

# Women as ‘new security actors’ in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali

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Issued in 2015, the UN Security Council’s Resolution 2242 called for ‘greater integration by Member States and the United Nations of their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism’.<sup>1</sup> Feminist scholars have criticized the merging of these agendas at the international level, alleging that the UN’s policy agenda on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) is co-opting the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and proposing to use women’s participation as a tool to fight terrorism.<sup>2</sup> This article contributes to ongoing debates in the field of gender and security by analysing the integration of the UN’s WPS and P/CVE agendas in a specific country context.

Mali is currently in the midst of a political and humanitarian crisis brought on by the 2012 civil war and *coup d’état*, after which the country experienced a surge in the presence of jihadist groups. In certain areas in northern and central Mali the security situation has prevented women from moving around safely, accessing markets and organizing themselves across communities. Many women in these areas were displaced or left behind as their sons and husbands left to fight, and/or have become targets of violence. The conflict has spurred an unprecedented level of international engagement, notably through the French military operation Serval (succeeded by Barkhane) and the establishment of a UN peacekeeping operation (MINUSMA) in 2013. Despite the peace agreement signed in 2015 between the Malian government and two coalitions of rebel groups, however, the security situation continues to deteriorate. In recent years, the country has

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<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015), [www.undocs.org/S/RES/2242\(2015\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2242(2015)). (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 21 March 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, ‘The “war on terror” and extremism: assessing the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Affairs* 92: 2, 2016, pp. 275–91; Gina Heathcote, ‘Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: progressive gains or dangerous development?’, *Global Society* 32: 4, 2018, pp. 374–94; Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, ‘Gender in the United Nations’ agenda on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22: 5, 2020, pp. 720–41.

seen a rise in jihadist insurgencies, intracommunal conflicts, banditry and violence targeting civilians.<sup>3</sup> These developments have made preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) key priorities for the international community. While external actors in Mali have had a tendency to favour traditional security responses,<sup>4</sup> what sets the UN's P/CVE agenda apart from previous counterterrorism paradigms is the focus on combining a traditional security response with 'soft' preventive policies, and efforts to include women as part of the response.<sup>5</sup> Gender (often understood to mean women) has thus become a key component of the UN's P/CVE agenda. Given the centrality of the counterterrorism and countering violent extremism frame to much international engagement in Mali in recent years,<sup>6</sup> there is a need to study how this agenda is adapted, challenged and/or resisted when implemented on the ground.

This article undertakes such a study by examining how Malian civil society and government representatives translate the UN policy agendas on WPS and P/CVE in the Malian context. It builds on research on norm translation, understood as the multidirectional and polycentric processes through which norms, ideas or policies are adapted, negotiated, contested or resisted as they encounter new socio-political contexts.<sup>7</sup> It focuses on how norms about women's rights to participation, as embedded in the WPS agenda, are translated in the discourse on P/CVE in Mali. When particular ideas about gender equality become formalized in legal documents, they take on a more fixed definition. Given its formalization in numerous UN Security Council resolutions, the WPS agenda is one such example.<sup>8</sup> It has been described as a 'norm bundle', consisting of a number of adjacent norms including women's right to participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.<sup>9</sup> Its focus has evolved over time, but centres on three main pillars:

<sup>3</sup> Adam Sandor, *Insecurity, the breakdown of social trust, and armed actor governance in central and northern Mali* (Montréal: Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix, 2017), <https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Sandor-english-Report.pdf>; Alexander Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: local politics and rebel groups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Denis M. Tull, 'Rebuilding Mali's army: the dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners', *International Affairs* 95: 2, 2019, pp. 405–22.

<sup>4</sup> Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde and Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs* 96: 4, 2020, pp. 855–74; Yvan Guichaoua, 'The bitter harvest of French interventionism in the Sahel', *International Affairs* 96: 4, 2020, pp. 895–911.

<sup>5</sup> David H. Ucko, 'Preventing violent extremism through the United Nations: the rise and fall of a good idea', *International Affairs* 91: 4, 2018, pp. 725–46; Rothermel, 'Gender in the United Nations', p. 721.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Charbonneau, 'Faire la paix au Mali: les limites de l'acharnement contre-terroriste', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 53: 3, 2019, pp. 447–62.

<sup>7</sup> Peggy Levitt and Sally Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States', *Global Networks* 9: 4, 2009, pp. 441–61; Conny Roggeband, Anna van der Vleuten and Anouka van Eerdewijk, eds, *Gender equality norms in regional governance: transnational dynamics in Europe, South America and southern Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Tobias Berger, *Global norms and local courts: translating the rule of law in Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Lisbeth Zimmermann, *Global norms with a local face? Rule-of-law promotion and norm translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde and Christine Nissen, 'Schizophrenic agendas in the EU's external actions in Mali', *International Affairs* 96: 4, 2020, pp. 935–53.

<sup>8</sup> The agenda is set out in a series of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019); 2493 (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Jacqui True and Antje Wiener, 'Everyone wants (a) peace: the dynamics of rhetoric and practice on "Women, Peace and Security"', *International Affairs* 95: 3, 2019, pp. 553.

participation, prevention and protection. The participation pillar, the focus of this article, has often been considered the most transformative but has also been the most difficult to advance.

The WPS agenda may in turn be used as a resource of ideas and practices by local organizations and individuals (such as NGOs, local elites and activists) seeking to promote similar goals, and who 'work to mediate, adapt and translate global norms into local institutions and practices'.<sup>10</sup> A key aspect of this article is its concern with how local organizations and individuals shape the meanings and trajectories of norms. Specifically, it contributes to the literature on the 'agency of the governed',<sup>11</sup> which has explored the role of local agents as constitutive of norms and their situated meanings. Building on the work of feminist scholars who have shown how imageries of women as passive victims or 'natural' peace agents have historically been (re)produced in peace and security discourses,<sup>12</sup> and on post-colonial insights about re-presentations of the 'Other' in colonial discourses,<sup>13</sup> I develop a framework for analysing how local intermediaries in norm translation engage in 'discursive practices of re-presentation', defined here as the production of subjects or images along with their social capacities and relations to one another.

The article seeks to answer the following research questions: How are global norms about women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution articulated in discourses about P/CVE in Mali? And what are the consequences of stakeholders' engagement with norms? I draw on feminist and post-colonial discourse analysis to analyse re-presentations of women in the discourse used in 27 interviews conducted in Bamako in 2017 with Malian civil society and government representatives. I also draw on the scholarly literature and two key policy documents—the Malian national action plans on WPS and P/CVE—to provide background and contextual information to support the analysis.

I suggest that analysing discursive practices of re-presentation is a fruitful avenue for advancing our understanding of the agency of local actors in norms research. While previous research has focused on how and by whom norms are diffused, a post-colonial perspective suggests taking a closer look at the respective roles of, and relations between, different local actors, and the impact of norm translation on actors otherwise marginalized from existing frameworks. The article seeks to

<sup>10</sup> Annika Björkdahl and Ivan Gusic, "'Global" norms and "local" agency: frictional peacebuilding in Kosovo', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18: 3, 2015, p. 266; Levitt and Merry, 'Vernacularization'; Berger, *Global norms and local courts*; Zimmermann, *Global norms with a local face?*

<sup>11</sup> See special issue edited by Anke Draude on 'The agency of the governed', *Third World Thematics* 2: 5, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Jean B. Elshtain, *Women and war* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Nadine Puechguirbal, 'Discourses on gender, patriarchy and Resolution 1325: a textual analysis of UN documents', *International Peacekeeping* 17: 2, 2010, pp. 172–87; Laura J. Shepherd, 'Victims of violence or agents of change? Representations of women in UN peacebuilding discourse', *Peacebuilding* 4: 2, 2016, pp. 121–35; Laura J. Shepherd, 'Sex, security and superhero(in)es: from 1325 to 1820 and beyond', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13: 4, 2011, pp. 504–21; Rothemel, 'Gender in the United Nations'.

<sup>13</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: western concepts of the Orient* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Stuart Hall, 'The West and the rest: discourse and power', in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, eds, *Formations of modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 185–227; Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, eds, *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66–111; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses' in *boundary 2* 12: 3, 1984, pp. 333–58.

contribute to the norms literature by shedding light on the (un)democratic nature of norm translation through analysis of the consequences of stakeholders' engagement in discursive practices of re-presentation.

The article proceeds by briefly outlining the global discourses on WPS and P/CVE before introducing the framework for studying discursive practices of re-presentation in norm translation. The following section presents the material on which the ensuing analysis is based. I then present the analysis of Malian discourses on women's participation in the fight against violent extremism. The analysis finds that the interviewees translate norms about women's participation by linking these ideas to 'new' threats, tasks, time and space. I use the term 'new security actors' to describe the dominant re-presentation of women that emerges in this context: namely, that of an appropriate and competent woman who will contribute to preventing radicalization and violent extremism by influencing, counselling and/or informing on her family or community members.<sup>14</sup>

### Integrating the UN policy agendas on WPS and P/CVE

Global discourses on counterterrorism and P/CVE developed in parallel with the WPS agenda, and terminology on violent extremism entered international debates in 2014–2015 as a result of ineffective and counterproductive counterterrorism approaches that seemed to generate even more grievances.<sup>15</sup> There was little formal interaction between the WPS and P/CVE agendas until 2015, when the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee's open briefing on the role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism, held on 9 September,<sup>16</sup> and the adoption of UNSCR 2242 on 13 October, formalized the linkage of the two agendas at the UN. The call for integration happened at a time when female suicide bombers in Boko Haram and female foreign fighters in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were catching the attention of international advocates and policy-makers.

Activists, practitioners and scholars have welcomed the recognition of women as agents in the fight against violent extremism, and research has shown that the participation of women's organizations in CVE activities may generate positive results for gender equality in politics and society.<sup>17</sup> Much of the scholarly literature on WPS and P/CVE, however, has been critical to the merging of the two agendas, and what analysts have seen as the co-optation of the WPS agenda by an international security regime that remains 'closed off to civil society, human

<sup>14</sup> The security studies literature has described private actors and intergovernmental organizations as new security actors—see e.g. Elke Krahnemann, *New threats and new actors in international security* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)—which differs from my use of the term as an ideal-type.

<sup>15</sup> Ní Aoláin, 'The "war on terror" and extremism'; Ucko, 'Preventing violent extremism'.

<sup>16</sup> Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, *Open briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on 'The role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism'* (New York: UN, 2015), <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Open-Briefing-Concept-Note.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Chikodiri Nwangwu and Christian Ezeibe, 'Femininity is not inferiority: women-led civil society organizations and "countering violent extremism" in Nigeria', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21: 2, 2019, pp. 168–93.

rights and gender activism'.<sup>18</sup> Feminist critics of P/CVE programming argue that it instrumentalizes women and women's rights, and uses them to justify measures and interventions, with the result of essentializing women and entrenching gender stereotypes.<sup>19</sup> According to Heathcote, UNSCR 2242 treats women's participation as a tool to fight terrorism: 'The integration of the countering terrorism strategies into the women peace and security agenda reinforces a retrograde production of gender as binary and preoccupied with saving women.'<sup>20</sup> When the Counter-Terrorism Committee held its open briefing in September 2015, it identified the role that women, in particular mothers, might play in preventing the radicalization of their children. Feminist scholars have denounced this statement as showing 'little sensitivity to the problems involved in engaging mothers as the front-line actors in preventing radicalisation', as well as underestimating, indeed ignoring, the potential harm to which women may be exposed as they become informers to the state on their sons and daughters.<sup>21</sup>

### Discursive practices of re-presentation in norm translation

In this article I suggest that we can study norms by examining how different stakeholders engage in discursive practices of re-presentation. This rests on understandings of discourse as social practice,<sup>22</sup> of norms as enacted and not just spoken,<sup>23</sup> and of translation processes as productive of certain effects.<sup>24</sup> Below, I develop discursive practices of re-presentation as an analytical tool for studying how local organizations and individuals translate norms about women's participation.

Feminist discourse analysts emphasize the ways in which gendered assumptions and power relations are discursively produced,<sup>25</sup> and feminist scholars in the field of gender and security have shown how certain imageries of gender or women dominate and have historically been (re)produced in peace and security discourses. Early feminist International Relations scholars such as Jean B. Elshtain and Cynthia Enloe focused on deconstructing essentializing views of women's roles and identified representations of women as 'beautiful souls' and as passive

<sup>18</sup> Ní Aoláin, 'The "war on terror" and extremism', p. 281; Heathcote, 'Security Council Resolution 2242', p. 387.

<sup>19</sup> Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, 'Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency', *Gender and Development* 25: 1, 2017, pp. 103–118; Katherine E. Brown, 'Gender and counter-radicalization: women and emerging counter-terror measures', in Jayne C. Huckerby and Margaret L. Satterthwaite, eds, *Gender, national security, and counter-terrorism: human rights perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 36–59.

<sup>20</sup> Heathcote, 'Security Council Resolution 2242', pp. 386, 389.

<sup>21</sup> Ní Aoláin, 'The "war on terror" and extremism', p. 285; Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown, *Countering violent extremism: making gender matter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Sahla Aroussi, 'Strange bedfellows: interrogating the unintended consequences of integrating countering violent extremism with the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Kenya', *Politics and Gender*, publ. online 6 July 2020, pp. 1–31, DOI:10.1017/S1743923X20000124.

<sup>22</sup> Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning practice to the linguistic turn: the case of diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31: 3, 2002, pp. 627–8.

<sup>23</sup> True and Wiener, 'Everyone wants (a) peace'; Anette Stimmer and Lea Wisken, 'The dynamics of dissent: when actions are louder than words', *International Affairs* 95: 3, 2019, pp. 515–33; Antje Wiener, *Contestation and constitution of norms in global international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Berger, *Global norms and local courts*; Cold-Ravnkilde and Nissen, 'Schizophrenic agendas'.

<sup>25</sup> Michelle M. Lazar, 'Feminist critical discourse analysis: articulating a feminist discourse praxis', *Critical Discourse Studies* 4: 2, 2007, p. 142.

victims of the global political system.<sup>26</sup> More recent contributions have shown how dichotomous representations of women either as victims of violence or as peacemakers are reflected in UN discourses, policies and practice on peace and security, and how this may have significant consequences, leading to, for instance, female soldiers being excluded from demobilization processes and thus affecting their post-conflict recovery.<sup>27</sup> While the literature on gender and political violence has pointed to representations of women who commit political violence as mothers, monsters and whores,<sup>28</sup> and scholars are increasingly considering women as supporters of or participants in violent extremism,<sup>29</sup> representations of women as perpetrators are limited in UN discourses on WPS and/or P/CVE.<sup>30</sup> Critics of the WPS agenda have argued that it reproduces gender stereotypes and fails to transform gender relations,<sup>31</sup> and that it marginalizes local contributions to peace and security by portraying the international community as the main provider of security and protection.<sup>32</sup> Rothermel demonstrates how such representations of local perpetrators and global saviours, and of gendered victimhood as legitimating security interventions, are also reflected in the UN's P/CVE agenda.<sup>33</sup>

Post-colonial studies, in attending to discourse and the ways in which the world has been framed and defined, offer additional insights into practices of representation. In much post-colonial thought, power is understood as a relational force that is productive of subjects, while truth is understood as produced through discourses that establish dominant ways of understanding and representing the social world.<sup>34</sup> The post-colonial perspective rests on an understanding of knowledge as situated, suggesting that norms and discourses that are considered universal may 'look' different if seen from post-colonial or non-western locations, meaning

<sup>26</sup> Elshtain, *Women and war*; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (London: Pandora, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Megan MacKenzie, 'Securitization and desecuritization: female soldiers and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone', *Security Studies* 18: 2, 2009, pp. 241–61; Puechguirbal, 'Discourses on gender, patriarchy and Resolution 1325'; Shepherd, 'Victims of violence'; Shepherd, 'Sex, security and superhero(in)es'.

<sup>28</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, monsters, whores: women's violence in global politics* (London and New York: Zed, 2007); Linda Åhäll, *Sexing war/policing gender: motherhood, myth and women's political violence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor, 'Female terrorism: a review', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21: 3, 2009, pp. 499–515; Benjamin Maiangwa and Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao, "'Daughters, brides, and supporters of the jihad": revisiting the gender-based atrocities of Boko Haram in Nigeria', *African Renaissance* 12: 2, 2015, pp. 117–44.

<sup>30</sup> Rothermel, 'Gender in the United Nations'.

<sup>31</sup> Shepherd, 'Sex, security and superhero(in)es'; Marjaana Jauhola, 'Decolonizing branded peacebuilding: abjected women talk back to the Finnish Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Affairs* 92: 2, 2016, pp. 333–51; Nicola Pratt, 'Reconceptualizing gender, reinscribing racial–sexual boundaries in international security: the case of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security"', *International Studies Quarterly* 57: 4, 2013, pp. 772–83.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Barnes, 'Lost in translation? UNAMSIL, UNSCR 1325 and women building peace in Sierra Leone', in Funmi Olonisakin, Karen Barnes and Eka Ikpe, eds, *Women, peace and security: translating policy into practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Heidi Hudson, 'A double-edged sword of peace?', *International Peacekeeping* 19: 4, 2012, pp. 443–60; Shepherd, 'Sex, security and superhero(in)es', p. 506; Laura J. Shepherd, 'Making war safe for women? National Action Plans and the militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Political Science Review* 37: 3, 2016, pp. 324–35.

<sup>33</sup> Rothermel, 'Gender in the United Nations', p. 730.

<sup>34</sup> Said, *Orientalism*; Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks* (London: Pluto Publishers Limited, 1986); Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001); Rita Abrahamsen, 'Postcolonialism' in Martin Griffiths, ed., *International Relations theory for the twenty-first century* (London: Routledge, 2007).



that norms may have different meanings and functions depending on where they are experienced.<sup>35</sup> Working with Said's introduction of the concept of 'Othering' to describe how western discourses understood and defined the non-western world, post-colonial studies has offered important insights about representations of the 'Other' in colonial discourses.<sup>36</sup> These representations tend to rely on 'stereotyping', a process of collapsing complex differences into a one-dimensional description that produces dichotomies of good/bad, competent/incompetent and/or relevant/irrelevant subjects.<sup>37</sup> For example, Mohanty has shown how the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular monolithic subject relies on a suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.<sup>38</sup> In this article I use the term re-presentation, drawing on Spivak's distinction between re-presentation of images or subjects, and representation as speaking for (e.g. an oppressed group). Spivak argues that even though the two processes are related, one should not be understood as directly following from the other.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the ability of agents to produce re-presentations of women should not lead us to assume that they speak on behalf of these women. Discursive practices of re-presentation are therefore defined here as *the production of subjects or images along with their social capacities and relations to one another*.

The focus on local organizations and individuals as intermediaries in norm translation risks downplaying the role of local power relations and hierarchies. The concern about representation that is so central to post-colonial theory has for a long time been lacking in the norms literature, but similar questions have gained traction in the literature on the agency of the governed. For example, Wiener has argued that the agency of the governed is conditioned on access to different practices of norm validation, defined as critical engagement with norms. In Wiener's framework, access to norm validation influences the degree of agency stakeholders are likely to develop.<sup>40</sup> Building on these insights, differently positioned stakeholders may have different degrees of access to re-presentation, reflecting their different degrees of agency. Following Wiener, agency reflects the norm-generative power that materializes through discursive practices of re-presentation. I distinguish between an 'actor', as someone whose action is rule-governed or rule-orientated, and an 'agent', as someone who is engaged in the exercise of power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re) constitute the world.<sup>41</sup> In other words, 'actors' are re-presented, while 'agents' re-present. Finally, the location of knowledge production about a specific issue influences who has access to re-presentation.

<sup>35</sup> Abrahamsen, 'Postcolonialism'; Charlotte Epstein, 'The postcolonial perspective: an introduction', *International Studies Perspectives* 2: 13, 2012, p. 295; Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'; Arlene Tickner, 'Seeing IR differently: notes from the Third World', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32: 2, 2003, pp. 295–324.

<sup>36</sup> Hall, 'The West and the rest'; Said, *Orientalism*; Mohanty, 'Under western eyes'; Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'

<sup>37</sup> Hall, 'The West and the rest', p. 215.

<sup>38</sup> Mohanty, 'Under western eyes', p. 333.

<sup>39</sup> Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Antje Wiener, 'Agency of the governed in global international relations: access to norm validation', *Third World Thematics* 2: 5, 2017, pp. 709–25.

<sup>41</sup> Ivan Karp, 'Agency and social theory: a review of Anthony Giddens', *American Ethnologist* 13: 1, 1986, pp. 131–7.

Norms about women's participation are thus understood to be (re)constructed and constituted through discursive practices of re-presentation. Re-presentations, in turn, have the potential to structure behaviour. That being said, norms are an expression of how things *should* be, rather than how they *are*: re-presentations do not necessarily reflect reality or predetermine behaviour. The aim of this article is therefore to shed light on the unintended consequences that may transpire if differentiated conditions to and forms of access to re-presentation are not revealed.

## Data

This article draws on a large dataset generated during fieldwork in 2017–2018 studying the implementation of the WPS agenda in Mali, including 65 semi-structured interviews and participant observation. A subset of 27 interviews conducted in Bamako in 2017 with 31 participants, including 11 men and 20 women, constitute the primary data for this article.<sup>42</sup> The analysis also draws on scholarly literature and the Malian National Action Plans on WPS and P/CVE.

The interviewees were Malian civil society representatives and four government representatives engaged in promoting the WPS agenda and/or working on P/CVE issues in Mali.<sup>43</sup> To preserve the respondents' anonymity, I have chosen not to disclose further details or attribute their statements beyond these categories in the text.<sup>44</sup> All interviewees were based in the capital, physically removed from the local communities faced with the threat of violent extremism. From the way interviewees talked about women's roles it was clear that some of them had stronger connections than others with local communities: for example, some representatives from women's organizations had close ties with local branches. For these interviewees, engaging with the WPS and P/CVE agendas often meant highlighting the work that women were already doing, and had been doing for a long time, in their communities. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their centrality in implementing the WPS and P/CVE agendas.<sup>45</sup> Further, local elites such as activists and civil society actors play key roles in norm translation; those interviewed for this study correspond to what are described as local intermediaries or translators in the literature. The analysis focuses on the voices and perceptions of these Malian elites in their translation of the WPS and P/CVE agendas in Mali. As the research focused on implementation of the WPS agenda and its integration with the P/CVE agenda, interviewees did not include women who had been victimized or recruited by extremist groups.

The interviews were analysed with a view to uncovering how women were re-presented in the discourse, focusing on how their roles, relations, capabilities and contexts were gendered.<sup>46</sup> I identified re-presentations that reflected those

<sup>42</sup> Author interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Quotations have been translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>43</sup> The government representatives were either government employees or in positions closely associated with the government.

<sup>44</sup> Conversations were non-attributable, and many preferred to speak in a personal capacity.

<sup>45</sup> Ucko, 'Preventing violent extremism', p. 257; Rothermel, 'Gender in the United Nations', p. 723.

<sup>46</sup> Lazar, 'Feminist critical discourse analysis'.



of women as peacemakers and victims prevalent in WPS discourse, as well as re-presentations of women as perpetrators. However, a powerful re-presentation of women as security actors, constructed as an extension of their roles as peace agents, dominated the discourse on their roles and contributions in the fight against violent extremism in Mali. Because security actors are usually deployed in order to respond to an identified threat, are equipped with specific capabilities/tasks, and have a delineated time and place of operation, I use the categories of threats, tasks, time and space to show how this dominant re-presentation is constructed in relation to traditional ideas of security and security actors.

## Re-presentations of women in Malian discourses on WPS and P/CVE

In 2018, with support from the international community, the Malian government developed a national action plan to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism (P/CVE NAP).<sup>47</sup> References to women's roles in this NAP confirm the merging of the WPS and P/CVE agendas in the Malian context. In line with global discourses on women's roles as victims, the P/CVE NAP cites violence against women as a justification for intervention. The document further mentions the need to 'initiate learning activities for youth and women affected by violent extremism and terrorism', and the need to 'strengthen the rule of law and human rights, in particular, for the benefit of vulnerable groups: women, children, etc.'<sup>48</sup> In 2019, Mali also launched a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (WPS NAP).<sup>49</sup> This was developed in collaboration with UN Women, including a comprehensive process of consultations with different stakeholders. Re-presentations of women as victims and as peacemakers are identifiable in the WPS NAP, which discusses violent extremism under its pillar on prevention of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and women's significant contribution to the prevention of conflict.

The analysis of interview data further identified interlinked re-presentations of women as victims and perpetrators, portraying them as in need of education and empowerment. Contrary to other contexts such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, women have not been seen directly participating in violent terrorist acts in Mali.<sup>50</sup> Several interviewees made this point. When interviewees talked about women as accomplices to or perpetrators of violent extremism, they often saw women as being instrumentalized, saying, 'in many cases we see that women are used, voluntarily or involuntarily.'<sup>51</sup> Many saw women as at risk of being brainwashed: 'These people ... they must not be able to indoctrinate them, because they are the

<sup>47</sup> *Document de politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent et le terrorisme et son plan d'action 2018–2020* (Bamako: Ministère des affaires religieuses et du culte, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> *Document de politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent*, pp. 7, 16, 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Plan d'Action National pour la mise en œuvre de la Résolution 1325 et des résolutions connexes du Conseil de sécurité (2019–2023) au Mali* (Bamako: Ministère de la promotion de la femme, de l'enfant et de la famille, 2019).

<sup>50</sup> Luca Raineri, *Dogmatism or pragmatism? Violent extremism and gender in the central Sahel* (London: International Alert, 2020), <https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel-Violent-Extremism-Gender-EN-2020.pdf>, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

easiest target group, the women.<sup>52</sup> The need to inform and educate women about the dangers of extremism was brought up by several interviewees as a way to make sure that women do not end up aiding and abetting terrorists:

There are a lot of women in the North, they hide the weapons. So, what to do? It is necessary that the women are involved, to sensitize them, to inform them of the gravity, the dangerousness of what they are doing. Women need to feel involved, to have roles to play.<sup>53</sup>

Several interviewees also warned of developments similar to those within Boko Haram, where young women or girls have become suicide bombers:<sup>54</sup> 'There are girls who agree to be married to the jihadists, ... there are some who also explode, who are elsewhere used as suicide bombers.'<sup>55</sup> Interviewees expressed concern that Mali might see similar developments in the future:

In our neighbouring countries, in the Sahel, we already see women who are radicalizing, who blow themselves up. A woman who goes to the market, and she blows herself up in the market, because nobody suspects her wearing a belt, it happened in neighbouring countries, ... it has not arrived here yet, but it can happen.<sup>56</sup>

We see that types of behaviour such as conspiring with terrorists, or committing acts of terrorism themselves, are considered inappropriate for women. Further, when interviewees talk about women who commit such acts, these women are understood to be brainwashed or instrumentalized by terrorists, thus relegated to the position of victims. Finally, women perpetrators or accomplices are seen as in desperate need of sensitization, education and awareness-raising. Consequently, with the right education or awareness-raising, these women can also play a role in preventing and countering violent extremism.

While the re-presentations of women as victims and perpetrators were clearly identifiable, the re-presentation of women as peace agents was dominant in the discourse. This was seen in the emphasis on women's biological or 'natural' roles, echoing the re-presentation of women as 'natural' peace agents. Respondents explained women's contributions to the fight against violent extremism through women's roles as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters: 'Women can play a big role. It's always the contact with the people. Because, those who are radicalized, ... it's our children, our husbands or our brothers. We can influence them, we can play on the maternal fibre.'<sup>57</sup>

However, when analysing the re-presentation of women as peacemakers, a particular re-presentation of women as security actors emerged. I use the phrase 'new security actors' because of the way their gendered roles, relations, capabilities and contexts are seen as equipping women to assist or even to some extent replace traditional security actors in the fight against violent extremism. Below I show how interviewees translate global WPS norms about women's participation

<sup>52</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Nov. 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Maïangwa and Amao, 'Daughters, brides, and supporters'.

<sup>55</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Sept. 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Sept. 2017.

by linking these to 'new' threats, tasks, time and space. The tasks, time and space are, however, not new for many women; rather, their 'newness' is understood in contrast to traditional security/counterterrorism approaches.

### *'New' threat: violent extremism*

Despite groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb having operated in the Sahara since the early 2000s, and in Mali since approximately 2006, the involvement of armed Islamist groups makes the 2012 rebellion and crisis different from past rebellions. These 'new' threats have led to CVE becoming the key conceptual framework through which insecurity and conflict are understood by external actors.<sup>58</sup>

In the interviews for this study, many respondents said involving women in the fight against violent extremism in Mali makes that fight more effective and promotes peace. In line with the discourse in the NAPs, several interviewees described violent extremism as a new dimension they needed to take into account when planning and carrying out a range of projects and activities, and violent extremism was seen as interfering with peacebuilding efforts. One interviewee voiced concern about the spread of insecurity and violence from the northern regions to the central regions (Mopti and Ségou): 'There are many more incidences related to extremist groups than secessionist rebel groups in these areas. So, we have no choice, we must begin to understand the phenomenon.'<sup>59</sup> This is interesting, given that women in the central Sahel seem to play more significant roles in ethnically based self-defence militias than in violent extremist groups,<sup>60</sup> and underlines that the identification of violent extremism as a 'new' threat must be understood as a discursive construction.

In Mali, the state and other 'traditional' security actors (the army, the police, the gendarmerie, and members of MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane) have not been able to address growing insecurity and the spread of extremist groups. It can be difficult to separate terrorists from rebels and criminals, and organizational structures and alliances are constantly shifting.<sup>61</sup> The problem extends beyond Mali, as violent extremism spreads across the Sahel. In other words, the enemy eludes traditional security actors and the traditional security response has so far proved insufficient.<sup>62</sup> Women's participation is then cast as a solution to the 'new' threat of violent extremism.

### *'New' tasks: influencing, counselling, informing*

Women are viewed as uniquely placed to influence their children, brothers and husbands not to join extremist movements. In the words of one interviewee,

<sup>58</sup> Charbonneau, 'Faire la paix au Mali'.

<sup>59</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Raineri, *Dogmatism or pragmatism?*, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Nicolas Desgrais, Yvan Guichaoua and Andrew Lebovich, 'Unity is the exception: alliance formation and de-formation among armed actors in Northern Mali', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 29: 4, 2018, pp. 654–79; Thurston, *Jihadists*.

<sup>62</sup> Charbonneau, 'Faire la paix au Mali'.

women can ‘advise their loved ones to be engaged, to disengage’.<sup>63</sup> This role as counsellors to their loved ones also includes intervening to reclaim a child or relative who is being radicalized but has not yet turned violent:

Most of the young people who were able to rejoin their families did so thanks to women. Either it’s their mom, or it’s their sister. There are also actions that have been thwarted or where we have been able to find a solution without the government being aware ... Because children are in the house, and when they talk it’s the moms who are home. They can say: Mother, we are trying to do this or that. And the woman informs the other women of the village and we quickly find a solution to tell the children not to do it.<sup>64</sup>

Respondents also noted how women ‘can approach the defence forces, the competent authorities, to inform them about cases of suspects or people who are not of a usual nature in society’.<sup>65</sup> In other words, women can gather and share information with the authorities: ‘To prevent [violent extremism] it may be necessary to put mechanisms in place, mechanisms to see as soon as there is, to make early warnings when we see Islamists, when they come to a community, it will be necessary to warn the authorities.’<sup>66</sup>

Cast in this role, women will operate as an extension of the state, performing ‘new’ security tasks, such as influencing, counselling and informing—each task enabled by their capacities and positions as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. While these tasks in themselves are not new, they can be understood as a ‘new’ element in the toolbox for preventing violent extremism. The assumption that women are naturally well placed to perform these tasks is, in turn, based on gender stereotypes of women as caring and peace-loving, and of motherhood as the central characteristic that enables women’s agency.

### ‘New’ time: prevention

When asked which roles women might play in the fight against violent extremism, interviewees highlighted the potential for ‘women [to] help rather in the prevention of violent extremism’,<sup>67</sup> and that the ‘prevention role that women are already doing is already important even at the village level’.<sup>68</sup> Many interviewees cited women’s roles as responsible for the upbringing and education of children:

The woman has a role of education, because, women are closer to the children. Because for us, you have to start from the ground up. Often once people have gone too far, it is difficult to bring them back. So that’s why I say, we focus on prevention. And the woman can play this role, of prevention.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Author interview, government representative, Bamako, Sept. 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

The Malian P/CVE NAP mentions the need to engage women and women's organizations in awareness-raising and in detection of radicalization under the pillar of prevention. It also identifies prison staff, teachers, youth and women's associations as in need of training to detect disturbing behaviour that can lead to radicalization, and suggests the need to 'promote women's participation in peace and security mechanisms at the national and community levels'.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the WPS NAP states that 'women, including young women, make a significant contribution to the detection, assessment of threats and the elimination of all conditions conducive to the development of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism', and that 'women are able to influence strategies and mechanisms for the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism'.<sup>71</sup>

While these official policy documents make reference to women's roles in formal security institutions, several interviewees referred explicitly to women's roles in prevention, and noted that actions related to *countering* violent extremism would be handled at a different level. As one interviewee put it: 'We [women] cannot combat extremism. But we can help to prevent violent extremism. Because, the combat has a security connotation.'<sup>72</sup> Thus, when they talk about women's roles in the fight against violent extremism, interviewees translate norms about women's participation by cutting away parts that do not seem to fit the local context. Women's participation is almost exclusively conceptualized as relevant for the prevention of violent extremism. While this does not necessarily reflect the way reforms of the security sector are envisioned according to the official policies of the Malian government and its international partners, it reflects traditional roles and expectations of women among groups such as the Fulani of the central Sahel, which prescribe obedience and modesty and consider a woman's place to be in the home.<sup>73</sup> Traditional security responses call for intervention to combat terrorism and violent extremism without women's involvement. But shifting the focus towards prevention opens up new roles for women.

### 'New' space: the private sphere

The shift towards a focus on prevention also moves vigilance for violent extremism into the private sphere. In Mali, the household has traditionally been considered women's sphere of political intervention,<sup>74</sup> and this shift thus makes women's contributions more relevant. When interviewees described women's contributions these were envisaged as being made almost exclusively in the private sphere. According to a civil society representative, 'the men [who engage in violent extremism] are either their children or their husband, their father or their brothers.

<sup>70</sup> *Document de politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent*, pp. 11–12, 16, 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Plan d'Action National pour la mise en œuvre de la Résolution 1325*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Raineri, *Dogmatism or pragmatism?*, p. 29.

<sup>74</sup> Rosa de Jorio, 'Women's organizations, the ideology of kinship, and the state in postindependence Mali', in Linda Stone, ed., *New directions in anthropological kinship* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 325.

So, the woman has links with all those men who can go into violent extremism.<sup>75</sup> Again, the private sphere is not a new space for women. It does, however, represent a 'new' space in the fight against violent extremism. We might note a paradox here: namely, that while feminists have fought to move women's roles and contributions into the public sphere, it is their contributions in the private sphere that are seen as qualifying them to play a role in the fight against violent extremism.

We see that by translating norms and discourses about women's participation and roles in P/CVE, interviewees reinterpret and reshape the embedded norms and ideas and adapt them to the local context. Arguments for women's participation in the fight against violent extremism are linked discursively to 'new' threats, tasks, time and space, and produce the discursive re-presentation of women as 'new security actors'. The rationales for including women build on the ideas that women can intervene where traditional security actors cannot, and that this is what is needed to achieve peace. 'New security actors' are characterized by their access to contexts that are out of reach for traditional security actors, both in time, because they operate to prevent violent extremism, and in space, because they operate mainly in the private sphere and through personal relationships. The discursive re-presentation of women as 'new security actors' outlines the image of an appropriate and competent woman who can contribute to the fight against violent extremism.

## Discussion

In the re-presentation of women as 'new security actors', we see that gender stereotypes are reproduced when women's ability to participate is seen as conditional on traditional gender roles associated with femininity. However, several interviewees talked about women as holding a unique position in Malian society that defied many traditional expectations. They argued that women's words are important and listened to, and that women are powerful despite being invisible in the public sphere: 'We know that even if the woman does not speak publicly in Mali, her word is very important.'<sup>76</sup> Women were also seen as exercising special powers, especially over their children, and to a lesser extent also over their brothers and husbands:

Here we have this saying that the child belongs to everyone, but his two ears belong to his mother. What does it mean? It means that it's up to the mother to educate her child, when the mother says to her child, from the beginning, you have to do this, you have to do that, the child will do what the woman [says]. If the mother says to the child, those are the people who killed your father or those are the people who did that, the child will grow up with hate and he's going to want revenge one day. So, it's from the family, with the mother, that these things are prepared. The fight against violent extremism, it starts from the family, from the community, the neighbourhood.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Author interview, government representative, Bamako, Nov. 2017.



This quote implies that Malian women are perceived as playing a negative role as well, in terms of violence. As Denia Chebli shows in her work on the 2012 rebellion, Tuareg women can exert considerable pressure on their husbands to engage in combat because it is very easy for them to obtain a divorce.<sup>78</sup> A recent study based in the central Sahel has also found that women may have multiple reasons for actively supporting violent extremist groups.<sup>79</sup> Behaviour among women that is violent, or encourages violence, was however seen as problematic, or understood as a type of behaviour not conducive to preventing violent extremism, and is therefore discouraged:

Women are so powerful, that if they are violent, and they enter violent extremism, it can have a boomerang effect, because not only will they perpetrate acts, but also, they have a huge role in the Malian society. Because they are the one advising their kids, advising their husbands.<sup>80</sup>

That women hold such powers over their children and husbands supports the image of women as 'new security actors' but fails to account for the differences that exist among Malian women. While Tuareg women may hold considerable sway over whether their husbands get involved in armed rebellion, gender roles vary greatly among Mali's diverse population. For example, among the mainly Bambara populations in the south, a woman's traditional place is at home and not in the public sphere where politics and economic affairs are conducted. This spatial separation of female and male realms of activity can also be found in other communities and is often reinforced in regions where Islam has a longer-standing influence. Although gradually changing, patriarchal norms of female propriety thus strongly influence expectations of women's behaviour in these communities.<sup>81</sup> This condition imposes some limitations on women's agency, especially in relation to husbands and older male family members. While it is often argued that adherence to patriarchal norms of female propriety may function as a source of informal influence, in many Malian communities such influence will be conditioned on women maintaining good relations with their husbands. In these situations, women's scope for influence and counselling is presumably offset by their need to maintain their husbands' trust and goodwill.

'New security actors' are also expected to alert the authorities if their loved ones are being radicalized or if they see something suspicious in their communities. Many areas in the south of Mali, where Bambara and Fulani communities live, have been less affected by armed conflict than others. In these areas, trust in the local security forces is still relatively high. However, Fulani communities in central Mali have experienced Malian armed forces of mainly Bambara ethnicity having 'detained, attacked and killed many Fulani people'. This has eroded trust in the central state and its security apparatus.<sup>82</sup> In contexts where trust in the

<sup>78</sup> Denia Chebli, 'La révolte en héritage: Militantisme en famille et fragmentation au nord-Mali (MNLA)', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 2: 234, 2019, pp. 453–81.

<sup>79</sup> Raineri, *Dogmatism or pragmatism?*, pp. 52–5.

<sup>80</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Dorothea E. Schulz, *Culture and customs of Mali* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), pp. 110, 129–31.

<sup>82</sup> Sandor, *Insecurity*, p. 13.

police and security forces is low, it is also likely that women will have reservations about informing the authorities about family members who are radicalized or associating with extremists. Despite this great diversity of experience, only one interviewee described a different aspect of motherhood which contradicts the expectations that, as ‘new security actors’, mothers will alert the authorities to the potential radicalization of their children: ‘They have a saying here in Mali, that a mother would always ... a mother will never leave the back of her child ... That even if your kid is a snake, you take it, and you tie it around your waist.’<sup>83</sup>

There is a striking silence in the dominant discourse on the failure to problematize the responsibility of the state in providing security and protection for its citizens. The concept of ‘new security actors’ is moulded around women’s gendered roles: they bear the transfer of responsibility from the state to individual women, and from the public to the private sphere. This shift puts women at risk while also preserving a gendered social order where the state, the international and the public are associated with masculinity, while the local, familial and private are associated with femininity. Translation of norms happens through processes of stereotyping, which suppresses the other identity markers of Malian women in addition to their roles as mothers, wives and sisters. This stereotyping of Malian women positions them to act as informal representatives of the Malian state apparatus, and to engage in new security practices which may or may not be suitable for them, depending on their location and identity.

The articulation of WPS norms about appropriate participation (as ‘new security actors’) and empowerment (through training and sensitization) further suggests that the location of knowledge production is not situated with individual women, but rather from the point of view of the international community, the state or local elites. The discursive re-presentation of women as ‘new security actors’ thereby contributes to reproducing the binary of local perpetrators and global saviours found in the global discourse. I argue that when intermediaries adapt elements of a discourse that reproduce global and local hierarchies, and mobilize women’s agency in service of the international community and the state, this constitutes some of the *unintended* consequences of translation.

Clearly, many of the universalizing tendencies pointed out by critics of the WPS agenda are reproduced through translation, while much of the transformative potential of WPS norms about women’s participation seems to have been lost in the process. Merry and Levitt refer to this as the ‘resonance dilemma’: when a ‘new’ idea or norm is very similar to the existing set of norms or ideas, it will be more readily adopted but is less likely to produce change. Norms that are very different are less likely to be adopted, but more likely to produce change.<sup>84</sup> This insight can explain the persistence and durability of the re-presentations of women and gender found in peace and security discourses over time, and in the UN WPS and P/CVE agendas specifically.

<sup>83</sup> Author interview, civil society representative, Bamako, Oct. 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Sally Merry and Peggy Levitt, ‘Remaking women’s human rights in the vernacular: the resonance dilemma’, in Lars Engberg-Pedersen, Adam Fejerskov and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, eds, *Rethinking gender equality in global governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 150.

Finally, the analysis shows how local intermediaries shape norms when they have access to discursive practices of re-presentation. However, the above discussion also shows that local intermediaries as defined in the current literature on norms do not represent the entirety of 'the local'. While their discursive practices highlight the entangled nature of 'local' and 'global' normative discourses, their perspective is partial, as are the re-presentations produced by these discourses. In fact, while interviewees were well placed to engage in discursive practices of re-presentation, none of them could speak on behalf of those women who could potentially play a role as 'new security actors'. When knowledge production remains located with the state, the international community or local elites, broader access to re-presentation is limited. 'New security actors' therefore remain 'actors' governed by norms unless they can get access to re-presentation and the norm-generative power which characterizes translating agents. The lack of access to re-presentation by a broader and more diverse set of stakeholders results in discourses about women's roles in the fight against violent extremism that are potentially pushing Malian women to engage in new security practices. Their roles as mothers, wives and sisters are leveraged for exclusionary purposes, and they risk being identified as informal representatives of the Malian state and its coercive apparatus. To avoid reductive re-presentations of women as 'new security actors', it is important to recognize women's agency in the community, civil society organizations and the public sector (including the security sector), in addition to their roles within the family.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have argued that discursive practices of re-presentation are a key aspect of norm translation, and that we can study the translation of norms about women's participation through the ways in which such norms are articulated in discourses about preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali. On the basis of a discourse analysis of 27 interviews with local intermediaries in norm translation, I find that re-presentations of women as victims, perpetrators and natural peace agents identified in UN policy discourses are being reproduced in the Malian discourse. However, a re-presentation of women as security actors in an extension of their roles as peace agents dominates in the discourse analysed for this article. I use the term 'new security actors' to describe this dominant re-presentation of women. This concept re-presents an appropriate and competent woman (an ideal-type) who can contribute to preventing radicalization and violent extremism by influencing, counselling or informing on her family and community members.

This article contributes to ongoing scholarly debates about the merging of the WPS and P/CVE agendas within the field of gender and security, as well as to the literature on norms in International Relations. It does so empirically, by analysing new data on Mali, and conceptually, by exploring the consequences of different stakeholders' engagement with the P/CVE and WPS agendas through a focus on how these engage in discursive practices of re-presentation.

Translation in Mali reproduces many of the universalizing tendencies which have been pointed out by critics of the WPS agenda; and discursive practices of re-presentation serve to reinforce the collapsing of differences into stereotypes of 'good' 'new security actors', and 'bad' accomplices and perpetrators. The re-presentation of women as 'new security actors' assumes that women will act in specific ways, while other actions are discouraged. Malian women are cast in roles either as allies of the state and the international community, who engage in counselling and informing, or as accomplices to terrorists, engaged in inaction or silence. These roles are assumed to securitize everyday life and personal relationships. 'New security actors' thus emerges as a problematic re-presentation, since it emphasizes traditional gender roles and potentially exposes women to risks.

Analysing discursive practices of re-presentation shows the agency of local intermediaries in norm translation. Yet the analysis has also shown that access to re-presentation is not equal, and that the resulting re-presentations tend to suppress diversity and (re)produce global and local hierarchies. This highlights the ambiguity of global norms and the way in which, when they are translated in new contexts, they may take on new meanings and functions. Such analysis is necessary since discourses are implicated in shaping behaviour, particularly in shaping the behaviour of the subject toward the Other, and may have real-life implications for policy, advocacy, programming and funding patterns. There is a risk that the discourse on women's roles in the fight against violent extremism could become implicated in shaping the behaviour of policy-makers towards 'new security actors'. This could result in misguided policies and further (re)production of hierarchies, as well as potential discrimination against and exclusion of certain individuals or groups of women.

Finally, the WPS agenda has been subject to criticism since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, and it has been argued that the agenda needs to be better adapted to the realities on the ground in the contexts where it is being implemented. The insights presented here support such arguments, and show that the implementation of the WPS agenda is not a linear process from a neo-liberal, internationally driven, top-down policy discourse towards a decolonized, locally owned bottom-up practice. Rather, the merging of the discourses on WPS and P/CVE in the Malian context produces re-presentations of women that are problematic and, in many ways, seem to contradict many of the normative aspirations in the WPS agenda.