Yemeni Women activists and the Security Council: A Discourse Analysis from a Women, Peace and Security lens

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Word count (incl. bibliography): 14.979

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in International Relations

Specialization: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

by

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February 2021

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1. Introduction

In 2020, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda celebrated its 20th anniversary, but amidst a global pushback on women´s rights and the continuation of violence and conflict, the realization of the agenda seems a far dream. The first resolution of the WPS agenda – landmark resolution 1325 – was adopted by the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC) in 2000. It builds on global feminist activism and movements (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2019: 428; O´Sullivan 2019: 47) and recognized for the first time the gendered impacts of conflict and war (Meger 2019: 279). The resolution highlighted the importance of involving women in decision-making related to the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding, the need to integrate gender perspectives into peace operations, and to protect women from violence in war (UNSC 2000). Over the years, the Security Council added nine more resolutions to the normative framework of the WPS agenda,[1] turning it into a robust institutionalized framework. As of December 2020, 89 countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) on 1325 (PeaceWomen 2020). Despite this progress, in the twenty years since the first resolution, there has been a lack of progress on the implementation and mainstreaming of the agenda.

As the body on WPS scholarship has been growing, some feminist researchers have argued that the "conceptual flaws" (O´Sullivan 2019: 60) of the agenda have undermined its transformative potential and resulted in implementation being focused on protection from sexual violence with a lack of attention being paid to the participation and agency of women (Goetz and Jenkins 2018: 120, 122; O'Reilly 2019: 194-195; O´Sullivan 2019: 60). Furthermore, postcolonial scholars have asserted that the WPS agenda is constructed on colonial hierarchies (Parashar 2019: 829-830). In 2008, Laura Shepherd analyzed gender, violence, security and the international sphere as conceptualized in resolution 1325 and a few related documents. While there has recently been more attention to investigating the Security Council´s engagement with civil society briefers generally (Mader et al. 2020; McMillan et. al. 2020), none of the research has applied Shepherd´s conceptual categories as an analytical framework to interrogate interactions between the Security Council and Yemeni women civil society briefers (WCSB).

[1] Res. 1820 in 2008, Res. 1888 and Res. 1889 in 2009, Res. 1960 in 2010, Res. 2106 and Res. 2122 in 2013, Res. 2242 in 2015, and Res. 2467 and Res. 2493 in 2019.

This thesis aims to investigate the discourse of WCSB to the Security Council as well as the discourse of the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) in Security Council meetings about the situation in Yemen between 2017 and 2020. The objective of this undertaking is to understand 1) how the states´ and the WCSB´s discourse compares with each other and 2) how their respective statements relate to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Based on Shepherd´s analysis, I will investigate the conceptualizations of gender, violence, the international sphere and security which can be found in the speeches of the WCSB, the UK and the US in order to answer the research questions. Based on previous research, the hypothesis would be that the WCSB conceptualize security in more multidimensional and people-centered ways than we are expecting of the UK and the US. Another assumption would be that the two states portray more narrow and state-centric understandings of security.

By solving this research puzzle, the thesis will interrogate and enrich the body of literature on WPS and the engagement of the Security Council with women´s voices, as well as gaps between rhetoric and action of the UK and the US both on WPS and in relation to the conflict in Yemen. Further, the contribution of this thesis will be in centering the voices of Yemeni women, and therefore creating more visibility where too often there is none. This is particularly relevant as "[t]he space for women to exercise their rights is shrinking every day." (Special Envoy, UNSC 2018b: 3)

Outline of the thesis

In the following section, I will briefly outline the historical and sociopolitical context of the conflict and women´s rights in Yemen. In chapter 3, I will then explore the key debates in feminist literature and scholarship on WPS. Thereafter, I will explore postcolonial feminist theories underpinning my thesis, as well as the analytical model I am applying: a Critical Discourse Analysis based on Laura Shepherd´s research (2008). The analysis will be carried out in chapter 5 where I will first analyze the speeches by five Yemeni WCSB in the Security Council, and will afterwards analyze the responses of the UK and the US to these speeches, as well as other statements made by the two states between 2017 and 2020. In chapter 6, the discussion and interpretation of the results will take place, leading to the answer of the research questions stated above. The thesis will close with concluding remarks.

2. Historical and Sociopolitical Context

This chapter will briefly set out the developments leading up to and since the outbreak of the war in Yemen and their impacts on women´s rights, as well as the role of the UK and the US in the conflict.

Longstanding political frustration by various groups in Yemen, related to issues such as corruption, a lack of economic opportunities and delay of reforms, led to protests in 2011 (IPTI 2018: 2). These resulted in President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepping down and handing power over to Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Women played a leading role in the uprising (IPTI 2018: 2, 5, 12; Cherry 2019: 64). In 2013 and 2014, a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) – during which solutions for the future of Yemen were meant to be found (Al-Ali 2018: 151; Elayah et al. 2020: 100; IPTI 2018: 1) – saw participation from a wide range of social groups, including women and youth and other groups previously marginalized in Yemen's politics (Manea 2015: 169): "each political group that was represented at the table was required to have at least 30 percent women on each panel" (Cherry 2019: 64; see also IPTI 2018: 1). Additionally, women, youth and civil society were also represented through independent delegations at the NDC (Elayah et al. 2020: 112; IPTI 2018: 6). Although the 30 % quota was not quite met, women did constitute 28% of attendees at the NDC (Cherry 2019: 64), making it a precedent in Yemeni history. However, the NDC failed to solve many underlying causes of social tensions and grievances (Lackner 2020: 19; Elayah et al. 2020: 112). In 2014, a few month after its end, the Houthi Alliance (Ansar Allah), a group mostly in control of the Northern regions of the country (Byman 2018: 149-150), started an insurgency, causing President Hadi to flee into exile (Elayah et al. 2020: 112). In 2015, with military support from states including the UK and the US, a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia started militarily intervening against the Houthis (Byman 2018: 141, 146; Elayah et al. 2020: 100, 112) to support the internationally recognized government (IRG) by President Hadi (Byman 2018: 145-146).

Since the end of the NDC, "women have been increasingly marginalized" (Cherry 2019: 65) and have not significantly been involved in national/international level peace efforts (IPTI 2018: 12) – for instance, during the latest round of UN-backed negotiations in Stockholm in 2018 only one woman delegate was directly involved in the conversations (Aldroubi 2018). In addition, women activists and peacebuilders nowadays face a "constant threat of persecution and violent attempts to silence them" (UNSC 2018b: 3; see also Cherry 2019: 63).

The role of the UK and the US

Both the United Kingdom and the United States support the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen militarily, by selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and providing logistical support (Nagra and O'Neal 2019: 8). Particularly the arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and their use and contributions to human rights violations and war crimes in Yemen have been controversial (Stavrianakis 2019: 57; Office of Inspector General 2020; Nagra and O´Neal 2019; Singh 2015). Evidence shows that civilians and civilian infrastructure have been targeted with these weapons, which violates international humanitarian law as well as the countries´ Arms Treaties (Nagra and O'Neal 2019: 8, 22, 110-112; Human Rights Watch 2021: 751). Moreover, "[t]he use of explosive weapons in Yemen has a gendered impact, affecting men and women differently" (Butcher 2019: 4), with women in particular suffering from the long-term consequences related to lack of access to health care and displacement as a result of the use of such weapons, as well as stigmatization from potential disabilities (2019: 8). In 2019, a Court of Appeal decision in the UK ruled that the export of British arms to Saudi Arabia without assessment of potential human rights violations in Yemen was unlawful and ordered the British government to stop exporting arms to Saudi Arabia. However, after a review the UK government recommenced licensing the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia (CAAT 2020).

3. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to highlight some of the key debates in WPS literature and explore feminist conceptualizations of peace and security and violence.

Conceptualizing feminist peace and security

Feminist IR scholars criticize conventional IR theories for excluding women and other marginalized groups from the analysis and thus rendering them invisible. They argue that gender is a socially constructed hierarchical concept that divides the world into masculine and feminine, whereby masculine characteristics are considered to be superior (Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 206).

While traditional International Relations (IR) theories understood security in terms of military or national state security (Tickner 1992: 29, 31, 52; Ackerly and True 2006: 252; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 212), feminist activists and scholars have argued that security is more than merely the absence of armed conflict. A feminist understanding of security is

multidimensional (Tickner 1992: 60) and takes into account not only military considerations but also economic, ecological and gendered insecurities (Tickner 1992: 22-23, 129). In contrast to conventional IR scholars, feminist scholars question whose security is the matter of analysis by highlighting how the security of the state might come at the expense of the security of (marginalized) individuals (Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 213).

Feminist scholars also widened the concept of violence by adding more types of violence to the analysis – for instance, domestic and structural violence and their root causes (Tickner 1992: 55, 57; Smyth et al. 2020: 7). Moreover, feminist scholars have argued that multiple forms of violence are interconnected across different levels, ranging from the international, to the national and the family (Tickner 1992: 58): "[f]amily violence must be seen in the context of wider power relations; it occurs within a gendered society in which male power dominates at all levels" (Tickner 1992: 58).

Galtung´s concept of structural violence is particularly useful for feminist research: Galtung differentiates between direct violence in the form of harmful physical or psychological actions by one actor towards another, and structural or indirect violence, which relates to inequalities and injustices (Galtung 1969: 170-171). Per Galtung´s conceptualization, direct violence would be more visible and thus more easily detectable – for instance, domestic or sexual violence would fall into this category. In contrast, structural violence would remain much more hidden – for instance, when a person is denied basic services, or sexism and/or racism within institutional cultures which can prevent a person from accessing leadership positions. As Galtung explains, this indirect form of violence is "violence [which] is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969: 171). As such, this concept is very useful for feminist scholars as many barriers to gender equality and women´s rights are structural, which means, they are embedded in socio-political systems, institutions and laws.

Feminist IR scholars highlighted the ways in which concepts of war and peace are inherently gendered: while war is associated with idealized male characteristics, peace is associated with stereotypical feminine attributes (Wibben 2011: 21; Tickner 1992; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 214). Although some states have perpetrated wars with the justification of protecting their citizens, or women specifically, IR feminists revealed that – rather than being a protector –

states themselves can pose significant security threats to their own citizens (Wibben 2011: 21; Tickner 1992; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 214).

During the Women's International Peace Conference (Halifax, Canada, 1985), the attending women defined security in different ways: while Western women from the middle class defined security in more narrow terms considering the threat of a nuclear war, women from non-Western countries had a much more broad and intersectional understanding of security "in terms of the structural violence associated with imperialism, militarism, racism, and sexism" (Tickner 1992: 54-55). This shows that the understanding of and needs related to security differ based on identity – which needs to be taken into account when analyzing concepts such as violence, (in)security and power.

Intersectionality is a concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991: 1296) which recognizes "tensions between assertions of multiple identity". This means that the combination of a person´s intersecting identities – such as their gender, race, age or level of ability – affect them in specific ways which are different from the effects of a single of these categories. Using the example of women of color, Crenshaw argues that they are marginalized in different ways than white women or male-identified people of color would be (Crenshaw 1991: 1252). Crenshaw (1991: 1252) criticizes "[t]he failure of feminism to interrogate race [which] means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color".

As Rooney´s study (2018) shows, intersectionality can a useful concept to expose silences and multi-layered systems of oppression and to interrogate experiences which were not previously taken into consideration. As such, it will be a useful concept for this thesis – in particular, as some scholars have argued, there is a "silencing of certain narratives from the [WPS] agenda", such as perspectives of women living with disabilities, women who are displaced, indigenous women or women living in rural areas (Onyesoh 2019: 446; Smyth et al. 2020: 10).

Debates in WPS scholarship

In WPS scholarship, there are tensions between pragmatic scholars who seek to work within the system to reform it, and more radical scholars who argue that the international peace and security system builds upon unequal patriarchal and militarist structures and needs to be

dismantled (O´Sullivan 2019: 48). As Mama (2018: 266) argues, "[a]s a profoundly gendered and gendering phenomenon, militarism cultivates aggressive and violent expressions of masculinity for the purposes of war". Some scholars have criticized the discursive constructions of the WPS resolutions (Shepherd 2008; Otto 2018; Parashar 2019, O´Sullivan 2019). These constructions are highly relevant, as they influence the thinking and approaches of the UN to the WPS agenda. As Shepherd argues: "practices of (re)production, (re)presentation and (re)legitimization are all 'discursive' practices" (Shepherd 2008: 20) and "discursive practices are practices of power" (Shepherd 2008: 23). Therefore, interrogating the discursive practices will create relevant insights into power dynamics.

A key element, which many takes issue with, is the essentialist narrative on which resolution 1325 is built (Parashar 2019: 829; Goetz and Jenkins 2018: 120; O´Sullivan 2019: 51; Smyth et al 2020: 10). This narrative portrays women as a homogenous group of natural peacemakers with similar perspectives, and while sidelining considerations of masculinities (Parashar 2019: 829, 836). As Tickner points out, closely relating women with peace is problematic because it contributes to "an idealized masculinity that depends on constructing women as passive victims in need of protection" (1992: 59). By buying into this association, the WPS agenda therefore contributes to binary conceptions of gender where men are perpetrators and women are victims (Parashar 2019: 835; O´Sullivan 2019: 51).

Many scholars also problematize that both in the discursive construction of the WPS framework and in most of its implementation, the focus has been on protection, while the participation pillar is often sidelined (Goetz and Jenkins 2018: 120, 122; O'Reilly 2019: 194-195). The reason for this, as Goetz and Jenkins claim, is that a focus on protection fits better with widespread assumptions about the gendered effects of conflict and is more easily matched with conservative perceptions on women's rights (2018: 129), whereas participation is much more politically sensitive (2018: 122). Even within feminist scholarship there are tensions between those who argue that sexual violence is the key issue, and others who warn that too strong a focus on the issues undermines the feminist origins of the agenda (Taylor 2019: 69).

Postcolonial feminist scholars in particular criticize the WPS agenda for its failure to account for colonial histories and violence. For instance, Parashar (2019) argues that the recently increasing efforts to integrate the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

agenda into the WPS agenda lead to an instrumentalization of women's rights for western neoliberal security agendas. Looking into the intersections of WPS and CVE, she claims that such policies "fail to account for the complex histories of political violence and extremist ideologies rooted in colonial encounters" (Parashar 2019: 829-830). Therefore, she considers the agenda to be western-centric, with roots in colonialism and neoliberalism and based on a racial hierarchy and 'othering' that looks at the "South" as places of conflict (Parashar 2019: 829-830, 836).

Further, it has been argued that there is a lack of recognition of intersectional identities within the WPS agenda (Parashar 2019: 836; O´Sullivan 2019: 51; Smyth et al 2020: 10): the way in which peace and security are conceptualized within the WPS agenda is neither truly feminist nor intersectional (Hamilton et al. 2020; Shepherd 2008). Rather, "[b]y defining peace and security as the absence of armed conflict, the WPS agenda overlooks the ways in which security is tied to identity in a given populace" (Hamilton et al. 2020: 12) – such as in contexts where armed violence is absent, but other forms of violence are present.

Richter-Devroe argues that many countries view the WPS Agenda as a foreign agenda which does not adhere to their own culture and traditions (2019: 254). As Goetz and Jenkins point out, particularly empowerment and participation of women as part of the WPS Agenda is often seen as a westernized bias (2018: 129). They write: "[a]t the political level, the opposition to the participation agenda is part of a backlash from mainly developing country member-states against using donor-funded post-conflict state-building to advance what they consider Western agendas of social transformation" (2018: 12). Similarly, Cupać and Ebetürk claim that there is an "antifeminist mobilization in the UN" (2020: 1), using the controversy around UN Security Council Resolution 2467, which is part of the WPS Agenda, as an example: during the negotiations surrounding the resolution in April 2019, there was considerable debate around the usage of the language "sexual and reproductive health". Despite the fact that this had been included in earlier resolutions, the US under the Trump-administration threatened to veto the resolution unless the words – considered to be a reference to abortion – were removed (Cupać and Ebetürk 2020: 1-2). This shows that not only developing or non-Western countries are pushing back – rather we are experiencing a backlash on hard-won gains on women's rights from multiple fronts (Cupać and Ebetürk 2020: 2).

Due to the above critiques, some scholars have questioned whether the WPS agenda can lead to transformative change (see e.g. Shepherd 2008: 7) so long as the international system of peace and security does not, and whether the WPS agenda should indeed be safeguarded in the Security Council resolutions: while WPS adds women to the equation, "it does not question, let alone try to change, the existing status quo of political power structures" (Richter-Devroe 2019: 261). Similarly, Otto stresses that "engagement with the Security Council has shifted feminist attention from preventing war to attempting to ameliorate its adverse impacts on women" (2018: 113). Moreover, previous research has shown that "the Security Council's approach to WPS remains superficial, ad-hoc, inconsistent" (Mader et al. 2020: 5). However, as Tickner argues, women's leadership at local levels, in social movements and in peace efforts "will remain marginal as long as they are seen as women's projects and occur far from centers of power" (1992:142). Thus, there are limitations to the transformational potential of the WPS agenda as long as it is part of and discursively influenced by patriarchal, militaristic systems of power. At the same time, it can be argued that – while a Security-Council-WPS agenda may not be as transformational as envisioned by the feminist movement it originated in – it does provide a tool for accountability to hold international actors to.

It is in this context, that I will analyse statements on peace and security made by Yemeni women in international arenas and the responding speeches by member states of the Security Council.

4. Theory and Methodology

The following chapter outlines my research puzzle and methodological approach, as well as its theoretical underpinnings.

Each year the UN Security Council hosts an annual Open Debate to discuss commitments of UN member states to and their progress on the WPS agenda and hear from women in conflict-affected areas. However, beyond these Open Debates, questions remain on whether the Security Council engages with women´s voices and the WPS agenda in meaningful ways.

To investigate this further, this thesis asks the following research question: *How do the discourse of women activists and states in the Security Council compare and relate to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?*

To solve this research puzzle, I will look at how conceptualizations of gender, violence, the international and security differ between women civil society briefers and representatives of the UK and the US by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis of their speeches in UNSC meetings on Yemen between 2017 and 2020. Particular attention will be paid to the discourse in four meetings during which Yemeni WCSB and states directly interacted. I will use a poststructural approach based on the analytical model used by L. Shepherd (2008).

4.1 Theoretical Considerations

Because this thesis looks at statements made by, about and in response to Yemeni women, the theoretical lens applied is postcolonial Feminism.

Rather than starting their analysis with the state, feminist IR scholars investigate women's everyday experiences and how they link to and are impacted by global affairs (Tickner 2006: 25, 40; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 207; Wibben 2011: 21). As Tickner (2006: 20) writes "there is no unique feminist research method […]. What makes feminist research unique, however, is a distinctive methodological perspective or framework which fundamentally challenges the often unseen androcentric or masculine biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all the disciplines." Therefore, the speeches made by Yemeni women about their lived experiences of the conflict are the appropriate starting point for my own analysis. Since the voices of women and non-state actors are often disregarded in mainstream IR literature, there is a need to investigate perspectives of those actors who are otherwise marginalized. As such, this thesis aims to center Yemeni women´s voices in the Security Council, to interrogate what their speeches tells us about their security needs, and how those in power at the international level engage with these experiences in their own statements.

Given that the population at the center of this thesis is Yemeni women, the thesis will choose a postcolonial feminist lens. Postcolonialist theorists critically investigate the legacies of and violence associated with colonialism and imperialism (Grovogui 2013: 264). According to postcolonial scholars, "[i]t is through the discursive construction of the non-Western world as the site of contemporary political violence that mainstream international relations reproduces an orientalist approach" (Parashar 2016; 374). Postcolonial feminist IR scholars criticize IR scholars following other feminist traditions for claiming universalism by assuming women to be a homogenous group united by the shared experience of gendered oppression – while

basing this assumption on the experiences of Western privileged women (Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 212; Parashar 2016: 371; Mohanty 1988: 63-65, 72). Thus, they fail to take into account the intersectional dynamics of women´s oppression. When writing about women from the 'third world' specifically, western feminists tend to portray them as victims lacking agency (Mohanty 1988: 65, 79-80). This way, they reinforce power relations between the West and non-Western countries (Mohanty 1988: 63, 81). In contrast, a postcolonial feminist approach acknowledges that the experiences of an individual are just as much racialized as they are gendered (Parashar 2016), and are historically and culturally diverse (Mohanty 1988). Therefore, a postcolonial feminist lens will expose gaps that will remain hidden in conventional IR and other feminist theories. It is therefore most appropriate for the aims of this thesis.

Poststructuralism, an approach (Campbell 2013: 225, 243) which is "inherently critical" (Campbell 2013: 232) and with which postcolonialism aligns well (Campbell 2013: 234; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 212), understands reality as constructed through language (Cohn 2006: 103-104; Tickner and Sjoberg 2013: 210). Looking at language aligns well with feminist approaches as well since women's everyday experiences are not captured in quantitative data (Tickner 2006: 24). Thus, investigating the narratives in the statements of Yemeni WCSB will enable me to gain insights into their experiences of the conflict in a way that would not be possible using positivist methods.

4.2 Methodological Approach

Due to this thesis´ focus on language, the method chosen is a Critical Discourse Analysis. "Discourse refers to a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible" (Campbell 2013: 234-235). Critical Discourse Analysis aims to expose these meanings (Bryman 2012: 530; Locke 2004: 2, 40) and how they contribute to the construction of social realities (Bryman 2012: 529, 537; True and Ackerly 2010: 208-209) and power (Blackledge 2013: 617; Bryman 2012: 537).

In 2008, L. Shepherd published a study on the discursive representation of the concepts of gender, violence and security as well as the international sphere in resolution 1325 itself and two reports by the UN Secretary General on the implementation of the resolution. Using the same four categories of concepts, this thesis will apply her model of Discourse Analysis,

which builds on the work of poststructural scholars like M. Foucault and E. Laclau and C. Mouffee (Shepherd 2008: 18-19). To lay a basis for my own analysis, I will briefly outline Shepherd´s analytical model and key findings.

Shepherd´s analysis

In her analysis, Shepherd finds that women – who are viewed as a homogenous group (Shepherd 2008: 97, 119) – are perceived as victims of violence who are in need of protection (Shepherd 2008: 87, 116, 119, 123), and are often associated with children (Shepherd 2008: 115, 119) and caregiving (Shepherd 2008: 87, 119). They are also presented as natural peacemakers (Shepherd 2008: 88-89, 118). Thus, there is an essentialist view on women which fails to recognize that women as well as men can take on roles of perpetrators or victims of violence (Shepherd 2008: 88, 90) and assumes that women will have shared views (Shepherd 2008: 118) and "that femininity will take precedence as a political identity" (Shepherd 2008: 90, see also 117). As Shepherd (2008: 88) states, these representations "preclude the notion that women can display agency or strength".

Violence is represented as an "inherently gendered" concept (Shepherd 2008: 93), of which women are victims (Shepherd 2008: 94), but not perpetrators: violence is seen as being "used *against* not *by* women and girls" (Shepherd 2008: 93, emphasis in original). The concept of violence, as Shepherd finds, is also limited to armed conflict and gender-based violence (Shepherd 2008: 131).

While the domestic sphere in the resolution and reports is implicitly conceptualized as the site of conflict (Shepherd 2008: 96, 124), the international domain in contrast is represented as removed from conflict and actors within it are considered to be resolving (as opposed to perpetrating) conflicts (Shepherd 2008: 96, 124). The international sphere is therefore seen as morally superior and engaged in sustaining peace and security (Shepherd 2008: 95, 126) – a conceptualization which Shepherd criticizes for its ignorance of the involvement of international actors in and their contributions to such conflicts (Shepherd 2008: 98).

In the resolution and reports, Shepherd (2008: 103, see also 124) finds a "discursive linking of the concept of security with 'international'", by which the Security Council receives "discursive privilege […] to speak about issues of security in the international domain" (Shepherd 2008: 103). Hereby, the conceptualization of security and peace is the absence of

armed conflict (Sheperd 2008: 123, 127) – which "fails completely to address the issues of structural violence" (Shepherd 2008: 127). Shepherd argues that the conceptualizations as outlined above prevent the full implementation of the resolution (Shepherd 2008: 106) and reinforce a system of inequalities (Shepherd 2008: 129).

Application and data selection

Using Shepherd´s analytical categories – gender, violence, the international sphere and security – I will investigate the speeches made by the five Yemeni women who briefed the Security Council between 2017 and 2020 as well as the speeches made by the UK and the US in the same time frame. The time frame was chosen as such, because 2017 was the first year in which the Council received a WCSB from Yemen, while at the time of writing the last WCSB from Yemen spoke in 2020.

The reasons for selecting the UK and the US for this analysis are as such: firstly, both states are permanent members on the Security Council, meaning that they yield significant influence and contribute to the continuity of the Security Council´s work. Additionally, the UK is currently the penholder for Yemen as well as for the WPS Agenda.[2] Secondly, both states are important supporters of the Saudi-led coalitions, and are the largest two exporters of arms to Saudi Arabia.

While only five speeches in four briefings were made by Yemeni women, between 2017 and 2020, UK representatives spoke 29 times in briefings about Yemen, and US representatives spoke 30 times. This creates an imbalance in the data, which is reflective of the power dynamics. In order to center the voices of the women, at first the statements of the WCSB will be analyzed. In the following section, the speeches of UK and US representatives will be interrogated. Hereby, the focus will be on speeches that were made in the briefings with WCSB present, but the analysis will be complemented by insights from UK and US statements in meetings without WCSB where this yields additional results or notable differences in the discourse.

[2] The penholder system is an informal arrangement between the permanent members of the Security Council by which one of them takes the lead on a thematic or country-related issue (Security Council Report 2018: 1-2).

Limits to the research and positionality

Feminist literature highlights the importance of positioning the researcher within the project to reflect on one's own assumptions and biases (Ackerly and True 2006: 245, 253, 256; Cohn 2006; Tickner 2006: 27; Wibben 2011: 18), perspectives which are excluded (Ackerly and True 2006: 256) and power dynamics between the researcher and the subjects (Ackerly and True 2006: 257; Tickner 2006: 27). As a white woman in a western country, I possess certain privileges which the WCSB may not have. I am also linguistically, culturally and geographically distanced from the actors whose statements I am investigating. For this reason, I have specifically chosen a method that allows me to conduct this research project as a desk-based exercise, focusing on data that is available in English. My chosen method brings with it limitations, among which is the silencing of voices which are not recorded in English. Consequently – and as a result of the small number of women invited to speak to the Council – the diversity of Yemeni voices represented will be limited.

The women´s movement which advocated for a resolution on WPS understood peace in a positive sense rather than the mere absence of conflict. As Shepherd´s research has shown, this is not reflected in resolution 1325 and UN reports. As the following section will show this is even less reflected in the discussions in the Security Council, which remain largely gender-blind and show a patriarchal, militaristic understanding of security. Moreover, neither the UK nor the US admit to their contributions to the suffering of Yemeni civilians – despite the fact the all civil society briefers to the UN keep highlighting this issue.

The Security Council receives regular briefings on the situation in Yemen and discusses its further steps. During these briefings, the Council usually hears from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen[3] and/or the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.[4] At times, briefings are also given by other UN agencies, such as UN OCHA or WFP. Since 2017, the UN Security Council has been briefed by five Yemeni women who represent civil society.[5] I shall proceed by first analyzing their statements, followed by the speeches of the UK and the US in response to these statements.

[3] The position of the Special Envoy was held by Jamal Benomar from 2011-2015, who was succeeded by Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in 2015-2018. Since 2018, Martin Griffiths serves as the Special Envoy.
[4] Since September 2017, this position is held by Mark Lowcock. He was preceded by Stephen O'Brien.
[5] Ms. Radhya Al-Mutawakel (30 May, 2017), Ms. Rasha Jarhum (16 Nov., 2018), Ms. Muna Luqman (15 April, 2019), Ms. Wafa´a Alsaidy and Ms. Raja Abdullah Ahmed Almasabi (both 28 July, 2020).

5. Critical Discourse Analysis

Based on Shepherd´s framework, I will look at the discourse related to and conceptualizations of gender, violence, the international sphere and security.

5.1 Analysis of Women Civil Society Briefers´ statements

Gender

In contrast to the common perception of women in conflict zones as passive victims, they play a variety of different roles, including nurturing and caregiving roles, being protectors and providers, as leaders, and as perpetrators of violence. Ms. Al-Mutawakel and Ms. Alsaidy mainly talk about women as "mothers, wives and daughters" (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017: 8), thus portraying them in caregiving roles and in relation to their (male) family members. Ms. Al-Mutawakel also implies a certain dependency on men by highlighting that women "have lost their breadwinners" (UNSC 2017: 8). In contrast, Ms. Jarhum and Ms. Luqman highlight more active roles of women – for instance, that they play critical roles as protectors and providers who secure their families´ survival by "provid[ing] their families with basic living necessities and protect[ing] their men from forced recruitment, abduction, detention and torture" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9). Moreover, Yemeni women play leading roles beyond their own homes "in alleviating the suffering of citizens" as well as "in peacebuilding" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10) – they "have been leading efforts to bring peace to Yemen and hold communities together" (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10). In contrast to essentialist narratives of women or femininity being characterized as inherently peaceful, Ms. Jarhum points out that women in the Al-Zaynabiat – an all-female troop of the Houthis – are responsible for the "violent repression" of other women (UNSC 2018f: 9). Thus, the WCSB highlight a diversity of perspectives and varying roles which Yemeni women play in the conflict – they "are not passive victims of this war" (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10). This counters universalist notions that consider women to be a homogenous group.

Confirming the argument that women activists are more likely to highlight not only issues related to women´s rights but also speak up for other marginalized groups (O'Reilly 2016: 26), the WCSB call for the inclusion of various groups in the peace process, including women, youth and civil society (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017: 8; Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 11), women from Houthi groups and people from the south (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10), and persons with disabilities (Almasabi in UNSC 2020f: 9).

Moreover, they emphasize that women-led organizations address humanitarian needs by filling gaps where the state is absent (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10). Using their access to spaces that are closed to outside actors, Yemeni women also contribute to de-escalation of tensions and peacebuilding: for example, a women´s organizations called Mothers of Abductees Association successfully negotiated for 336 detained persons to be released while other women´s organizations are "actively working to stop the recruitment of children as combatants" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10). This is in contrast to unsuccessful attempts by the UN to negotiate the release of detainees and the UN´s own program on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) having been suspended since 2016 (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10).

Lastly, the briefers call for inclusive peace processes in which women are not only advisors, but are able to play meaningful roles (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10) with a set quota of seats that are left empty if they are not vacated by women (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 11; Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10).

Violence

The WCSB conceptualize violence and war as gendered phenomena and as such differentiate the intersectional and gender-specific threats that different groups in Yemen face. For instance, Ms. Al-Mutawakel highlights that "[t]his war is taking the greatest toll on Yemeni women, who have become prime civilian targets for all warring parties" (UNSC 2017: 8). Similarly, Ms. Luqman emphasizes the targeting of women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders: they "are arbitrarily detained and forced to abandon their work" (UNSC 2019a: 10). In addition "accusations of immoral acts and defamation are another tool used against women" (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: p10) – these threats have gendered dimensions and can undermine and silence women activists, particularly in conservative societies (Bishop 2017: 12-13).

In contrast to the more narrow conceptualizations of security found by Shepherd, the WCSB take into account different types of violence, including structural violence: even prior to the conflict, "Yemeni women were already suffering from legal, institutional and social violence" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9), leading to "multidimensional insecurities of this war" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9). Ms. Alsaidy identifies links between "the deterioration of the economy […] and […] the continuation of the cycle of violence" (UNSC 2020f: 7). In addition to violence

within Yemen, European, American and Saudi policies prevent the resettlement of Yemenis in safety (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9) – this could be considered another form of structural violence.

However, international actors not only contribute to indirect violence but are implicated in direct violence against Yemeni civilians through their support of the Saudi-led coalition. While the UK and the US mainly blame the Houthis for the ongoing violence (see below), the WCSB clearly consider the military actions of the Coalition to be equally harmful: "[b]oth sides share responsibility for the indiscriminate shelling of civilians" (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017: 8) and "horrors [are] perpetrated by all parties" (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 9). Similarly, Ms. Jarhum (UNSC 2018f: 9) highlights that attacks by both sides resulted in civilian deaths. Among her recommendations, an "immediate ceasefire, starting by ending the air bombardments led by the internationally recognized Government and its allies in the Arab coalition" is the first one mentioned (UNSC 2018f: 10), which highlights its importance.

The deliberate use of starvation as a tool in the conflict is another form of violence identified: apart from air strikes, landmines, explosive weapons and other attacks of direct violence (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017: 8; Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9; Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 9; Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 6; Almasabi in UNSC 2020f: 8), "[h]unger is still used as a weapon of war" (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 9).

Finally, the WCSB stress not only the immediate impacts of the war but also its long-term effects: as Ms. Almasabi explains, as a result of direct violence and attacks, malnutrition, and lack of access to health care, the amount of persons with disabilities in Yemen doubled since the war started in 2015 (UNSC 2020f: 8). These are long-term consequences resulting from and likely to result in further experiences of violence, which reminds of Cockburn´s concept of a gendered continuum of violence (Cockburn 2004).

International

The WCSB consider the Security Council to be a powerful actor which has influence over the warring parties in Yemen, and they expect it to take action. This is evident in their appeals for an end to the war and their requests that the Council exert pressure on conflict parties to comply with international human rights and humanitarian laws, to lift restrictions on humanitarian operations and to pay public servants´ salaries (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017:

8; Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10; Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10; Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7-8). As Ms. Al-Mutawakel stresses: "Yemenis expect to see serious steps taken to restore their confidence in the capacity of the United Nations" (UNSC 2017: 8). This statement is one of multiple examples (see Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 10; Almasabi in UNSC 2020f: 9) of the briefers voicing their disappointment at a lack of action by international actors to mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians. As a result "regular civilians like myself keep wondering if there truly is collective international willingness to end this war" (Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7). International actors, therefore, are considered to have greater power over the warring parties than civilians do. However, this conceptualization of power comes with expectations, as it is implied that the Security Council members are partially responsible for civilian suffering in Yemen by failing to mitigate the war´s impact: "[t]he lack of action on those recommendations is a moral failure that contributes to the continued suffering of more than 27 million Yemenis." (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 11) Instead of conceptualizing the international sphere and its actors as morally superior, Ms. Jarhum thus considers them to fail their responsibilities: the wording "moral failure" directly links inaction of the Security Council to "suffering", meaning that inaction can also be a form of violence.

However, beyond inaction, the WCSB expose and demand accountability for the direct involvement of UNSC members in the conflict in Yemen by means of selling and transferring weapons to warring parties while "disregarding the main principles of the Arms Trade Treaty" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 9). While all briefers refrain from naming actors in this regard, they clearly demand that the Security Council prevent any further arming of or other military support to warring parties (Al-Mutawakel in UNSC 2017b: 8; Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10; Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7; Almasabi in UNSC 2020f: 9). Highlighting the correlation between such military support and the continuation of violence in Yemen counters the domestic/international dichotomy identified by Shepherd whereby the international is considered as removed from conflict, and further exposes the hypocrisy and colonialism of some UNSC members who provide aid while their arms industries benefit from civilian suffering in Yemen: "any economic profits made from selling weapons that might be used in Yemen are literally made off the dead bodies of Yemeni men, women, boys and girls" (Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7).

Moreover, the international sphere is conceptualized as a deeply patriarchal space: as such, UN´s peace efforts are based on "patriarchal philosophy […], which rewards violence by

granting space at the negotiation table only to holders of weapons." (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 10) Instead of being perceived as an inclusive space that embraces human security the WCSB thus consider the UN and UN-facilitated mediation efforts as spaces where traditional security is prioritized – despite the institutionalization of the WPS agenda. As Ms. Almsasabi concludes "[the Security Council] can do more. They can do better. We are not an afterthought." (UNSC 2020f: 9)

Security

Shepherd´s Analysis found that in UN documents security was mainly conceptualized as the absence of armed conflict. In contrast, the WCSB conceptualize security as a multidimensional and intersectional phenomenon. From their perspective, levels of (in)security strongly revolve around the presence of armed conflict: in their speeches, they request that the conflict in Yemen must end and explain atrocities and insecurities which are direct or indirect results of the fighting. For instance, Ms. Luqman calls for "the development of professional security forces that are well trained, including in human rights" as well as for "efforts to demilitarize liberated cities" (UNSC 2019a: 10). This likely means that security forces and others actors carrying weapons are perceived as a source of insecurity and threat to the population instead of offering protection. However, as Ms. Jarhum highlights, Yemeni women "now bear the burden of the multidimensional insecurities of this war" as a result of facing different types of violence on multiple levels (UNSC 2018f: 9). It is evident in this statement that the conceptualization of (in)security stretches beyond direct physical consequences of fighting itself and interlinks with multiple types of violence. For instance, the briefers recognize intersectional dimensions of insecurity based on identity and privilege, such as level of ability: "[i]magine having to run for your life without a wheelchair, crutches or an assistive device that you need to be able to move." (Almasabi in UNSC 2020f: 8) What security means to the individual can vary significantly from one to another based on such identities and can be different from the priorities of states: to Ms. Al-Mutawakel security encompasses the rule of law and the presence of state institutions. This is noticeable when she speaks of a "terrifying absence of State institutions" (UNSC 2017: 7) – both in areas controlled by the IRG and those controlled by the Houthis – and stresses that "Yemenis aspire to a strong Administration capable of providing security" (UNSC 2017: 8).

Another vital dimension of security for the WCSB is economic security: constructing poverty, hunger and loss of livelihoods as security issues (Luqman in UNSC 2019a: 9; Alsaidy in

UNSC 2020f: 6-7), some of the briefers called on the Security Council and the IRG to "save Yemen´s economy" (Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7), including by stabilizing the local currency and Central Bank (Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 7). However, despite the need for international economic support, the briefers emphasize that in the long run security can only be achieved and maintained through a political solution that ends the conflict: "Aid cannot and will not replace peace" (Alsaidy in UNSC 2020f: 8).

5.2 Analysis of statements by the UK and the US

I will now turn to the analysis of the UK´s and US´ statements in the Security Council´s meetings on Yemen. Before proceeding, it should be noted that the analysis will mainly focus on the states´ responses to the WCSB. Since neither of the two states spoke during the meeting that Ms. Al-Mutawakel attended, the statements of the UK and the US which will be analyzed will mainly be from the meetings which Ms. Jarhum, Ms. Luqman, and Ms. Alsaidy and Ms. Almasabi attended. An analysis was conducted of the entire data set of UK and US speeches between 2017 and 2020, however, apart from a few notable exceptions – which will be explored below – no additional insights were gained from the meetings without WCSB presence.

Gender

Both the UK and the US largely failed to meaningfully engage with the statements and recommendations made by the WCSB. Although particularly Ms. Jarhum and Ms. Luqman focused much of their respective speeches on women, and despite considering Ms. Jarhum´s statements to be "incredibly important" (UK in UNSC 2018f: 12), the UK speaker did not engage with any of the points raised by her except to highlight that "[i]t is obviously vital that talks are inclusive and women are properly included" (UNSC 2018f: 12). Following the briefings by Ms. Alsaidy and Ms. Almasabi, the UK speaker makes no mention of "women" or "gender" (UNSC 2020f: 9-10). While the UK highlighted the significance of some of the WCSB´s statements, the US representatives hardly acknowledged their speeches. For instance, after Ms. Jarhum´s briefing, the US re-emphasized the recommendations by Mr. Lowcock (UNSC 2018f: 19) but does not refer to the recommendations made by Ms. Jarhum, or those of Ms. Luqman a year later. However, in 2020 the US briefly acknowledged suggestions made by Ms. Almasabi regarding the implementation of a resolution on persons with disabilities in conflict (UNSC 2020f: 18). Yet, the above shows that the engagement is tokenistic. Despite both states regularly having committed to National Action Plans and the

UK being the penholder for WPS in the Security Council, this seems to suggest that other issues are of higher importance or urgency.

Moreover, between the WCSB and the states, there is a different understanding of women´s participation in peace processes: Although Ms. Jarhum emphasized that "women´s engagement must not be restricted to an advisory role" (UNSC 2018f: 10) and "demand[ed] no less than 30 per cent participation by women" as well as "an independent women´s delegation at the peace negotiation table" (UNSC 2018f: 11), the UK failed to acknowledge these requests. According to the UK, "the women's technical advisory service [to the Special Envoy] is a very good step" (UNSC 2018f: 12). While the term "step" signals an intermediary stage, the UK speaker nevertheless did not reinforce Ms. Jarhum´s message on more meaningful participation.

After Ms. Luqman presented a series of recommendations in her speech – including the request that the Council "take a serious stand with [Yemenis]" (UNSC 2019a: 10) – the UK representative merely stated that "[t]he testimony of Ms. Luqman was very powerful, but we know that the United Nations has been working very hard for implementation" (UNSC 2019a: 11). The latter part of this sentence undermines the legitimacy of Ms. Luqman´s statements, which showcases the power hierarchy between state or UN actors and civil society. This dynamic is also evident in the comparatively higher engagement with the content of Mr. Griffith´s and Mr. Lowcock´s speeches: while not reinforcing recommendations brought forward by Ms. Jarhum, in the same meeting the UK did, in contrast, refer to "Mark [Lowcock]´s five asks" three times (UNSC 2018f: 12).

It is remarkable that despite the WCSB´s speeches, the UK and the US fail to recognize the diversity of Yemeni women´s roles in the conflict. Likewise, it is noteworthy that the UK or US´ speeches in meetings without presence of WCSB are largely gender-blind – there is very little mention of "women" or "gender". A notable exception is a statement made by the US in March 2020: "When the United Nations is ready to convene talks, the parties must […] represent all Yemenis, including women" (UNSC 2020c: 8).

Violence

When speaking about violence, the UK and the US mainly refer to direct physical violence from fighting as it results in humanitarian suffering, which means that their conceptualization

is narrower than that of the WCSB: referring to the humanitarian impact, the UK states this is "extremely alarming. I am running out of superlatives to echo how worrying that is." (UNSC 2019a: 11) While the UK states in a meeting without presence of WCSB that "instances of intimidation and sexual violence against women in Houthi-controlled areas are also deeply troubling" (UNSC 2020b: 8), there is a noticeable lack of recognition of the gendered dimensions of violence that goes beyond portraying women as victims. For instance, the US representatives speak of "Yemeni women and children, the most innocent victims of this conflict" (UNSC 2018b: 10) and of "starving children and their mothers" (UNSC 2018d: 15). These statements fail to acknowledge the differentiated types of violence and gender-specific threats that were emphasized by WCSB.

The UK and the US further failed to reflect on correlations between their military support to the Saudi-led coalition and continuing violence in Yemen, as well as to critically interrogate violence against civilians perpetrated by the IRG and the Saudi-led coalition. In contrast, both states regularly held the Houthis accountable: the UK called them out for "hav[ing] provoked an escalation in the conflict" (UNSC 2020f: 10) and urges: "The Houthis must cease such provocations." (UNSC 2020f: 10) Similarly, the US states: "It is irresponsible for the Houthis to place their fighters on the rooftops of hospitals, warehouses and other civilian infrastructure." (UNSC 2018f: 19) This is without any mention of the detrimental impacts of the Saudi-led coalition´s air strikes that were mentioned by multiple briefers. In later meetings, the UK also "condemn[ed] the use of force by the Southern Transitional Council[6] to seize State institutions" (UNSC 2019e: 7) with the US voicing similar concerns (UNSC 2020e: 24).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that – while Ms. Luqman spoke of hunger as a strategic tool in the conflict (UNSC 2019a: 9) – both the UK and the US tend to speak of the issue rather as a by-product of the conflict: "I am extremely concerned that […] an additional 1.2 million people will be facing food insecurity this year. […] This situation is driven by economic contraction." (UK in UNSC 2020f: 9)

[6] The Southern Transitional Council (STC) is a separatist group in Southern Yemen formed in 2017 and supported by the United Arab Emirates.

International

While the WCSB warned of "moral failure" (Jarhum in UNSC 2018f: 11) of the Security Council, the UK and US portray international actors as removed from the conflict. Similar to the WCSB, both states consider the Security Council as an important actor in resolving the conflict in Yemen, particularly through supporting the work of the Special Envoy (UK in UNSC 2018f: 12; US in UNSC 2018f: 18; UK in UNSC 2019a: 11; UK in UNSC 2020f: 10). While Ms. Almasabi emphasized that the Security Council "can do more. They can do better" (UNSC 2020f: 9), in the same meeting the US speaker pushes this responsibility away from international actors: "The Houthis can and must do better" (UNSC 2020f: 17). Thus the states conceptualize the international as a sphere of conflict resolution and peace, which is morally superior to domestic spheres – corresponding to the domestic/international dichotomy Shepherd identified.

Similarly, international peacebuilding efforts are held in higher regard than those at local or grassroots levels: while the UK "appreciate[s] the scale of the task" (UNSC 2019a: 11) which the Special Envoy faces in negotiating with the warring parties to prepare peace talks, there is no such recognition of Yemeni civil society or Yemeni women peacebuilders. This seems unbalanced, particularly in meetings when WCSB spoke to the Council about their peacebuilding efforts.

Both the WCSB and the two states consider the provision of funding to be a key role of the Security Council and other UN member states: Ms. Jarhum requested a reconstruction fund "to be co-financed by the Arab coalition countries and the international community" (UNSC 2018f: 11). The financial responsibility for these particular parties is noteworthy and could be an implied reference to the destruction of civilian infrastructure by airstrikes of the Saudi-led Coalition. Ms. Jarhum further highlighted a need for "funding directly and flexibly to grass-roots women" (UNSC 2018f: p11). Although the states did not respond to the remark about women, they often emphasize their own financial contributions to the humanitarian response (e.g. US in UNSC 2018b: 10; UK in UNSC 2018c: 6; UK in UNSC 2018e: 5; UK in UNSC 2020h: 33): as repeatedly pointed out by its representatives, the US is "one of the largest humanitarian contributors in Yemen" (US in UNSC 2019e: 9; see also US in UNSC 2018e: 15; UNSC 2019f: 8; UNSC 2020g: 9). However, neither country acknowledges their own contributions to the increased humanitarian needs in Yemen through their military support.

Despite the WCSB requesting a stop to further transfer of weapons to warring parties in Yemen, neither the UK nor the US acknowledged any correlation between their military support and the continuation of the conflict, or reflected on allegations of British and American arms being used to perpetrate violence against civilians in Yemen. Thus, there is a lack of recognition of the UK´s and the US´ contributions to and indirect involvement in the conflict in Yemen. In contrast, US speakers mention Iranian weapons multiple times: "Iran must stop its efforts to arm the Houthis, which only prolong this conflict." (UNSC 2020f: 18; see also US in UNSC 2019d: 10 and UNSC 2020b: 10)

Security

There are mainly three dimensions of security that the US and the UK highlighted in their speeches: the conflict´s humanitarian impact, regional security concerns, and concerns regarding the alleged connections between the Houthis and Iran. The latter two were not mentioned in the briefings with WCSB presence, but were frequently discussed in other meetings and shall therefore be explored here as well.

Similar to the WCSB, the UK and the US were concerned about food and economic insecurity, the threat of a famine (UK in UNSC 2020f: 9-10; UK in UNSC 2018d; UK in UNSC 2018e; US in UNSC 2018g; US in UNSC 2019b: 10), and restrictions of movement impacting the humanitarian response (UK in UNSC 2019a: 11; US in UNSC 2019a: 18; US in UNSC 2020f: 17; US in UNSC 2018f: 19). The Houthis were regularly mentioned in relation to these restrictions (e.g. US in UNSC 2020a: 8; UK in UNSC 2020b: 7). The issue was highlighted by Ms. Luqman as well: "Space for civil society organizations is becoming increasingly restricted, especially in areas under Houthi control" (UNSC 2019a: 10). Likewise, in meetings without presence of WCSB, the discourse largely revolves around the humanitarian issues. This level of attention likely stems from the Council being briefed on humanitarian issues at the beginning of almost every meeting, but cannot be an excuse for the discussions being gender-blind.

Beyond security related to humanitarian need, the states expressed concerns about the conflict´s regional impact (UK in UNSC 2018c: 6) and the threat of terrorism (UK in UNSC 2018b: 6; US in UNSC 2018b: 10; US in UNSC 2018c: 9), which were not acknowledged by the WCSB. For instance, the UK speaker stressed "that the situation in Yemen threatens international peace and security" (UNSC 2018a: 2). As pointed out by the UK (UNSC 2018a:

2) during a meeting in 2018, "[t]he conflict creates ungoverned spaces in which terrorists can operate, poses security threats to countries in the region and […] fuels regional tensions".

Lastly, both countries expressed "concern about the seeming link between the Houthis and Iran" (UK in UNSC 2019c: p9) related to a report which found some Houthi military equipment to be of Iranian origin. The UK spoke of "hope that the international community can come together to press the Houthis not to become a vehicle for wider retaliation from Iran in the region" (UNSC 2020a: 6). The US considered the transfer of Iranian arms to the Houthis as "destabilizing" (UNSC 2019b: 10) and "prolonging the war" (UNSC 2019b: p10) and repeated "concern about ongoing reports of Iranian interference in the conflict", (UNSC 2020d: 25) which "undermine the prospects for a political solution in Yemen" (UNSC 2020b: 10).

While highlighting the role of Iran and Iranian weapons in the conflict, neither of the states commented on its own arms sales. Another dimension of security which the states ignored is lack of resettlement options which Ms. Jarhum highlighted (UNSC 2018f: 9).

In this chapter I have laid out the how the five women civil society briefers speak about issues related to gender, violence, the international and security, as well as the discourses of the UK and the US around these. In the following chapter, I will now reflect the analysis conducted in this chapter back on the wider Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

6. Discussion

Using a Discourse Analysis based on the model by Shepherd (2008), I analyzed statements of WCSB, the UK and the US in Security Council briefings on Yemen to interrogate how they compare, and relate to the WPS agenda. In the following section I will proceed to interpret the findings described in the previous chapter from a WPS lens, and identify how the results add to the body of postcolonial feminist literature.

The WCSB highlighted that the roles of women in the conflict in Yemen are diverse and varied. This speaks against essentialist notions and dichotomous representations of women in conflict as passive victims, or "super heroines". Further, the richness of perspectives and opinions represented by the WCSB adds to the evidence that women are indeed not a homogenous group, as argued in postcolonial feminist literature which rejects universalism

(Parashar 2016: 371; Mohanty 1988: 63-65, 72). The WCSB discourse is significant, because it provides insights from inside the conflict and its effects on women trough personalized narratives. This means that a different analysis can derive from the WCSB speeches than from the briefings Council members receive from the Special Envoy and other UN colleagues. The insights by and thinking of the WCSB yield important opportunities to inform the Security Council´s engagement in Yemen. However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, the UK and the US hardly engage with these debates in their responses. This shows a lack of political will from the side of the states to truly engage in creating change in power structures. It could then be argued that the engagement of the Security Council with civil society and women activists is tokenistic in its nature.

Several other findings of the analysis constitute multiple pieces of evidence that the engagement is tokenistic. Firstly, the US´ and UK´s lack of engagement with and response to the issues raised by the WCSB as opposed to the greater engagement with the speeches of the Special Envoy and Mr. Lowcock showcases not only how other issues are perceived to be more important than the gendered impacts of the war, but further suggest that the briefings by the Special Envoy take precedence. These attitudes mirror the huge discrepancy in power between the P5 states[7] and the civilians affected by the decisions made by the P5. Secondly, the fact that the UK praised the mere presence of women as advisors while the WCSB called for *meaningful* inclusion is reminiscent of an "add women and stir" approach. Such approaches have been criticized by feminist scholars for being "not enough" (Cockburn 2004: 24) because increasing the numbers of women alone does not automatically lead to women having more influence (Jennings 2012: 24) – instead, this requires deeper structural reforms. However, as the past two decades since the first resolution on WPS have shown, tokenistic engagement will not lead to sustainable changes. Instead – and as clearly asserted in the speeches of the WCSB – there is a rights-based argument to be made about meaningful involvement.

As others have argued (e.g. Richter-Devroe 2019: 261), in order to achieve the transformative potential of the WPS agenda, the patriarchal and colonial institutional structures of the international system need to be dismantled, which means that structural barriers which prevent women and other marginalized groups from participating in decisions on peace and security need to be removed: misogynistic institutional cultures, stigmatization of women

[7] The P5 are the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

leaders, social norms which prescribe women stay at home or norms which normalize violence against women.

It is noteworthy that the discourse in the Security Council meetings on Yemen remained largely gender-blind and even when WCSB were present, there was a lack of engagement with the content of their speeches. As such, it can be argued that – perhaps with the notable exception of the annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security – the Security Council continues to marginalize women´s rights issues in its discussions and decisions. This lack of attention to women´s rights could be related to the fact that the briefings given by the Special Envoy and the Under-Secretary General at the beginning of almost every meeting are usually gender-blind as well, and thus, the opportunities of Member States to take gender-specific challenges into consideration are limited. However, given the lack of engagement even in meetings with WCSB – all of whom offer clearly formulated recommendations – likely means that beyond structural barriers, there is a lack of political will.

As the analysis in the previous chapter found there are significant differences in the view on and understanding of security between the WCSB and the UK and US speakers. While the UK and the US concerned themselves with the threat to regional security that the conflict could exacerbate, they failed to acknowledge how the international system of states itself is harmful to civilians in Yemen. When one of the WCSB pointed to the lack of resettlement options for Yemenis, it became apparent that violence not only comes from parties directly involved in the conflict. Instead, the international system itself – with its unequal power distribution, privileging of military concerns over human security concerns and hierarchy of passports – can be associated with structural violence. This contrasts the discursive conceptualization of the international sphere being removed from conflict, which Shepherd (2008) identified in resolution 1325 and related documents. What this thesis shows, then, is that there continues to be a failure by international powerholders – the Security Council in particular – to address the structural barriers to women´s meaningful participation as well as a failure to realize the WPS agenda in more than just a rhetoric or tokenistic manner. The US and the UK heard from civil society briefers – but they did not listen to them. Transformational change would require them to listen and respond to the statements made by WCSB and to take their views and recommendations into account when taking action which will affect them.

The UK´s and the US´s lack of acknowledgement of their contributions to and responsibility of violence against civilians in Yemen by means of military support to Coalition forces is problematic in the context of WPS for multiple reasons. Firstly, feminist scholars and activists have traditionally been critical of militarism (e.g. Tickner 1992: 54-55) and have considered it to be paradoxical to feminist policy approaches (Uchida 2020: 30). Secondly, the states have an obligation to assess risks of gender-based violence in relation to the weapons they sell (Stavrianakis 2016: 840; Green et. al. 2013: 553). Thirdly, by failing to interrogate their contributions to the conflict the UK and the US also perpetrate a colonial mindset: as both states highlighted their financial contributions to alleviate humanitarian suffering in Yemen, they failed to acknowledge their own contributions to the worsening of the humanitarian situation through military support – despite being held accountable by the WCSB. The privilege of the UK and the US to be able to simply ignore the WCSB´ statements on this issue speaks to the power dynamic between the states and civil society and suggests that, in the end, the states decide on the directions the discourse takes. It further suggests that power takes precedence over accountability.

Despite hearing from WCSB, the states largely fail to engage with the content of their speeches. This suggests that the WPS agenda lost its transformational roots of feminist activism and has become a tool for the Security Council to engage with women in a tokenistic manner, without having to compromise on their own space or voice, and without truly creating change. This is similar to arguments made Paffenholz et al. (2016: 5-6) have made in the context of women´s presence at peace talks – just because women are there, does not mean that they are able to exert influence over the negotiations. This thesis has shown this to be true is the context of Security Council briefings as well – there is a lack of real influence, which makes the WCSB´s statements essentially a box ticking exercise.

Answering the Research Question

The main question that guided this research was: *How do the discourse of women activists and states in the Security Council compare and relate to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?*

In order to find answers to this research puzzle, I have analyzed conceptualizations of gender, violence, the international sphere and security and how these differ between statements by Yemeni WCSB and statements by the UK and the US.

As evident in the discussion of the results, there are quite notable differences in the statements of the WSCB as opposed to the statements by the UK and the US. Not only do the WSCB offer a more detailed and multilayered analysis of the humanitarian impact of the conflict in Yemen, but they also expose its gendered impacts – which the UK and the US largely fail to respond to. In relation to the four pillars of the WPS agenda – protection, participation, prevention and relief and recovery – the statements of the UK and the US regarding Yemeni women were rather one-sided: they highlighted protection needs of "women and children" or civilians generally while neglecting the WPS pillar on participation. This makes it seem as if protection is more important than women´s political and social rights and reinforces essentialist narratives about women.

In contrast, the WCSB called for their right for meaningful inclusion and represented diverse views on the varying roles that women play in the conflict. While the UK and the US highlighted their roles in humanitarian relief, they also largely failed to acknowledge the leading role of Yemeni women in relief efforts in Yemen. This lack of recognition while emphasizing their own support to humanitarian efforts undermines women´s leadership. It also contributes to narratives of Yemenis being aid dependent – which the speakers had specifically spoken out against – and the UK and the US being saviors.

It can then be argued that, while the UK and the US as two permanent members of the Security Council do not advance the WPS agenda in Yemen and even undermine it, it is essential to continue to center the voices of women affected by conflict in order to reveal how the WPS agenda is implemented (or not) on individual levels. Despite the fact that the WPS agenda celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, states – even those considering themselves WPS champions – continue to reinforce systems of structural inequalities and violence by sidelining women and perpetrating essentialist narratives. Through their military support they further contribute to the direct targeting of women in conflict. It could be concluded that the transformative potential of the WPS agenda cannot be achieved for as long as states fail to interrogate the gaps between their rhetorical commitments and their actions, and for as long as they continue to perpetrate violent, colonial and militaristic interventions that undermine women´s and human rights. For this reason, it is essential to center women´s voices, which will allow to will expose the gaps in states´ commitments to the WPS agenda.

In this chapter I have discussed and interpreted the results of the Discourse Analysis conducted and provided an answer to my research question. It is notable that many of the results of this study align with what previous research has found, while enriching the available scholarship by using the Security Council briefings on the conflict in Yemen as a case study and context to answer questions about WPS. This thesis contributed to the body of evidence on Women, Peace and Security and to feminist and postcolonial literature by critically interrogating how the UK and the US (fail to) engage with civil society briefers from Yemen. By comparing women´s conceptualizations of gender, violence, security and the international sphere with those of the two states, this thesis showed that there are remarkable differences.

In the final section of this dissertation I shall now draw my concluding remarks.

7. Conclusion

Twenty years after the first resolution on Women, Peace and Security there is a pushback on women´s rights, and a lack of progress and transformative change.

Using a postcolonial feminist lens and by applying the analytical framework of Laura Shepherd (2008) to the Security Council meetings on Yemen, this thesis investigated how the discourses of women activists and the UK and the US compare, and how these discourses in turn relate to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In particular, I analyzed conceptualizations of gender, security, violence and the international within the speeches of Yemeni women as well as the UK and the US speeches at the Security Council between 2017 and 2020. While other scholars have criticized the discursive conceptualizations of the WPS resolutions, no previous research compared conceptualizations in the discourse of civil society briefers to the Security Council with the discursive conceptualizations of the US and the UK. In fact, few have researched how Security Council members engage with civil society briefers, although greater attention has been paid to this in more recent studies. This thesis therefore contributes to creating new insights for this body of literature.

While women in Yemen played leading roles in the 2011 uprising and the National Dialogue Conference, they have increasingly been excluded from Yemen´s political processes and peace efforts. This thesis centered the voices of five Yemeni women who briefed the Security Council in the last few years. This added new insights to context and conflict dynamics in Yemen, and their gendered implications.

As the analysis has shown, the WCSB had a different – more multidimensional – understanding of security in comparison to that of the UK and the US. While the briefers highlighted the intersectional dynamics of (in)security, as well as economic security, the UK and the US conceptualized security rather in terms of state security and wider regional dynamics of the conflict. Both the WCSB and the states expressed worry about food security.

Moreover, there was significant difference in the conceptualizations on violence: the WCSB considered violence to be a gendered phenomenon with specific gendered and structural threats, and highlighted that violence is perpetrated by all parties to the war – including international actors supporting parties to the conflict. The UK and the US on the other hand mostly blamed the Houthi alliance for the continuation of the conflict and failed to reflect on correlations between their military support to warring parties and human rights violations.

Both the briefers and the states connected the international sphere to power. The WCSB considered international actors to be responsible for the continuation of the war in Yemen by means of military support to warring parties, as well as insufficient action by the Security Council to end the conflict. The UK and the US, however, considered the domestic sphere to be the conflict zone whereas the international sphere was understood as removed from conflict.

The most significant difference was the conceptualization of gender. The WCSB highlighted many different roles that Yemeni women hold in the conflict – mothers, nurturers, protectors, peacebuilders, perpetrators of violence, leadership. In contrast, the UK and the US failed to properly engage with the WCSB, recognize the diversity of Yemeni women or acknowledge their contributions to peace and relief efforts in Yemen.

This thesis argued that despite their commitments to the WPS agenda, the UK and the US fail to take into account the gendered dimensions of the conflict in Yemen and to recognize the intersectional security threats women in Yemen face. Moreover, instead of centering the voices of the activists – as the persons who will be experiencing the lived realities of the results of Security Council discussions and decisions on Yemen – both states failed largely to engage with the opinions and recommendations of Women Civil Society Briefers from Yemen. This lack of engagement showed that the states are tokenistic and superficial in their dealings with women´s voices – which contributes to the silencing of the activists. Even

twenty years after the first resolution on WPS, the discourse in the Security Council continues to be largely gender-blind and fails to move beyond box-ticking exercises or conceptualizations of women as victims or placing women and children in the same category.

Furthermore, the thesis argued that both the UK and the US fail to reflect on their own contributions to the conflict in Yemen by means of military support to warring parties. Thus, a patriarchal colonial attitude remains and both states undermine the WPS agenda. In order to truly implement and realize the potential of the WPS agenda, it is essential that the voices of the women and other marginalized groups are not only heard, but listened to and centered in the discourse. This requires breaking down structural barriers and overturning power hierarchies – starting by listening to women´s voices.

Despite criticism of international arms sales to parties to the conflict in Yemen, the UK and the US both positioned themselves as removed from the conflict and morally superior. This is in line with Shepherd´s findings (2008: 94-95, 124, 126) of the way in which the international sphere is conceptualized in resolution 1325 and related UN reports. Therefore, it can be concluded that in addition to structural violence coming from the international system which marginalizes women, the US and the UK are implicated in direct violence against civilians in Yemen through their military support, whereby they contribute to multidimensional insecurities in Yemen – without, however, recognition of their responsibilities.

As this thesis has shown, the WPS agenda has become a tool for tokenistic engagement instead of being used to create structural and transformational changes that will lead to greater gender equality. This thesis concludes with reiterating the importance of centering the women´s voices to interrogate gaps in WPS scholarship as well as to expose gaps between rhetorical commitment and action of the Security Council in relation to WPS.

While this thesis focused on Yemeni women and the UK and the US, future research could interrogate the discourses of other actors which contribute to the sale of weapons to parties in conflict. Interesting cases could be Canada and Sweden – both states have, in a more limited manner, engaged in arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, while promoting explicitly Feminist Foreign Policies. Such a research agenda could find answers to the compatibility of Feminist Foreign Policy and arms trade and could interrogate how Feminist Foreign Policy influences (or not) the discursive conceptualizations analyzed in this thesis.

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