public online⁵. It constitutes a ninety-six-page policy document that, like other NAPs, outlines local aspirations for ways in which to domesticate the WPS agenda over a period of five years. The process of developing SA's NAP on WPS began in 2009, when numerous local stakeholders (including representatives from civil society, development, and government sectors) gathered together to build consensus around how it should be compiled (Burger 2020).

I applied feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse the text. Feminist CDA focuses on language, discourses, social institutions and power (Lazar 2007; Weedon 1987). Whilst this method is underpinned by many of the same principles as traditional CDA (e.g., Fairclough, Wodak and Mulderrig 2011), it asserts an overt political commitment towards adopting a critical conceptualisation of gender and gendered hierarchies and interactions. Its primary objective is thus to surface the ways in which naturalised gendered power relations are (re)produced discursively (Lazar 2007; Weedon 1987).

Feminist CDA is interdisciplinary in its orientation, and so it provided the tools required to place queer and feminist post-structural theories/methodologies in conversation with one another to produce a layered analysis of the selected NAP (Lazar 2007; Weedon 1987). Given its explicit focus on gender, it was also an appropriate methodological lens through which to surface gendered discourses (their mainstream and counter constituents) in the Action Plan, including subtle differences within and between gendered constructions and the ways in which different gendered identities were (in)visibilised and positioned throughout the text. To conduct the analysis systematically, I read and re-read the text "against the grain" to explore taken-for-granted discourses of gender. I also looked for repetitions, ruptures and silences with respect to the gendered discourses featured in the document (see, e.g., Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020).

5 To access the document, refer to Burger, Delien, ed. 2020. "National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2020-2025". Department of International Relations and Cooperation Office/ Government of South Africa. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202103/south-african-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security.pdf

A Queer Feminist Discourse Analysis of South Africa's (2020-2025) National Action Plan

The analysis below presents a fragmented and slippery discursive matrix that is, in many ways, consistent with previous discourse analyses of NAPs on WPS (refer to Drummond and Rebelo 2020; Fritz, Doering and Gumru 2011; Hudson 2017; Madsen and Hudson 2020). The discourses exposed in the analysis are presented in two main clusters: discourses of gender and discourses of peace and (in)security.

Discourses of Gender

The NAP features discourses of gender that are ambivalent and, at times, even contradictory. From its outset, the NAP engages with discourses of gender that are explicitly queer:

The roles, responsibilities, attributes and opportunities that are socio-culturally ascribed to men, women, boys and girls in a given society. Most societies construct gender according to two distinct and opposite categories: boy/man/male, girl/woman/female. However, gender is along a continuum, and is not limited to just two possibilities. A person may have a non-gender identity, meaning they do not identify strictly as a boy or a girl, man or woman, but they could identify as both, or neither, or as another gender entirely. (Burger 2020, 17)

In the above definition of gender, three significant ideas work to transgress normative gender binaries: first, the idea that gender is a social construct arising in socio-cultural systems, relationships, and practices. Articulating gender in this way creates opportunities for discursive and wider societal norms to be challenged and unsettled. Second, the explicit reference to (and ultimate rejection of) a heteronormative gender binary makes it forcefully clear that gender is more than an essential identity marker. Third, the more radical conceptualisation of gender as non-binary and as occurring along a spectrum, which creates space for plurality and fluidity, recognising that people may identify with and practice their gendered identities in ways that disrupt heteronormative binaries. Possible opportunities for the NAP to engage these ideas even further might be to include some commentary as to 1) the possible differences and/or intersections between “gender” and “sexualities” and 2) the multiple ways in which gendered and sexual identities may be embodied and expressed by people (perhaps explaining some key concepts like “passing”, “cis”, “trans”, etcetera). As it stands, however, this definition makes a powerful statement as to how the NAP might challenge binaries through a more nuanced understanding of gender.

A continuation of this queering discourse is evident in the NAP's conceptualisation of gender equality, which it defines as “the equal enjoyment of rights and access to opportunities and outcomes, including resources, by women, men, girls, boys and gender non-conforming persons” (Burger 2020, 18). In this definition, the explicit reference to gender non-conforming identities illustrates a conceptualisation of rights and resources as belonging not only to people whose identities fit within heteronormative gender binaries, but also to those citizens whose identities challenge them, specifically, those that are “gender non-conforming”. However, taking into account the full definition of gender offered on the previous page, we might assume that this speaks to a wider range of queer identities, too. Continuing on page 18, the NAP engages further with this queer and inclusive discourse by articulating a gender-sensitive approach to achieving gender equality through “acknowledging and considering the specific gender needs of women, men and gender non-conforming persons at all levels of development, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation”.

The NAP turns inwards to engage reflexively with its strategies for peacebuilding in the above construction of *gender-sensitivity*: there is an overt recognition of the importance of platforming the gendered needs of people from a range of different gender identities, and this can be read as explicitly queer in its orientation to imagining how peacebuilding processes might be taken forward. The invocation of a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding (as opposed to one that imposes the security needs of the state onto its citizenry, for example) is also noteworthy, because it establishes possibilities for the process to be collaborative and participatory. Such a queer discourse is echoed and expanded in later sections of the NAP that outline its guiding principles as “listening and responding to the needs of women, girls and gender non-conforming persons’ voices with an intersectional lens” (Burger 2020, 60). The discursive call for an intersectional approach to peacebuilding is a formidable one, particularly in the context of SA’s longstanding history of intersecting identity oppressions along racial, class-based, gendered, and sexual fault lines and their continuities in the present moment.

Intersectional discourses are further reflected in the tagline of the NAP, which reads: “peace and security for women in all their diversity” (the word “diversity” can be read as signalling the heterogeneity and fluidity of women’s identities, which creates space for women of different gendered and sexual identities to be part of the peacebuilding process). By threading these queer and intersectional discourses throughout the text, the NAP centres an overt commitment to visibilising and engaging with the ways in which peacebuilding policy is itself political in design and possible effects. These discourses speak explicitly to genderqueer citizens, allowing space in the text for their voices to be heard and recognising the connections between peace and security and wider questions of personhood, citizenry, and belonging in the country.

Alongside these queer and intersectional discourses, more traditional feminist discourses feature extensively throughout the NAP. These discourses are evident particularly through the repeated use of the identity marker “women” in the text. Consider, for example, the NAP’s articulation of its purpose, which is defined exclusively in relation to women:

The NAP is but the beginning of a process ensuring women’s peace and security. NAPs, however, are a key public policy instrument for the implementation of WPS nationally as they provide an opportunity for countries to identify and prioritise key peace and security issues facing women and to develop strategic actions to address them. (Burger 2020, 25)

The repeated focus on women in the document can be read in multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory ways. One lens through which to understand the text’s prominent focus on “women” is to read it against the backdrop of SA’s gendered and sexual history and the ways in which this has informed movements against patriarchal gendered power relations. SA’s NAP emerges out of a specific socio-political history in which women, and black women in particular, were largely invisibilised by colonial and apartheid machineries in the service of maintaining white heteropatriarchy. Simultaneously, many of these women have been majorly influential in bringing about movements for gender equality during and long after the *de jure* demise of the racialised struggle. The focus on women in the NAP can thus be read as one way in which policymakers have foregrounded the significance and power of women actors in these social, political, and activist spheres, which can perhaps also be identified as a direct feminist challenging of patriarchal gendered configurations both past and present. In this reading, the NAP refers explicitly to this historical context in the following way, for example:

South African women have a long history of fighting for the emancipation of the country as a whole and for gender equality in particular. Women demonstrated in anti-pass campaigns in 1913 and 1930 and led the campaign in 1956. They were part of

liberation movements and part of the 1976 student protests. Scores of young women left the country to join the armed struggle. In the early 1990s, during its peacemaking process, South African women came together (in the form of a Women's Coalition) to demand representation in the peace talks and that the principle of gender equality be embedded in a new Constitution. The struggle for gender equality by the women of South Africa, as well as their participation in the peace negotiations that led to the demise of apartheid, laid the foundation for a democratic transition in which their rights would be respected and guaranteed. (Burger 2020, 58)

On the same page of the document, there is further reference to the importance of focalising women's movements in the drafting of new peacebuilding policies as follows: "The drafting of the NAP also served as a renewed source of inspiration for galvanising women into participating in the development of policies and programmes that have implications on their peace and security". This framing of "women" is also echoed in the visuals selected for the front cover of the policy document, which show key historical moments in women's resistance against racial and gendered oppressions and thus make an overt commitment to locating South African women's contemporary experiences of peace and (in)security within a specific historical context that highlights both their struggles and their concomitant resistances against these struggles. These stylistic choices are especially significant in the context of calls from critical scholars (see, e.g., Haastrup and Hagen 2021) to think more intentionally about how representations of race and gender can sometimes reify global systems of power in the WPS field, often under the guise of conceptualising peacebuilding from *the local*, for example. This feminist framing of South African women—communicated both discursively and photographically in the document—may be identified as challenging colonial and apartheid tropes that cast black women as perpetual, passive, and inevitable victims by focalising their agency and power in mobilising against white heteropatriarchy.

Another possible way in which to understand the prominent focus on "women" in the NAP, however, is to read it as part of a gender discourse that occasionally lapses into essentialist language and in turn, contradicts the centring of women's agency and power. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from page five of the NAP:

The NAP also provides concrete action steps to help government and civil society to evolve out of conflict peacefully, through involvement of women as peace anchors in communities during localised conflicts such as service delivery protests, gang violence, student uprisings as well as the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies. (Burger 2020, 5)

The above excerpt reveals an evident gendered discourse that works to construct *women* as a monolithic and stable category of person, particularly through the construction of women as "peace anchors". The notion of "women as peace anchors" may be read as drawing on heteronormative gendered stereotypes of peaceful, passive and non-violent women that abound in conventional peacebuilding narratives (see, e.g., Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011). Through the essentialist discourse, peacebuilding is (re)produced as a "woman's issue" and ironically, this framing re-enacts gendered power differentials through its attempt to prioritise women and highlight their agency in peacebuilding, with women positioned as both the objects of violence and the sources of its resolution (refer to Shepherd 2016). Part of what may be read as missing in these gender discourses is an acknowledgement of the structural and relational roots of gendered violence, and perhaps a further acknowledgement of the state's accountability in addressing these issues (I explore each of these aspects in greater detail in the second part of the analysis).

The women-centric focus that is reiterated throughout numerous sections of the NAP may also be read as sometimes lapsing back into the trap of "gender equals women discourse" and positioning other gendered and sexual subjects in ways that silence and/or

erase possibilities for their involvement in peacebuilding activities. There is thus considerable tension in the gender discourses of the document between centring the voices, identities, and experiences of women (an important imperative in the case of SA especially) and continuing the more transgressive and encompassing view of gender as it is initially articulated in the text so that possibilities emerge for the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ actors to be centred in peacebuilding policy.

At times, the text struggles to tease out these complexities and there are silences that constrain queer subjects' rights to speak within the gendered discourses at play: in the above extracts about women's involvement in the struggles for racial and gendered equality, for example, there is no mention of queer resistances against colonial and apartheid gendered and sexual oppressions. A queering of this historical account, however, would reveal the fact that LGBTQIA+ people have made major contributions in the journey towards addressing wide-ranging, intersecting inequalities in SA both historically and contemporarily (see, e.g., Judge 2021; Tucker 2009; Van Zyl and Steyn 2005). If "gender" is conflated with "women", then it is also possible to erase queer people from the policy's gendered view altogether, as may be read in the NAP's articulation of "vulnerable groups" as follows:

[...] groups of people in society that are at a higher risk of experiencing economic hardship, violence, environmental disasters, societal exclusion and other forms of discrimination. These groups of people include children, the elderly, refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, people with disabilities, people with albinism, indigenous communities, religious and ethnic minorities, etc. (Burger 2020, 20)

In the above definition, particular assumptions are at play as to notions of personhood, risk, and vulnerability. It is widely documented that queer people experience disproportionately high levels of discrimination and violence in everyday spaces and interactions in SA, despite their de jure protection by national frameworks for equal citizenship (Judge 2021; Vincent and Howell 2014; Windvogel and Koopman 2019). Existing evidence (e.g., Cobar, Bjertén-Günther and Jung 2018) also shows that LGBTQIA+ people are likely to be affected disproportionately during periods of official "conflict" such as during wars, for example. These unique and intersectional vulnerabilities are not fully articulated within the "gender equals woman" discourse, and they are carried through into subsequent sections of the NAP. On page 41, for example, a list appears that outlines a series of "points emerging from civil society dialogues on WPS". However, not one of these points articulates a single issue that may be of specific relevance to queer people. Further to this, the absence of queer actors (relative to the prominence of women) is carried through in the indicators for the 'prevention' pillar of the NAP (Burger 2020, 75), where not one of the indicators speaks to the importance of understanding the needs and experiences of queer people. In this reading, the "gender equals women" discourse makes it possible for the needs of certain gendered actors to be rhetorically side-lined in peacebuilding processes⁶.

Discourses of Peace and (In)security

A similar pattern of ambivalence and contestation can be identified in the discourses of peace and (in)security that feature in the NAP. These discourses are interwoven within and between the discourses of gender, speaking more specifically to the rights and positions of different gendered actors to speak within broader discussions around *peace* and *violence*.

6 Graaff's (2021) detailed analysis of SA's (2020-2025) NSP on GBV and Femicide illustrates a similar pattern where the policy lapses into "gender equals women" discourse.

Despite its current technical classification as a “postconflict” society, the absence of an official war in the country; a Constitution and Bill of Human Rights, perhaps the most liberal and democratic in the world; some of the highest levels of representation of women in parliament and the bureaucracy; and most recently, a comprehensive National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBV (Gender-Based Violence) and Femicide (Madumise-Pajibo and Shisana 2020), SA continues to experience some of the highest rates of gendered inequality and violence globally (CSV 2016; Judge 2021). Against this backdrop, the NAP engages with these tensions in ways that can be read as reflexive and open, where the discourses of *peace* and *(in)security* turn in on themselves and comment on the status quo as follows:

SA is often portrayed as a leading example of gender mainstreaming in the security sector. It is among those countries with the highest representation of women in this sector globally. However, it has not been able to effectively translate this representation into protecting women against GBV, or other forms of violence, or in creating a peaceful and inclusive society. It provides the world with a case study of how to get women into the security sector and into peace processes, but it also highlights the limitations of the strategies employed. It is now well placed to rethink the WPS Agenda, provide it with a new strategic vision and mobilise support to take the agenda to greater heights. The implementation of this NAP on WPS will go a long way to renew efforts at realising the WPS agenda both nationally and internationally. (Burger 2020, 23)

From the above statement, the ongoing tensions between “peace” and “(in)security” (including violence) are articulated with an open recognition of the ways in which previous strategies for addressing inequalities have been limited. The discourse reveals how representation, while often a very necessary first step towards challenging inequalities, has not been sufficient in addressing the persistent gaps between policy and people’s everyday experiences of (in)security. What is not said explicitly, but may be read from the statement, is that the “new strategic vision” of the NAP must look beyond superficial modes of gendered transformation towards achieving a more inclusive and peaceful society.

It may be argued that the NAP discursively articulates part of this vision through the ways in which it constructs its approach to peacebuilding. Its fundamental principle, for example, is “that human security and state security are intrinsically linked. Meaning, there can never be human security without peaceful states, and there cannot be durable peace for states without the safety of their citizens” (Burger 2020, 4). Further to this, the NAP defines *peace* as “not merely the absence of war but also the presence of social justice, human integration, understanding and reconciliation among people, communities and/or nations” (Burger 2020, 19). In these statements, there is an explicit challenging of traditional notions of *security*, in which the security needs of the state tend to assume priority over the needs of its citizenry, and through which security is often implemented by force (policing, militarisation, etc.).

In conceptualising a “new strategic vision” for peace and security in WPS, a possible (and perhaps deeper) way to expand these ideas would be for the NAP to ask more nuanced questions about whether or not traditional systems of security can be expected to service the specific peace and justice needs of queer communities, in particular, given the complicity of these systems in (re)producing inequalities and violence against queer people (see, e.g., Hagen 2021). These questions are especially relevant in SA, because of the historical and contemporary ways in which the state and its corollaries (police and military institutions in particular) have (re)enacted and simultaneously challenged white heteropatriarchy in the country (see, e.g., Pinheiro and Kiguwa 2021). The possibilities for national security to be more radically transformed, through a more holistic and people-centred lens, are arguably already explored in the NAP through its focus on mutual aid and community-centred, participatory approaches to peacebuilding. Several

of the NAP's indicators across its four pillars, for example, advocate explicitly for community-centric approaches to developing peacebuilding capacity in the country.

What is also left unsaid in the statement on SA's position within the global peacebuilding context, however, is that insecurity and violence (gendered violence in particular) impact not only women, but people from a range of different gendered and sexual identities. This can perhaps be identified as another slippage of the discourse into one that conflates "gender" with "women" and thus neglects to prioritise the lived experiences of queer actors.

Alongside this discourse, however, are ruptures in the NAP that work to challenge dominant ideas about which subjects have the rights to speak within a discourse of gendered violence. The NAP's definition of SGBV (Sexual and GBV), for example, includes queer people in the discourse as follows:

The acts perpetrated against women, men, gender nonconforming persons, girls and boys based on their sex that cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic harm. The forms of include domestic violence; sexual abuse, including rape and sexual abuse of children by family members; forced pregnancy; sexual slavery; forced marriage; traditional practices harmful to men and women; violence in armed conflict; violence in postconflict situations; neglect; trafficking of persons, particularly women and girls; and emotional abuse. While it is acknowledged that most acts of SGBV are perpetrated by men against women, not all victims of SGBV are female. (Burger 2020, 20)

In a further example, a more inclusive discourse on violence appears on page 37 of the NAP, where anti-queer violence is articulated as follows:

SA played a historical role in pushing for the promotion and protection of the human rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersex, queer, asexual and other (LGBTIQA+) community. It is the first African country to recognise same sex marriages. However, because of negative social norms and stereotypes, the community in SA continues to experience wide-spread discrimination, harassment and violence, despite the Constitution's guaranteeing the rights to safety regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. (Burger 2020, 37)

In the above constructions, several important points are surfaced in relation to insecurity and violence: first, that gendered violence affects not only women, but people from a wide range of different gendered and sexual identities, which platforms the rights of queer actors to speak within the discourse. Secondly, that there is a major gap between that which is articulated on paper and the everyday experiences of queer people in contemporary SA, which opens up a space for discussion about violence in the everyday and violence as occurring not only during formal periods of conflict, but during 'peaceful' periods as well. Further to this, the construction of discrimination and homophobic violence is framed against the backdrop of "negative social norms and stereotypes", which aptly attributes the difficulties experienced by many South African queer people to factors in the societal/normative realm. Finally, the construction of violence and discrimination against queer people articulates it as falling within the wider frame of GBV in SA because it happens on the basis of sexual orientation and *gender identity*. These discursive shifts are critical opportunities to further dislodge prevailing 'truths' about gendered violence (including gendered violence experienced by queer people) and to begin reconceptualizing it in more radical terms.

These discursive shifts are carried through in other sections of the text, where the NAP's 'prevention' and 'protection' pillars speak directly to the specific peace and justice needs of queer people. Two examples are worth mentioning here: first, the prevention pillar's

outcome: “communities that are more tolerant of sexual difference and the protection of the LGBTIQ community” and its associated indicator: “decrease in the number of attacks on LGBTIQ communities” (Burger 2020, 73) and second, the protection pillar’s activities: “protect the LGBTIQ communities by providing awareness and psychosocial programmes and dedicated social services; employ protective measures generated by innovative technology and transitional safe houses, etc.” and their associated indicator: “number and quality of awareness programmes and services in place” (Burger 2020, 77).

Discussion and Recommendations for Future Work

The discourse analysis presented in this paper shows that SA’s NAP on WPS is not necessarily a coherent policy document; rather, it includes various discursive tensions, ambivalences, and even contradictions. On one hand, the document speaks very clearly to queer actors within the discourses of *gender*, *peace*, and *(in)security*, which brings the policy closer to articulating what is imagined as a more radical and gender-sensitive “new strategic vision” for peace and security in SA. Explicit examples of queer and intersectional gendered discourses are woven throughout the NAP, establishing space and subject positions in the text through which queer actors may be heard and included. From within these discourses, lived experiences and community-centric ways of creating more peaceful and inclusive societies are foregrounded. This supports opportunities for the grander dichotomies between *peace* versus *violence* and *woman* versus *man* to be unsettled, and for *security* to be imagined in ways that challenge heteropatriarchal state traditions. Particularly in the context of SA’s complex socio-political history, the potential power of these discourses to challenge the status quo cannot be understated.

Alongside these more transgressive discourses, however, there are also slippery shifts throughout the NAP into contrasting and even contradictory language. On the one hand, the prominent focus on women actors may be read as feminist in its championing of the roles played by women in working towards racial and gender equalities both historically and contemporarily. Situated in a reading of SA’s history that takes into account the ways in which women—and black women, in particular—have struggled under and resisted against racialised heteropatriarchal regimes, the focus on their agency and power may be read as an essential one.

In a different reading of the same discourse, however, one might problematise its potentially-essentialist and silencing effects, especially because it contrasts so starkly with the more fluid articulation of *gender* that features alongside it in the NAP: by conflating “gender” with “women”, the more traditional discourses in the policy sometimes essentialise women’s identities. So too does this conflation sometimes exclude queer actors from taking up equal space and having equal rights to speak within the discourse. These slippages and contradictions are carried throughout the entirety of the NAP, so that even the four pillars of the policy, along with their associated activities, outcomes, and indicators, speak to, but sometimes simultaneously silence, the realities and needs of queer actors in the struggle against violence and the journey towards peace.

Attending to the multiple layers of meaning within and between these discursive contradictions characterising the NAP invites us to imagine possibilities for ways in which SA’s broader gender and queer agenda may be advanced within and outside of peacebuilding processes. The contents of the NAP reflect a policymaking process that was intentionally participatory in design, and may thusly be read as a bricolage of different perspectives coming together in pursuit of some common ground as to how peacebuilding might be imagined in more radically-inclusive and equal terms. For these reasons, the NAP is perhaps

read most usefully as a living, slippery text that reflects a pivotal moment for discursive shifts in SA's pursuit of equal, intersectional citizenship and peace for all⁷.

A number of attendant priorities emerge from this case study that could be taken up during the development of future iterations of this and other NAPs on WPS in order to further advance a gender-transformative and queer agenda: There is an urgent need for further research that documents South African queer perspectives of peace and (in)security and draws explicitly from local epistemologies and lived experiences. The field would also benefit from further probes into possibilities for bridging together queer and feminist perspectives of gender, peace, and security.

In SA, a number of organisations⁸ and scholars are already working to advance a gender-transformative agenda and are thus well-positioned to engage this work. In order for the resulting findings and recommendations to be fed back into future peacebuilding policy, it would be ideal if the coalitions arising out of the NAP could invite stakeholders working on this research to collaborate with them on the caucuses that they intend to host throughout the period during which the policy is implemented. A related research project could perhaps be designed that explores the connections between the language in peacebuilding policies and their practical effects: SA's NAP on WPS outlines specific activities for the monitoring and evaluation of the policy's implementation, and so such a research project could be integrated into that work, for example.

Ultimately, the discourse analysis presented in the paper illustrates how policy can be used to harness critical gendered language and generate possibilities for radical (re)imaginings of *gendered peace*. It further centres the potential value of policy discourses which, in their fragmentation, ruptures, continuities and ambivalences, can facilitate opportunities for queer peace at the instrumental level and beyond.

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7 The queer feminist approach applied to the NAP in this research paper may serve as one possible starting point for conceptualising how future policy iterations might be written up differently. The approach takes an explicitly queer stance to thinking about gender and comments on the possible inclusionary/exclusionary effects of the gendered discourses in the document.

8 For some examples of this ongoing work, refer to local organisations such as the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) (<https://www.ijr.org.za>), currently under the Executive Directorship of Professor Cheryl Hendricks. Professor Hendricks was involved in the drafting of SA's NAP on WPS and has also produced a considerable body of work in the field (2015; 2017), alongside the scholars cited in this paper. The IJR is currently engaged in a process of creating awareness and conducting capacity building across all nine provinces in SA to support the implementation of the NAP and to establish a National Peace Charter. The Centre for Human Rights (based at the University of Pretoria) has also developed the "Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)" unit, which works progressively towards the realisation of the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons in Africa through advocacy, training, policy development, and social action (refer to <https://www.chr.up.ac.za/sogiesc-unit>), which would be well-placed to contribute to future policy work in the field.

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