# Reconceptualising Advocacy through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Achilleos-Sarll, Columba

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# Reconceptualizing Advocacy through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Embodiment, Relationality, and Power

Columba Achilleos-Sarll 🆔

*University of Birmingham, UK*

This article critically examines the embodied and relational politics of networked advocacy in the case of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the United Kingdom. Moving beyond liberal framings that position WPS advocacy as an attempt to overcome gender exclusion from peace and security policymaking, this article is concerned instead with the gendered, racialized, and classed logics and hierarchies (re)produced through the practice of WPS advocacy. Toward this end, this article conceptualizes advocacy as an embodied, relational practice where WPS meanings are shaped, power is negotiated, and individuals are interpolated into subject positions. This conceptual claim is substantiated through an initial, exploratory analysis of interviews conducted with UK NGO professionals and government officials. Examining the figures of the "critical friends" and the "shouty NGOs," I demonstrate how modes of advocating for WPS are ascribed and inscribed to certain bodies, which, in turn, reproduce power relations that affect the possibilities of the agenda. By reconceptualizing advocacy, the article contributes not only to WPS scholarship on civil society and advocacy but to wider debates within international political sociology around embodiment, relationality, and power. Additionally, it contributes empirically by highlighting how NGOs advocate for the WPS agenda.

Cet article analyse de façon critique la politique incarnée et relationnelle de la défense en réseau dans le cas du programme pour les femmes, la paix et la sécurité (FPS) au Royaume-Uni (RU). Pour dépasser les cadres libéraux qui classent la défense FPS comme une tentative de surmonter l'exclusion genrée de la politique de paix et de sécurité, cet article s'intéresse plutôt aux logiques et hiérarchies genrées, racialisées et classées qui sont (re)produites par la pratique de la défense FPS. À cette fin, cet article conceptualise la défense telle une pratique incarnée et relationnelle où les significations FPS sont formées, le pouvoir négocié et les personnes interpolées à des positions de sujets. Cette affirmation conceptuelle est justifiée à l'aide d'une analyse initiale et préliminaire d'entretiens menés avec des professionnels d'ONG et des fonctionnaires du gouvernement britanniques. En examinant les personnages d'≪ amis critiques ≫ et d'≪ ONG agressives ≫, je démontre comment les modes de défense des FPS sont attribués et dédiés à certaines entités qui, à leur tour, reproduisent les relations de pouvoir qui déterminent les possibilités du programme. En reconceptualisant la défense, l'article contribue à la recherche des FPS sur la société civile et la défense, mais traite aussi de débats plus larges au sein de la sociologie de la politique internationale (SPI) concernant l'incarnation, la relationalité et le pouvoir. En outre, il apporte une

contribution empirique en s'intéressant à la défense du programme FPS par les ONG.

Este artículo estudia, de forma crítica las políticas arraigadas y relacionales de la defensa de causas en red en el caso de la agenda Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad (MPS) en el Reino Unido. Este artículo llega más allá de los marcos liberales que posicionan la defensa de las causas de las mujeres, la paz y la seguridad como un intento de superar la exclusión de género dentro de la formulación de las políticas de paz y seguridad y, para ello, se ocupa de las lógicas y de las jerarquías de género, racializadas y clasistas, (re)producidas a través de la práctica de la defensa de las causas de las mujeres, la paz y la seguridad. Con este fin, este artículo conceptualiza la defensa de causas como una práctica relacional arraigada por la que se da forma a los significados de las causas de las mujeres, de la paz y de la seguridad, se negocia el poder y se interpolan los individuos hacia posiciones de subordinación. Esta afirmación conceptual se corrobora a través de un análisis exploratorio inicial procedente de entrevistas realizadas con profesionales de ONG y con funcionarios gubernamentales del Reino Unido. Demostramos, a través del estudio de las figuras de los ≪amigos críticos≫ y las ≪ONG gritonas≫, cómo los modos en que se aboga por las causas de las mujeres, la paz y la seguridad se pueden atribuir e inscribir en ciertos organismos, que, a su vez, reproducen relaciones de poder que determinan las posibilidades de la agenda. El artículo contribuye, por el hecho de reconceptualizar esta defensa de causas, no solo a los estudios en materia de mujeres, paz y seguridad en la sociedad civil y en la defensa de causas, sino que también aborda debates más amplios dentro de la Sociología Política Internacional (SPI) en torno a la corporeidad, la relacionalidad y el poder. Además, el artículo contribuye empíricamente debido a que también investiga cómo las ONG abogan por la agenda de las mujeres, la paz y la seguridad.

## Introduction

Civil society is at the heart of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and they have been since its inception with the passing of United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), which was the result of longstanding feminist theory, civil soceity organizing, and local activism around women's rights and needs in conflict and post-conflict settings. A further nine Security Council resolutions have since been adopted under the title of "Women, Peace and Security" and cohere to form the central architecture of this international political framework.[1] The resolutions articulate both principles and priorities and have been understood in terms of comprising four WPS pillars. These include the *protection* of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict states; the *participation* of women in peace and security governance; the *prevention* of conflict and (conflict-related sexual) violence; and gender-sensitive *relief and recovery* efforts to rebuild war-torn communities' post-conflict. The agenda now far exceeds this clutch of UN resolutions, and has acted as a catalyst for an array of campaigns, policies, and proximate agendas developed at state and regional levels that adopt a "gender perspective" on matters of international peace and security. Working tirelessly to keep the agenda alive, civil society invests both emotional and intellectual labor into generating and sustaining the WPS agenda (Achilleos-Sarll 2020a; Hamilton, Mundkur, and Shepherd 2021). Hence the agenda that emanates from UNSCR 1325 relies on the implementation

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[1] The resolutions, with years of adoption, include UNSCR 1325 (2000); UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009); UNSCR 1889 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013); UNSCR 2122 (2013); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2467 (2019); and UNSCR 2493 (2019).

of domestic policy by member states for its effectiveness, who are held to account by (networked) civil society organizations (CSOs) that provide continuous policy scrutiny.

Moving beyond liberal framings that position WPS advocacy as an attempt to overcome gender exclusion from peace and security policymaking, this article is concerned instead with the gendered, racialized, and classed logics and hierarchies (re)produced through the practice of WPS advocacy. Through an analysis of new empirical material, predominately interviews conducted with NGO professionals and government actors located in the United Kingdom, I study how WPS advocacy directed at the United Kingdom government—a powerful donor state—is negotiated and (re)produced at the intersection between "state" and "civil society." In so doing, I develop the concept of advocacy as an embodied, relational practice where WPS meanings are shaped, power is negotiated, and individuals are interpolated into subject positions. Indeed, it was insights from my interlocutors who discussed how organizations, and the gender experts within them, are gendered, racialized, and classed in ways that position them as certain "types" of advocate, depending on the performance, or practice, of WPS advocacy, which prompted me to revisit the concept. This included the figure of the "critical friend," a label that broadly describes gender justice advocates who work with governments as well as institutions of global governance to advance gender reforms to try and affect policy change (e.g., Holvikivi 2019; Chappell and Mackay 2020). Shifting the analytical focus away from the content behind WPS advocacy messages toward the embodied and relational politics of WPS advocacy, this article examines the positionality of networked advocates in relation to doing WPS advocacy with respect to their place within overlapping systems and hierarchies of power.

WPS advocacy, I argue, is not simply the extension or product of what advocates do—reports, briefing statements, and speeches, which might render advocates devoid of complexity and (inter-)corporeality. Rather, I contend that WPS advocacy, including how it is perceived and received, is intimately connected to embodiments of gender, race, class as well as other intersecting modalities of social power. Therefore, a key empirical and analytical goal is to foreground the intense boundary work and boundary crossing that goes into defining *what* counts as "acceptable" (WPS) advocacy (as a category of practice) and, by implication, *who* counts as a "respectable" and "competent" WPS advocate, with all the attendant gendered, racialized, and classed connotations that link respectability and competence to the disposition of certain bodies. Ultimately, I argue that how WPS is implemented is partly determined by the (gendered, racialized, and classed) logics of advocacy as an embodied, relational practice. This study therefore compliments and contributes primarily to the WPS scholarship on civil society and advocacy through a focus on the embodied relationality of advocates and the reproduction of hierarchies of power (e.g., Gibbings 2011; de Almagro 2018a; Mundkur and Shepherd 2018; Achilleos-Sarll 2020a; Hamilton, Mundkur, and Shepherd 2021), but it also speaks to wider debates within international political sociology regarding what social actors—in this case WPS advocates—*do* (Bigo and Walker 2007, 4). Indeed, IPS scholars demonstrate how modes of action are intimately connected to embodiments of gender and race as well as other intersecting vectors of power (e.g., Åhäll 2018; Dyvik and Welland 2018; Stern and Strand 2022). Moreover, while concerned with a single case, the issues it raises regarding who gets to be respected as a competent WPS advocate, including the advocacy that becomes (im)possible and (un)sayable, have wider implications for studying advocacy around other policy domains, a point I return to in the conclusion.

The article unfolds across three main sections. First, I appraise the WPS scholarship on civil society and advocacy, focusing on the literature concerned with the relationship between advocacy, embodiment, and relationality. In so doing, I make the

case for rethinking advocacy as an embodied, relational practice, including the importance of centering feminist work. I then draw from critical feminist scholarship to develop an analytical framework that facilitates this conceptualization. The final section substantiates and develops this claim through the case of UK-WPS networked advocacy. Primarily, the article contributes a novel conceptualization of advocacy in international relations as an embodied, relational practice with constitutive political effects, thus recognizing it as a distinct concept in International Relations (IR), but also contributes empirically by demonstrating how networked organizations advocate for the WPS agenda in a site beyond the UN. In conclusion, I consider the potential applicability of this conceptualization beyond research on WPS civil society and advocacy.

## WPS Civil Society and Advocacy

The role of civil society, particularly International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), has broadly been approached either from a liberal perspective, which views civil society as distinct from the state and as the promoter of liberal norms and values, or from a critical perspective that blurs the line between "state" and "civil society." As a corollary of a liberal perspective, advocacy is often assessed in binary terms as either a "success" or "failure," variously attaching to frameworks of "insider-ness" or "outsider-ness" (e.g., Bratton 1989; Eade 2000; Stromquist 2002; Batiwala and Brown 2006). The approach taken by WPS scholars to civil society largely follows more liberal framings, with the majority of literature focusing on the role of civil society, from how UNSCR 1325 was adopted (e.g., Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004; Cockburn 2007; Anderlini 2019) to continuing efforts to ensure 1325 and subsequent resolutions, protocols, and policies are implemented (e.g., El-Bushra 2007; Irvine 2013; MacLeod 2016; Mundkur and Shepherd 2018; Björkdahl and Selimovic 2019; Taylor 2019; Cook and Allen 2020; Susskind and Duarte 2019.[2] The account of WPS civil society has therefore mostly been celebratory, in part because civil society is positioned as a non-state actor and because feminist scholars working on WPS often locate their work at the intersection between scholarship and activism, meaning that they are much more likely to align politically. This contributes to perpetuating a normative conceptualization of WPS civil society as predominantly a force for good.

Moreover, focusing on advocacy as the product of different organizational strategies can inadvertently reduce advocates to a homogenous group of disembodied actors, disconnected from their laboring bodies; the bodies that *do* advocacy work. Advocacy is therefore mostly understood as a "thing" rather than a *doing*; processes of creation, curation, representation, negotiation, and re/interpretation. Conversely, placing greater emphasis on the discursive construction of "civil society" (e.g., Cox 1999; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Roy 2015; Shepherd 2015), critical perspectives help break down this binary thinking by highlighting the everyday work of advocates and organizations, including their internal and external struggles to navigate the politics of funding, state power, donors, and recipients, but they also speak to how subjects are constituted. Aligning with more critical, feminist perspectives, this article moves beyond an analysis of advocacy largely as the product of different organizational strategies, which positions civil society as distinct from the state, to focus instead on the gendered, racialized, and classed hierarchies and embodiments reinscribed through the performative politics of networked WPS advocacy.

The relationship between advocacy, embodiment, and relationality is rarely analyzed or explicitly theorized in WPS scholarship on civil society, perhaps owing

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[2]I am not suggesting that this work explicitly defines its approach to civil society as "liberal"; indeed, much WPS scholarship is mostly critical in its feminist orientation, but rather that the approach taken mirrors more liberal perspectives of civil society.

to the more liberal approach taken. There is a body of WPS scholarship, how-
ever, that highlights the emotional—or affective and embodied—dimension of
activist work, either undertaken at the UN Security Council (Gibbings 2011; Cook
2016; Lyytikäinen and Jauhola 2020; Hamilton et al. 2021; Shepherd 2021) or in
conflict and post-conflict environments (e.g., McLeod 2016; Almagro 2018b). An
important contribution is Gibbings' (2011) classic article that draws attention to
the affective labor of WPS advocates when she recalls a visit by two Iraqi women
activists, Amal Al-Khedairy and Nermin Al-Mufti, to the UN in 2003 to address an
informal group of gender advisors, NGOs, and government representatives. In re-
counting the visit, Gibbing explains that rather than discussing what was expected
of them—how women have participated in the reconstruction of Iraq—they instead
excoriated the US and UK-led invasion, which they denounced as imperialist. Trans-
gressing the norms and expectations that encourage emotions to be managed and
certain scripts to be followed, attendees expressed embarrassment at their "per-
formance," and their affect was labeled "angry," resulting in the dismissal of their
criticisms (p. 526). It is clear from this example that the aim of effective advocacy
has a distinctly emotional element: "policymakers have to *feel* differently in order
to *act* differently" (Hudson and Goetz 2014, 341–42), and civil society partakes in
orchestrating these relations by mediating between differently positioned actors, or-
ganizations, and institutions. This is ultimately a story of sensibility, including "how
people feel about the work that they do, and the dispositions they develop over
time, as they serve the agenda" (Shepherd 2021, 127).

Gendered, racialized, and classed hierarchies underwrite these affective rela-
tions and performative encounters, including the role and positionality of those
feminist "insiders/outsiders," variously described as "critical friends" (e.g., Bastick
and Duncanson 2015; Holvikivi 2019; Chappell and Mackay 2020) vis-à-vis govern-
ments, organizations, and activists working in-country. As Gibbing's (2011) example
demonstrates, it is usually women of color from the Global South that are "invited"
by mostly white, female advocates/organizations located in the Global North (the
"critical friends") to brief the Council. Holding a degree of institutional power, they
regularly act as gatekeepers, while Global South advocates are expected to perform
difference and otherness by recounting moving personal stories of conflict (Allen
2018). It is therefore not only powerful institutions that discipline how advocacy is
performed, but advocates and organizations discipline and self-censor themselves
and others.

Yet, while there is now a growing and wide ranging body of WPS scholarship
concerned with the reproduction of race and coloniality in the WPS agenda
(e.g., Pratt 2013; Basu 2016; Shepherd 2016; Weerawardhana 2017; de Almagro
2018a; Achilleos-Sarll 2020b, 2023; Haastrup and Hagen 2020; Parashar 2019;
Muehlenhoff 2022), much less attention has been paid to the way race as it inter-
sects with other social markers manifests in WPS advocacy (Achilleos-Sarll 2020a).
Indeed, often missing from accounts of critical friendship more broadly is an exam-
ination of the racialized assumptions that might underpin this embodied position
and, moreover, what happens when it goes awry. It appears that in an effort to avoid
stigmatizing the "critical friends" who have the difficult task of trying to (re-)gender
political institutions, race is overlooked. However, by moving beyond liberal ac-
counts of civil society and advocacy as a material product, and attending to the
(re)inscription of gendered, racialized, and classed hierarchies and embodiments
through the performative politics of advocacy complicates how we understand how
the "critical friends" are positioned in relation to wider structures of power, but also
in terms of who can be seen as—or indeed *become*—a critical friend of a government
or institution, with implications for the advocacy that gets practiced.

Situated within the WPS scholarship on civil society and advocacy, this article
seeks to expand and complement this literature in two distinct ways. Firstly, by con-
ceptualizing advocacy as an embodied, relational practice, I move away from a lib-

eral approach that examines WPS advocacy simply as a product and strategy to overcome gender exclusion from peace and security policymaking, and which positions civil society as the promoter of liberal norms and values, to instead consider how WPS advocacy is ascribed and inscribed to certain bodies thus reinscribing power relations that delimit the boundaries and possibilities of the agenda. This analytical shift provides an opening that enables an analysis that challenges liberal and overly normative conceptualizations of civil society as representing a space of pure opposition. Secondly, I study networked WPS advocacy in a site beyond the UN. Studying WPS advocacy directed toward a powerful donor government through a body of new interview material highlights how WPS advocacy, and the WPS agenda itself, is (re)produced and negotiated at the intersection between "state" and "civil society." Having established the need to investigate the embodied and relational politics of WPS advocacy from a critical, feminist perspective, the following section develops a conceptual framework to enable that investigation.

## Conceptualizing Advocacy as an Embodied, Relational Practice

Following insights from feminist post-structuralism, I understand advocacy as a collection of discourses; representations about subjects/objects that are woven together into "systems of meaning-production" (Shepherd 2008, 20). Through the description and/or depiction of people, places, and things within "text" (broadly understood), subjects/objects are attributed qualities/characteristics that render them known/knowable (Doty 1993, 1996; Shepherd 2008, 2021). They are constituted not only within discourse but also become the products of those representational practices (Doty 1993; Hall 1997). As Shepherd (2021, 31) explains, "different discourses configure. . .attachments of meaning quite differently" by promulgating certain assumptions about, for example, women's roles within peacebuilding. One such representation may configure the subject of the "female peacebuilder" as an agent in building peace and guaranteeing security due to an association between femininity and peacefulness, while another might render that same subject a helpless victim of war due to an association between femininity and victimhood. Those representations are arranged in accordance with "privileged discursive points" (such as gender and race), as well as particular logics (Shepherd 2021, 33) that, through signification, fix meaning, however temporarily, in often hegemonic ways (Doty 1996, 10). This semblance of "fixity" "delineates the terms of intelligibility" in accordance with a logic of possibility (Doty 1996, 6; Shepherd 2021, 62, 75). To study advocacy is therefore to study discourse, which can be excavated, for example, through the analysis of civil society reports, speeches, and briefing statements and the meanings they contain.

To fully comprehend the totality of meaning-making embedded in advocacy, I argue that it is necessary to go beyond an understanding of advocacy as a collection of discourses, because "discursive processes also always have material, affective, atmospheric, embodied, and mobile characters" (Åhäll 2019, 155). While discourse may refer to 'texts', it also relates to the linguistic and behavioural social practices that are linked to the text, which have constitutive political effects (Doty 1996, 239; Shepherd 2008, 18; Wilcox 2014). Discourses are "embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour…which, at once, impose and maintain them" (Fairclough 1977, 100; cited in Shepherd 2008, 19). The first theoretical move I therefore wish to make is to bring together the embodied *and* discursive in my understanding of advocacy, and to do that I turn to Pedwell (2010, 6), who employs the term "discursive-material" to capture the complex imbrication between the "discursive" and the "embodied" (see also Ahmed 2000; Wilcox 2014; Dyvik 2016; Åhäll 2019). Embodiment, which is effectively the lived experience of the body, Pedwell (2010) and other feminists argue foregrounds bodies not only

as discursively marked, represented, and thus inert, but also as places where discourses manifest, producing the doing, or agential, subject (Shepherd 2021, 31; see also Stern and Strand 2022). This compels us to consider "bodies as sites of performance in their own right rather than nothing more than surfaces for discursive inscription" (Dowler and Sharp 2010, 169). In other words, discourses are not simply overlaid onto the body "as if these bodies offered blank surfaces of equal topography" (Ibid) but are reproduced in and through the body. Thus, while gender and other modalities of social power constitute organizing logics within discourse, they are not disembodied but rather "acted *on* and *by* physical bodies" (Pedwell 2010, 6; see also Grosz 1994; Braidotti 2002, 2005; Wilcox 2014). As Butler argues, it is through stylized acts that the body is transformed "into *his* body or *her* body" (Butler 1988, 523, emphasis added). Race and gender are therefore neither fixed categories nor are they fixed categories of experience but rather power relations (e.g., Ahmed 2004, 150).

As critical feminist scholarship argues, performances do not simply follow from identities but are instead produced through and because of those performances, i.e., it is not only putatively male bodies that *do* advocacy in "masculine" ways. This is not to deny that how people understand their identities also shapes their performances and that those performances are, in turn, shaped by our expectation that we will be disciplined by others if we do not perform in the *right* way (Butler 2004).[3] In other words, "the performative aspect of discourse works through repetitions and citations which, in turn, produce, regulate, and destabilise the subject" (Butler 1988, 523). Embodiment and the production of the subject are thereby interlinked and co-constituted: Subjects are "both produced and productive, both discursively constituted and embodied" (Dyvik 2016, 21). Bringing together the discursive and embodied into a conceptualization of advocacy facilitates the study not only of advocacy messages and strategies but also of how advocacy practices, or performances, are inscribed and ascribed to certain (gendered, racialized, and classed) bodies in ways that reinscribe certain hierarchies that have constitutive political effects on the possibilties of advocacy.[4]

Given the above, it is theoretically unhelpful to separate what we might understand as the "discursive self" from the "embodied self." The discursive and embodied are intimately bound; "we" are the effects or products of certain discourses (of gender, race, and class), but those effects are located in embodied selves. Discourses therefore manifest not only through "text"—or linguistic strategies—but also through physical and sensory perceptions, experiences, and atmospheres as we encounter, navigate, and try to make sense of the world. Accordingly, advocacy is communicative and therein relational, informing an audience about the character, identity, and sensibility of the advocate, as well as constitutive, meaning that the practice of advocating produces the advocate, who does not exist outside the practice or power relations in question. As such, "bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves" (Ahmed 2004; Brennan 2004; Berlant 2011, 15; Åhäll 2018; Welland 2021). Advocacy is therefore not limited to spoken and written words, it is also about delivery and modes of relationality, including "how bodies are positioned and valued in relation to other bodies" (Åhäll 2018, 41). There is a back-and-forth discursive circularity at work that depends on audience reception but also uptake, to the extent that framings or recommendations used by civil society are adopted (in purer or more moderated forms) by the target of advocacy.

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[3]I thank Hannah Wright for encouraging me to draw out this point.

[4]While I acknowledge that practice theory also draws attention to practices as meaningful patterns of action, I do not believe that practice theory lays sole claim to the concept of "practice" as used here. As I demonstrate in this section, my understanding of advocacy as an embodied, relational practice instead draws heavily from feminist theories of discourse, embodiment, and relationality, which offer the conceptual tools that allow me to interpret my interview data. I thank Roxani Krystalli who helped me arrive at this point.

This connection constitutes the second theoretical move that takes account of the relationality of advocates and other actors operating within the hybrid, or liminal space between "state" and civil "society" (see Pratt and Rezk 2019, 250). Indeed, what is often overlooked is "how particular intersections might be linked, or connected to, other intersections" (Pedwell 2010, 40). That is, "embodied subjects are constituted (as "sexed," "gendered," and "racialized") through contextually specific configurations of power" (Pedwell 2010, 16; see also Crenshaw 1989) that navigate social relations: "embodiment is always already *the social experience of dwelling with other bodies*" (Ahmed 2000, 47, emphasis in original). As Åhäll (2019, 155) writes, "paying attention to how certain (gendered, raced, sexed) subjects become the objects of others' affective responses means that the focus must also be on the shape (gender/sex) and surface (skin/race) of bodies." In other words, embodied subjects are constituted through "the boundaries of communities. . .demarcated and fortified by expelling those 'others' who, on account of their 'marked' bodies, are seen not to 'belong'" (Pedwell 2010, 56; see also Puwar 2004). Therefore, by attending to the relationality of subjects highlights how embodiment is mediated through processes of organizing, networking, and othering, and how gender, which is fundamental to how social worlds operate, plays a fundamental role in these processes. The embodied and discursive self is therefore bound within the social environment where advocacy, and in particular networked advocacy, is performed, which can serve, as I demonstrate empirically, as a form of restraint—both disciplining and self-disciplining.

Conceptualizing advocacy as an embodied, relational practice allows for an examination of advocacy in two ways. Firstly, by rethinking advocacy as "discursive-embodied," advocacy emerges not only as a position that is taken on a certain issue but also as an embodied practice; something that advocates *do,* the effect of bodies that work, bodies that *do* advocacy work. Advocacy is therefore an ongoing process that happens not only to bodies but also *because* of bodies. Centering advocates and their embodiments of gender, race, and class facilitates an investigation into how those that advocate for the WPS agenda are not only inscribed within wider systems and hierarchies of power but are themselves also the products or effects of those power relations. Secondly, this conceptualization highlights how those power relations shape the way NGOs/NGO professionals advocate, exposing the effects of the discourses they use and opening future avenues for research that I return to in the conclusion. This is important because it reveals the relational asymmetries *within* and *between* differently socially located organizations and advocates and what becomes possible within certain networked WPS advocacy communities. The analytical framework developed here foreshadows the empirical investigation. Preceding that, I outline the methodology in the following section.

## Methodology

In 2018 and 2019, I conducted sixty-five in-depth semistructured interviews with fifty-four participants, including thirty-four NGO professionals, eighteen UK government officials, and two independent consultants working in the WPS field in the UK.[5] The empirical sections that follow draw from a selection of those interviews and observations, mostly from those conducted with NGO professionals, about their experience advocating for the WPS agenda. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, all interview data are fully anonymized. These NGO professionals work

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[5]For many scholars, including those who write on WPS, NGOs are seen as either part of the fabric of civil society, or are themselves "civil society organizations." Whilst I follow those who position NGOs as a prominent actor within civil society, I also recognize that NGOs are a particular form of political organization (see Eade 2000; Stromquist 2002; Batiwala and Brown 2006). I therefore use "NGO professional" instead of civil society when referring to interviews to acknowledge that they are part of distinct organizations, whilst also highlighting they are form part of a wider civil society network advocating for WPS, a network that self-defines as "civil society."

for a wide range of different organizations, including human rights, humanitarian, peacebuilding, development, and women's rights organizations. Most have come to work with and advocate for WPS via the UK's only civil society WPS network, Gender Action for Peace and Security.[6] They define their role on their website as follows: "We were founded to progress the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Our role is to promote and hold the United Kingdom Government to account on its international commitments to women and girls in conflict areas."

The network is effectively the sum of its member organizations and boasts extensive capillary connections with a global WPS policy and advocacy community. Broadly, the network engages in two types of advocacy work. The first relates to the adoption, and thereafter monitoring, of UK National Action Plans (NAPs), through regular consultations, meetings, and reports. The second concerns thematic issues around WPS (like the arms trade) or provides detailed empirical research on a region, or country, which is mostly led by individual, member organizations, who have the necessary expertise and access. The intention, however, is not to center the network in the analysis, but rather to use them as a conduit to consider the advocacy and experiences of a range of networked WPS advocates. I therefore do not engage in an examination of individual organizations or include advocacy materials to discuss specific civil society recommendations. While recognizing that this is an important part of the story, it is beyond the scope of this article, but is addressed elsewhere as it forms part of a larger research project, of which this article is one component. Additionally, a focus on interviews "provides a wider range of discursive practices. . .a constellation of meaning-in-use in a very literal way" (Shepherd 2017, 28).

The empirical sections are framed around the figures of the "critical friends" and the "shouty NGOs," which are understood as fluid categories of discursive representation and embodiment. These were terms, especially the former, that were sometimes used by my interlocuters to describe how advocates and organizations endeavor to maintain access to and a close working relationship with the UK government so to influence, shape, and critique WPS (and related gender) policy. The term circulates within NGO communities beyond WPS to highlight the relational dynamics between NGOs and governments, institutions, and international organizations.[7] While critical friend was the most common descriptor, the "shouty NGO" was also used on occasion to describe what happens when the norms associated with critical friendship are transgressed. The intention, however, is not to present these categories as exhaustive, monolithic, or entirely separate from one another, as they are neither fixed nor clearly demarcated. Advocates do not remain static within them, but instead move along, between, and beyond them. They are therefore used heuristically to order and make sense of (some of) the data by contextualizing the embodied and relational politics of UK-WPS networked advocacy and locating it as part of wider systems, hierarchies, and structures of power. As such, the empirical material presented makes no claim to be fully representative of all UK-based WPS advocates/organizations; rather, I pull out a few key themes to unpack both subject positions, which provoked me to revisit the concept of advocacy.

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[6]At the time of writing, twenty NGOs are currently network members. These include ActionAid; Amnesty International; CARE International; Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy; Conciliation Resources; International Alert; International Rescue Committee; Legal Action Worldwide; Mercy Corps; Northern Ireland Women's European Platform; Oxfam; Plan International; Saferworld; United Kingdom National Committee for UN Women; United Nations Association-United Kingdom; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Womankind Worldwide; Women for Women International; SecurityWomen; and Peace Direct.

[7]It is worth noting here that the term "critical friend" has been traced back to educational research, particularly radical pedagogy (Costa and Kallick 1993). More relevant to this research, however, is that it has also been taken up by feminist researchers seeking to understand how feminist scholars studying gender experts working to advance gender reform agendas are relationally situated (e.g., Chappell and Mackay 2020; Holvikivi 2019). In this context, I recognize that I could also be considered a critical friend.

Focusing on the UK has also meant that the bodies and subjects produced by and on the receiving end of UK-WPS policies, programs, and advocacy in conflict and post-conflict environments have become an inextricable part of the analysis. These include activists and advocates working in-country who connect to the network to lobby the UK government on WPS-related matters regarding their countries and areas of concern, but I did not interview anyone from this constituency directly. Instead, they appear through secondary literature and interview data rather than at first-hand. While this is certainly a limitation that produces its own set of exclusions, it is also indicative of how certain bodies are represented and/or absented through the hierarchies reproduced not only through WPS policy but also through WPS advocacy. However, this was also a conscious decision. I decided not to conduct interviews in conflict and/or post-conflict sites where the UK is "implementing" or "supporting" WPS activities as I felt my intellectual efforts were better served to "study-up" (Nadar 1972; Shepherd 2017; Hagen 2021; Hagen et al. 2023), focusing on the advocacy directed toward a powerful donor government. As Shepherd (2017, 4) writes, these structures and institutions "deserve our analytical attention, not least because the policies and governance frameworks devised at that level have such profound impacts on so many people across the world."

### The "Critical Friends"

There was consensus amongst those I spoke with from the UK government that they welcomed and valued the involvement, expertise, and consultations with civil society over WPS matters, which they regarded as a necessary part of a well-functioning democracy. As Lang (2013, 33) explains, the intention to "'[strengthen] civil society' has become a formula for democracy frequently cited by government commissions, [and] donor agencies." What is more is that in the UK and elsewhere, it is now almost impossible to imagine the WPS agenda without acknowledging the role of civil society. This was reiterated by a government official who noted that in the UK they have become an "assumptive situation" (GOV03a-2018). Since the adoption of the UK's first NAP in 2006, and in conjunction with the proliferation of the WPS "ecosystem" (Kirby and Shepherd 2021), the network engaged in intense advocacy efforts to formalize their relationship with the UK government (Achilleos-Sarll 2020a). One NGO professional explained that this had been a strategic choice that had led them to being on the "inside," which they told me had enabled "quiet diplomacy," described as having "the telephone of whoever is advising the UK ambassador to the Security Council" (Interview data, NGO06b-2018). This was also reflected in the remarks of another NGO professional, who explained that such a close working relationship was uncommon across other policy domains, thus describing it as "quite spectacular" (Interview data, UK, NGO02a).

However, it was not simply "civil society" writ large whose involvement the government welcomes, but a particular type of advocate and relationship—one that accords with critical friendship. One government interviewee expressed, "it is helpful that our civil society partners continue to be critical friends" (Interview data, GOV08a-2018). This was explained in terms of being both a partner and also serving as a challenge function—though with greater emphasis often placed on the former. Presumably, because the civil society stamp of approval confers a degree of legitimacy on the government, they are encouraging it to continue. NGO professionals reinforced this view: "The critical friend formulation is a way to make the government comfortable with our relationship with them, at the same time [as making] us comfortable" (Interview data, NGO17a-2018). As a two-way relationship, finding that state of equilibrium is necessary to ensure a close working relationship where both sets of actors find themselves equally comfortable. The relationship is, after all, partly reciprocal, to the extent that some advocates/organizations are invested in, and benefit from, maintaining this relationship, not least because, as one partic-

ipant put it: "We are talking about a sector that provides a lot of jobs and salaries so how do you balance that with saying truth to power, and what does that looks like?" (Interview data, NGO09a-2018).

The make-up of INGO sector broadly reflects the agency of mostly white, urban, middle-class, highly educated, professionalized policy experts with white men over-represented at senior decision-making levels and with the larger and better funded organizations headquartered and concentrated in the Global North, meaning that the direction and control of INGO activity are firmly located in Western Europe and North America (see de Jong 2017). However, those that have come to work on WPS are drawn from a particular class of people: Mostly white, middle-class women, who have professional roles as either "gender experts" or "gender advisors." They therefore form a distinct community of actors, socialized in part through shared experiences of education and social class, creating a sense of collective identity but also group position in that they broadly self-identify as feminists.

In the Global North, white, middle-class women are the somatic norm in the WPS advocacy community. While the critical friends are privileged, professional-ized, strategic partners on the one hand, they are also patronized feminists on the other hand, in that they occupy a subordinate position vis-à-vis the UK government as well as within the wider NGO sector. They are simultaneously both insiders *and* outsiders. This was reflected in the following:

> These women were viewed by some of the people we were lobbying as "nice girls" – pat them on the head. It was very much a belief that we didn't understand; we couldn't really understand security issues…the feeling that we didn't understand warfare, se-curity, the fact we were talking about "women's issues" which were a different thing, and a subset thereof. It was frustrating to watch because I had so much respect for these people that I was working with, and I knew that they were brilliant [but] they were being viewed and treated like they were The Women's Institute (Interview data, NGO14a-2018).

Although the above is the situated, lived experience of this interviewee, I heard other versions of this same story. They are required to respect the gendered hierar-chies of the relationship with the UK government, which is constructed and repro-duced as the site of both "expertise" and "leadership" (Achilleos-Sarll 2023, 8–10), housing the "universal" aka disembodied political actor (Puwar 2004, 14, 57; see also Wright 2021). That said, this patronized status was not universally felt across all gov-ernment departments that technically owned WPS prior to the government merger in 2020. This included the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Ministry of Defence (MoD)(the first two forming the FCDO) and taking the lead on WPS matters. The same interviewee continued: "it felt in some parts of the government we were respected and under-stood for the work that we did. And in other places, we were just the nice girls that you had to say encouraging things to and send them on their way. . .Some parts of DFID gave us far more respect" (Interview data, NGO14a-2018). In contrast, they remarked: "you would turn up to the MOD and you would be met by a load of men in white shirts who had all been or served in the military, and you would have this group of women, largely academic leaning, and then this group of white men in white shirts. And we would start with the absolutely basics, so maybe they thought we didn't understand more than the absolute basics" (Interview data, NGO14a-2018). As I have discussed elsewhere, "Until the merger, although the FCO was technically the lead department, it was DFID that was regularly cited during interviews as being the most progressive and left-leaning, housing considerable expertise on WPS, as well as gender equality and women's rights" (Achilleos-Sarll 2023, 9), and one of the reasons why the merger has been so frustrating for organisations working on WPS.

The position of the critical friend is gendered, racialized, and classed in ways that reproduce this subject as the "ideal" or "preferred" (WPS) advocate. Rooted in a distinctly European, white, middle-class, notion of "respectable femininity" (Puwar 2004, 24), understood in terms of polite deference aka not being seen to be too feminist or too critical, successfully adopting the position of, or becoming, a "critical friend" of the government offers a degree of access and, therefore, power. Despite performing respectability through middle-class whiteness, being predominately women working on supposedly "women's issues" contributes—as the interviews above alluded to—to marginalizing WPS as an optional extra in UK government policymaking, which is a critique that has also been made in other contexts. The association of WPS with "women's issues" is a common WPS stereotype that serves to devalue WPS work (e.g., Henshaw 2022) as well as naturalize (and feminize) the work of civil society, which is consistently, albeit unevenly, "underappreciated and underfunded" (Hamilton, Mundkur, and Shepherd 2021, 7). This creates an environment wherein WPS advocates are not seen as fully rational political actors, which, in part, curtails their influence on policymaking. This also maps onto wider discursive framings of "civil society," which, as Shepherd writes (2015, 892), is configured differently across different socio-political and historical contexts.

Due to the associations described above, there are gendered distinctions that reproduce the WPS "civil society" community as a feminized space, in so far as it is populated mostly by women working on gender equality and women's rights. Those men that do come to work in the WPS space I was told were sometimes treated slightly differently. As one participant recalled, "there was a sort of feeling that if you were a man talking about WPS you were treated differently and had more access and more voice. It's probably true for any women working in any issues in development, but when you are talking about security issues, it was easier for those men to be seen as people that knew what they were talking about" (Interview data, NGO14a-2018). Therefore, although NGOs are often referred to in government documents such as the NAP as "partners," "friends," or "consultants" of the UK government on WPS matters, those who advocate for WPS are clearly marginalized by and required to respect the gendered hierarchies of the relationship, but there are also gendered hierarchies within the civil society space on account of one's positionality. Therefore, it is not that they are "excluded from the state. Instead, through a series of hierarchies of inclusion they become included differently" (Puwar 2004, 24).

As gender experts and advisors, it was unsurprising, then, that the majority of those I spoke with self-identified as feminists. This was often cited as a key motivation for their WPS work, with several first encountering WPS during their university education. Although most of the NGO professionals would often self-identify as feminists during interviews, in contrast, the majority—though not all—of the NGOs that employ them seldom profile their organizations as "feminist." It was evident that some of these organizations actively distance themselves from feminism so as not to be associated with the "f" word. As one participant remarked: "Organizations hesitate before putting the word 'feminism' in"(Interview data, NGO05a-2018). Therefore, it was not so much that advocates refused to publicly identify their organizations as feminist, but often it was their colleagues, especially those in senior roles, that did the refusing.

It also seemed that some government actors were reluctant to label WPS advocates as "feminists." Instead, one minister described the network in the following terms: "They are predominately [sic] women, not wholly women, I don't view them as feminists, I view them as human rights communities, with injustice as their driving force, rather than promoting feminism" (Interview data, GOV03a-2018). This appeared to signal an effort to erase and/or deny feminism as a political framework and project that could influence government policymaking, and it therefore seemed necessary for this policymaker to disassociate feminism with advocating for the WPS agenda. In this context, WPS was seen as a more comfortable policy than,

say, feminist foreign policy, stating the unlikelihood of the UK ever describing its foreign policy in those terms: "I just don't think we will get there" (Ibid; see also Achilleos-Sarll 2023, 8). There was an icky-ness attached to feminism; one that positioned feminism as unruly, improper, threatening, and distinctly feminine, altogether antithetical to realpolitik. Some advocates expressed a shared concern that using feminist terminology to profile an individual or an organization could therefore potentially "close doors with the government and. . .limit some of the advocacy that was being undertaken" (Interview data, NGO21a-2018). This strategic awareness and sensitivity to anything that might jeopardize their position appeared emblematic of practicing critical friendship. There is a double refusal, or unspoken pact, at work in relation to the usurpation of feminist discourse by government ministers alongside a hesitancy by WPS advocates resulting from proximity to government structures and resources.

Part of practicing critical friendship involved conducting and performing what was occasionally described as "solutions-oriented advocacy," which was often synonymous with "sensible," "rational" advocacy. On several occasions, I was told that the government encourages organizations to focus on the technicalities of "how to" implement WPS, even if the problem as they see it is the state's interpretation of WPS and particularly its understandings of "peace" and "conflict." Thus, some NGO professionals reiterated the pressure on NGOs to be "solutions-oriented," as it is frequently described in the sector. In this "solutions-oriented" culture, advocates are expected to provide practical and technical solutions to implementation. This, one NGO professional explained, put organizations in an "existential crisis" over their identity (Interview data, NGO06b-2018). A few participants linked solutions-based advocacy to the norm of rationality, associated with certain "types" of organizations and their respective approaches to advocacy, which have deeply masculinized connotations. For example, one NGO professional observed that the peacebuilding organizations were the archetypal example of the "critical friends" in that they "tend to almost brand themselves as think-tanky in the way their analysis [is] very sober, [isn't] 'shouty' in a way they might see the human rights organisations" (Interview data, NGO04b-2018). The same participant explained how they provide "measured. . .rational analysis" (Interview data, NGO04b-2018).

Hence, government officials often equated "rational" (problem-solving) advocacy with "effective" and "realistic" advocacy, which was contrasted with advocacy that was understood as "unrealistic" and "ineffective" and thus often deprioritized. This included calling out government hypocrisy and exclusions in UK-WPS policy, particularly the UK NAP, in relation to, for example, the arms trade, Northern Ireland, and migration—longstanding advocacy asks which would destabilize the state's framings of "peace" and "conflict" (Achilleos-Sarll 2020a) and thus challenge "its marginalizations and discriminations" (Parashar 2019, 5; see also Haastrup and Hagen 2020, 136; Achilleos-Sarll 2023, 3). Interestingly, it was these perennial demands that were often associated with the performative politics of more vocal or "shouty" advocacy, which I turn to in the following section. Reflecting on the foregoing, a policymaker remarked: "it's the business of government to provide policy based on a bit more objectivity and balance" (Interview data, GOV03a). Thus, practicing critical friendship requires negotiating a relationship comfortable for both sides to enable a line of communication to the government, but this includes making strategic decisions about what advocacy is pursued, where, and how. Clearly, civil society facilitates, even if unwillingly so, the appropriation of the agenda, which then gets stripped of its feminist content, in exchange for access, but often with limited success.

### The "Shouty NGOs"

The second subject position to emerge I describe as the "shouty NGOs"; those seen as (occasionally) breaking the unwritten rules of "rational" and "solutions-

oriented" advocacy described above associated with white, middle-class bodies. The possibility that an advocate might be typecast as "irresponsible," "inflammatory," and "aggressive" (aka "shouty") by the UK government was highlighted when interviewees described how an advocate, or an organization, might be labelled if they transgress the norms that govern formal spaces of encounter with the UK government. Norms that are based on an unwritten social code that all advocates are expected to know and adhere to (see also Gibbings 2011). This has broadly been described in terms of "NGO speak": An advocacy repertoire that organizations and advocates must acquire to ensure they retain access to funds and maintain their status (Aksartova 2009, 171). These spaces of encounter welcome some advocacy recommendations—and ways of presenting those recommendations, while proscribing others. It was not so much an explicit naming, but rather an atmospheric "feltness" (Welland 2021, 61), as I discuss further below, that would shift their status within the advocacy community. The term was used to refer not only to those working within the UK-WPS advocacy community but also to local activists and organizations working in conflict and post-conflict environments (an analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this article).

The adjective "shouty" refers to a particular type of anger often associated with emotional women who speak outside the cultural norms and social expectations that discipline their bodies and behaviors (Young 2000; Puwar 2004; Hage 2006; Ahmed 2017). Historically, the psychological state of a woman who displays behaviors thought to deviate from these norms has often been pathologized as "irrational," "hysterical," or "emotional." The possibility that one could be perceived as being *too* "emotional" encourages self-censorship and self-effacement; the need to manage one's dispositions in a predominantly white male (or white female) context. As one interviewee expressed: "You want to be in there, but it also constrains you—you are trying to have a line of communication, so people are going to listen. So, you can't be too confrontational" (Interview data, NGO01a-2018). Controlling emotions was therefore viewed by some as necessary to performing advocacy in a way so that they could be seen as a rationally acting subject and so heard and taken seriously.

Take the following quote by an NGO professional describing what happens when someone speaks outside the implicit norms governing a space:

> In that moment a whole set of norms have been transgressed. You feel it, and you know that it's awkward, and you just know from the government's response…that that they are forming a view of that person…You are all thinking "I'm glad it's not me standing up and saying that because that will undermine my relationship with these people and that's what my job depends on, maintaining these relationships." (Interview data, NGO04b-2018)

There is a particular emotional labor associated with uncomfortable encounters resulting from performing advocacy circumscribed as being "out of place" (Puwar 2004). Brennan (2004, 3, 51) explains how an individual experience is embedded within a wider social environment that can produce an "affective atmosphere"; "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'?" (Brennan 2004, 1). Focusing on the social and how emotion and affect are always partial, contextual, and embodied, Ahmed explains, "I turned to emotions as they help me to explain not only how we are affected in this way or that, by this or that, but also how those judgements then hold or become agreed as shared perceptions" (Ahmed 2014, 208; see also Åhäll 2018, 40). That performance, those judgments, and that "feltness" (Welland 2021, 61) create an environment wherein certain advocates struggle to be seen as competent and capable and are aware and reminded of the possibility that it may affect the dynamics of future encounters, relationships, and advocacy asks.

The following describes how that those awkward moments might be managed by advocates in relation to specific advocacy demands:

> It's about bracketing out the difficult issues and focusing on the areas where you can engage with the government. So, for example, with Yemen, instead of criticising UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, you applaud them for giving money to Yemeni women's organisations to participate in the peace talks and push for more funding. (Interview data, NGO18b-2018)

There are direct resonances with Gibbings' (2011) "angry" Iraqi women activists at the UN. Indeed, such stories highlight what happens when carefully curated advocacy demands directed at a powerful donor state meet activism dealing with the immediate violent effects of war and conflict on the ground. Several participants explained what might happen when the "critical friend" goes awry (talking about arms sales as mentioned), to say something others might not, and which others might perceive as a misjudging of the time, place, and purpose of advocacy.

This also spoke to a racialized division of labor wherein some bodies often shoulder (or are expected to shoulder) the burden of critique more than others (the "shouty NGOs")—and the insecurities inherent in adopting that position, not least because this often also carries the burden of representation. Conversely, other bodies, notably the "critical friends," who are in positions of relative privilege, can shoulder the burden more easily and are less likely to be dismissed for doing so. Crucially, bodies that are white and middle class often occupy the "critical friends" space more easily, whilst also appearing to be more "rational." Relatedly while some participants highlighted efforts to offset this burden on local organizations working in conflict and post-conflict settings to navigate the wider NGO and aid sector hierarchies and politics, for example, by, say, taking on more labor whether around fundraising or applying for donor funds on behalf of smaller organizations, they continued: "It's not really a shift in the system—it's just saying we will do the bits they can't. To be honest, I really question overall the sector's willingness to give up that power" (Interview data, NGO06b-2018; see also de Jong 2017).

That same interviewee elaborated on the gendered and racialized embodiments that distinguish the "critical friend" from the "shouty NGOs": "If I put a face to the 'insider' and a face to the 'critical friend,' and a face to that "shouty outside voice"— that shouty voice is going to be the angry, Black women, and that insider will be that very respectable, Oxbridge educated, white middle class man" (Interview data, NGO06b-2018). This speaks to the intersectional constitution of the subject, and the significance of considering how gender works in and through relation to other social markers of power, especially race, in the embodied, and relational politics of advocacy, rather than homogenizing WPS advocates in the Global North through reference only to the experiences of white women. The liminality of these figures cannot be understood by privileging and prioritizing gender above race or other significant relations of social power (Pratt 2013, 774) in understanding women's experiences of advocating for the WPS agenda. Privileging gender in this social context reinforces conceptualizations of women as "natural" WPS advocates who themselves do not partake in reproducing hierarchies of power, leading to a partial and limited account of networked advocacy and who gets to be respected as a competent WPS advocate.

Perceptions of anger, moreover, are also both gendered and racialized; "seen as a characteristic of some bodies and not others" (Ahmed 2004, 4). While the insider is the unmarked norm against which everyone else is interpolated "other." They continued, "We exist within this system where we assume that if you are male, white, older, and well-spoken you have more credibility in what you say opposed to a young African woman, or an old Indian woman." Ahmed (2017, 177) describes the figure of the angry Black woman, the angry woman of color, and the angry indigenous woman, as a "feminist killjoy: a feminist killjoy who kills feminist joy." Investigating

affective moments of "feminist killjoyism," Lyytikäinen and Jauhola (2020, 84) argue that these moments can open up alternative—perhaps transformative, spaces in feminist activism characterized by "difference, dissent and antagonism" as opposed to "consensus-driven gender equality policies of the neoliberal strategic state."

If an advocate or organization is said to become "too shouty," there were consequences that interviewees mentioned. For example, one remarked, "if they typecast you as a certain kind of activist, then they won't listen to the content" (Interview data, NGO19a-2018). Organizations want to avoid being placed in a position where they feel that the government needs to "manage them" as another NGO professional explained (Interview data, NGO02a-2018). Advocates expressed fear that if one takes on that shouty role it "puts them in the position of being the enemy— being an actor that has to be managed rather than the critical friend that they could be" (Interview data, NGO02a-2018). This was described as "strategic handling": making an organization feel like they have a stake in a project or a decision while not taking anything that they say seriously (Interview data, NGO02a-2018). That said, having a community of advocates performing critical friendship establishes a line of access that facilitates "critical" voices or gives other organizations access: "[The critical friends] can do all the relationship building, by them creating the baseline allows us to be as radical as we want. . .We are a radical feminist organisation, and we are brought in so the feminists can talk." There appears, therefore, to be both a hierarchy *and* an unspoken relationship between both subject positions. Although it was, in part, an ideological decision by certain organizations (often the few organizations that explicitly use the feminist moniker) not to participate in certain decision-making forums related to WPS including, for example, NATO's Civil Society Advisory Panel, that they felt were antithetical to their feminist principles; strategically, they also know that decisions to disengage will not shut the door completely because, by being part of a larger network, their organization retains access by proxy.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that unpacking how advocacy practices, or performances, are ascribed and inscribed to certain bodies by contextualizing them as part of wider systems and hierarchies of power is crucial to understanding the meaning-making embedded in WPS advocacy. By rethinking advocacy as an embodied, relational practice, this article has sought to widen the conceptual scope of the term and, in so doing, has made theoretical and empirical contributions primarily to the WPS scholarship on civil society and advocacy but also to the wider field of international political sociology.

Firstly, drawing from feminist theory, I advanced the conceptual claim that advocacy is an embodied, relational practice. By this I mean that advocacy is not simply a strategy to affect change as per more liberal accounts, but it is also a performance, or practice, linked to embodiments of gender, race, class as well as other modalities of social power. This facilitated an investigation into how the embodied positionality and relationality of advocates shape WPS advocacy as well as its effects. This conceptual claim helps expose the dynamics, entanglements, and hierarchies within WPS advocacy circles and between CSOs and governments, especially in the Global North, thereby problematizing overly normative conceptualizations of civil society actors as always democratizing, and injecting criticality into, the process of developing the agenda. Whilst drawing predominately from feminist theories on embodiment to rethink WPS advocacy, this research also compliments sociological explorations that have investigated embodiment, relationality, and affect across multiple governance sites and spheres of practice (e.g., Åhäll 2018; Dyvik and Welland 2018; Stern and Strand 2022). Reconceptualizing advocacy in this way therefore pushes

us not only to rethink the concept in IR but also in IPS, which has thus far engaged much more with, for example, the embodied practice of diplomacy than it has with advocacy, despite conceptual overlap. Unpacking distinct advocacy practices, such as gatekeeping and norm transgression, which the analysis has, at times, alluded to, would therefore provide the basis of further research within this sociological tradition.

Secondly, substantiating this claim through an analysis of interview data that explored how networked NGOs advocate for the WPS agenda in the UK, the article also provided an empirical contribution. Using interview data to observe the embodied, relational politics of WPS advocacy, I highlighted how the "critical friends" and the "shouty NGOs" are gendered, racialized, and classed in ways that delimit the boundaries of the agenda. As such, I demonstrated how advocates and organizations pursue and perform advocacy in line with their subject positions, both enforced upon them and adopted by them. This provides empirical insight into WPS advocacy beyond its most studied site, that of the United Nations Security Council.

The conceptual argument around advocacy as embodied and relational is designed to open up other areas of research offering a starting point for further study. There is much more that could be said, not least because embodiments are difficult to capture methodologically, so further research, particularly using ethnographic and more aesthetic approaches to examine individual organizations, advocacy sites, and particular advocacy asks, could help expand these initial findings. Furthermore, advocacy will certainly not unfold with the same effects and affects everywhere; and, indeed, the multiple sites, both formal and informal, where WPS advocacy takes place need further attention. Additional research on WPS advocacy networks, their multiple configurations, their reach, the power relations that underpin them, and how they co-constitute the messages and recommendations organizations pursue could help offer a more comprehensive picture of WPS advocacy, and subsequently deepen our understanding of how WPS advocacy not only challenges but also reproduces global hierarchies of power.

Crucially, the conceptual intervention that I have proposed here is potentially applicable beyond research into the WPS agenda. While the data are drawn from the UK, the conceptual claim I believe has relevance for comprehending various advocacy networks and campaigns, such as around the climate emergency, especially in countries that have a strong civil society input into the framing of such policy. This is a call to pay attention not only to the various messages and recommendations that civil society pursues, but also to how advocates themselves, as already embodied (communities of) actors, are embedded in hierarchies that have political implications for the production and performance of advocacy and therefore the wider reproduction of policy agendas. For example, building on the literature on eco-feminism, climate advocacy, and the intersections between gender and race (e.g., Wilson and Chu 2019; Verlie 2022; Chipato and Chandler 2022), one could investigate how environmental advocates may be gendered, racialized, and classed in relation to wider networks, governments, institutions, and (non-)human others. Relatedly, it could be examined how environmental advocacy networks produce advocacy vernaculars based on situated environmental privileges and/or oppressions in ways that may challenge and/or reproduce global hierarchies of power, and which are consequential for the future direction of climate advocacy.[8]

To conclude, I argue that we can expand our understanding of advocacy as a distinct category of analysis for IR if we consider advocacy as an embodied, relational practice. This broadening helps realize the concept's potential as a generative mode for research into the role of NGOs examined at the intersection between "state" and "civil society."

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[8]I thank Julie Gilson for helping me make these connections with climate advocacy.

## Funding

## Acknowledgments

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