The African Union's Silencing the Guns: between stereotyping and owning gender roles

Miriam Mona Mukalazi

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Miriam Mona Mukalazi

Abstract Following the motto "African Solutions for African Problems", the African Union (AU) fosters its agency as a regional actor on gender policies. The *Silencing the Guns* campaign represents one example. Here, the AU attempts to link gender, peace and security policies. Taking the AU's motto into account, this research explores to what degree *Silencing the Guns* is driven by the understanding of gender roles linked to African Feminisms, and to what degree gender assumptions of other feminist traditions are embedded. With the help of hypervisibility as a concept, stereotypes will be put into the context of *Silencing the Guns*. To answer the research question, a mixed-methods approach is applied for data collection. The results clearly indicate references to African feminist theories such as Womanism. In particular, these results help introduce a discussion around epistemological power hierarchies in feminist discourse defining what (harmful) gender stereotypes are for whom. Although there is a common understanding among most of the feminist researchers that gender is a social construct influenced by socio-cultural contexts, the socio-cultural context of the Global North seems to be the universal departure point to investigate gender stereotypes. However, leaving out the various socio-cultural contexts in the Global South that shape gender as a social construct distorts the knowledge about how gender stereotypes function in different societies. Consequently, the main output of this research is a call to rethink the universal claim on how gender stereotypes are defined and interpreted and to urgently encounter multiple decolonial approaches of epistemology, methodology and ontology.

Keywords African Feminism · Peace and security · Regional governance · Post-colonialism · Hypervisibility

✉ Miriam Mona Mukalazi

Political Science III, Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf, Universitätsstr. 1, 40225 Düsseldorf, Germany

E-Mail: miriam.mona.mukalazi@wecf.org

Die Silencing-the-Guns-Kampagne der Afrikanischen Union – zwischen Stereotypisierung und Aneignung von Geschlechterrollen

Zusammenfassung Getreu dem Motto „Afrikanische Lösungen für afrikanische Probleme" setzt sich die Afrikanische Union (AU) als regionaler Akteur für die Gleichstellungspolitik auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent ein. Die sicherheitspolitische Kampagne „*Silencing the Guns*" („Die Waffen zum Schweigen bringen") ist hierfür ein Beispiel. Hier versucht die AU, Gender-, Friedens- und Sicherheitspolitik miteinander zu verknüpfen. Unter Berücksichtigung des Mottos der AU wird in der vorliegenden Studie untersucht, inwieweit *Silencing the Guns* durch das Verständnis von Geschlechterrollen im Zusammenhang mit afrikanischen Feminismen vorangetrieben wird und inwieweit genderbezogene Annahmen anderer feministischer Traditionen eingebettet sind. Mithilfe des Konzepts der Hypervisibilität werden Geschlechterstereotypen in den Kontext von *Silencing the Guns* gestellt. Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage werden qualitative und quantitative Methoden der Datenerhebung angewendet. Die Ergebnisse zeigen deutliche Bezüge zu afrikanischen feministischen Theorien wie „Womanism". Insbesondere tragen diese Ergebnisse dazu bei, eine Diskussion über erkenntnistheoretische Machthierarchien im feministischen Diskurs einzuleiten, die definieren, wann welche Geschlechterstereotypen für wen als schädlich definiert werden. Obwohl die meisten feministischen Forschenden davon ausgehen, dass Geschlecht ein soziales Konstrukt ist, das von soziokulturellen Kontexten beeinflusst wird, scheint der soziokulturelle Kontext des Globalen Nordens der universelle Ausgangspunkt für die Untersuchung von Geschlechterstereotypen zu sein. Lässt man jedoch die verschiedenen soziokulturellen Kontexte im Globalen Süden außer Acht, die ebenso das Geschlecht als soziales Konstrukt prägen, wird das Wissen darüber, wie Geschlechterstereotypen in verschiedenen Gesellschaften funktionieren, verzerrt. Folglich ist das Hauptergebnis dieser Studie ein Aufruf, den universellen Anspruch, wie Geschlechterstereotypen definiert und interpretiert werden, zu überdenken und sich dringend mit vielfältigen dekolonialen Ansätzen der Epistemologie, Methodologie und Ontologie auseinanderzusetzen.

Schlüsselwörter Afrikanischer Feminismus · Frieden und Sicherheit · Regionales Regieren · Postkolonialismus · Hypervisibilität

1 Introduction

Colonial assumptions around gender are deeply embedded in the international relations discourse of what is defined as a universal or as culturally specific understanding of gender. One result of neglecting the existing impact of colonial assumptions is the tension loaded debate of how to mirror the lived experience and how to disrupt gender stereotypes in policy frameworks, which then finally translate into the realities of those affected by these policies. When it comes to a culturally specific understanding of gender in policy frameworks, regional organisations offer valuable insights because their regional frameworks are intertwined with global frameworks based on universal assumptions of patriarchal oppression. This is also the case for

policies dealing with gender, peace, and security and, in general, the military as an institution of hegemonic masculinity (Haastrup 2021). I argue that unfolding colonial assumptions in gender policy frameworks help to interrogate the question of which universal gender stereotypes are picked up by regional organisations, and which of the regional characteristics of gender stereotypes are perceived as harmful by whom. To answer this question, the gendered approach of *Silencing the Guns* campaign of the African Union (AU) presents an excellent case to discuss the tension between the lived experience on the African continent and the universal attempt to disrupt gender stereotypes in the context of peace and security policies. Building on feminist peace and security literature that is engaged with the question of how universal norms of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda are transferred between the global to the local context (Abdullah 2016; Kirby and Shepherd 2016), and studies to what degree the WPS agenda feeds into institutional reproduction of stereotypes of race and sexual identities (Haastrup and Hagen 2021; Pratt 2013), this research aims to contribute to a post-colonial discourse on how gender stereotypes are embedded in policy frameworks and to the discourse on epistemological power to declare which stereotypes are perceived as harmful. Engaging with tensions in feminist scholarship regarding gender stereotypes in peace and security does not only, therefore, interrogate the tension between the gender-militarisation discourse but also invites the reader to question the dynamics of epistemological power hierarchies in feminist scholarship.

The article is structured into four parts. After briefly outlining the AU's *Silencing the Guns*, I present, in the second section, the work of different post-colonial scholars challenging the dominance of epistemological power to define what gender stereotypes are. In the third section, I introduce the concept of hypervisibility to showcase which gender stereotypes are made extremely (in)visible, hyper-(in)visible, and how this is linked to regional characteristics of gender stereotyping. The following section serves to demonstrate how a discourse and frame analysis leads to the possible empirical application. The fourth wraps up the results of this study and reconnects them with the introductory question of epistemological power.

2 *Silencing the Guns*: A call for women to serve Africa?

In 2016, the AU developed *Silencing the Guns by 2020* in Lusaka (Zambia) as part of the adoption of Agenda 2063 (African Union 2015), and the process of the 50th anniversary of the AU and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). However, during the implementation phase, it became apparent that the objective would not be realised by 2020 (Amani Africa 2019). Therefore, the timeline of the roadmap has been extended to 2030, and a new implementation plan was agreed on during a meeting in Lusaka in June 2022. For the AU, the historical impact of colonialism left its mark on the current status of conflicts and inequalities on the continent (MacKenzie et al. 2019, pp. 824–825). *Silencing the Guns*, therefore, aims to illustrate African agency and aligns with the AU's motto "African Solutions for African Problems" (Okumu et al. 2020, p.24). Therefore, it is not a surprise that an emphasis on the agency of the *African Woman* is also used

as a narrative to find African solutions for African problems. It could be argued that including women in *Silencing the Guns* is a way of increasing the capacity of its armed forces and its own forms of militarism against Western interventions and influence. However, in the end, it cannot be neglected that today's African leaders have actually normalised violent, oppressive politics against their most vulnerable citizens as the price for a conflict-free Africa promised with *Silencing the Guns* (MacKenzie et al. 2019, pp. 824–825). Nonetheless, it is a fact that colonial legacies are a driver of conflicts on the African continent today. Consequently, the discourse around gender, peace and security is influenced by colonial heritage (Mama and Okazawa-Rey 2008, pp.1-2).

2.1 The institutional intersections of *Silencing the Guns* and governing gender

According to the *Silencing the Guns* roadmap, the objective is to overcome the cycle of violent conflicts and disruptive crises linked to the continent's political history and make Africa conflict-free (African Union 2016a; African Union Peace and Security Council 2019). This becomes evident with the three significant aspects listed which have created an enormous burden for Africa and its people: slavery, colonisation and the unpaid extraction/exploitation of natural resources. All three aspects cannot be ignored when analysing *Silencing the Guns* from a gendered approach. This means the (re)production of gender stereotypes needs to be set into the context of (re) militarised processes linked to colonial and neocolonial interventions on the African continent. Regarding the institutional linkage between *Silencing the Guns* and gender policies, the Office of the Special Envoy (OSE) on Women, Peace and Security plays a crucial role. Although the AU's *Silencing the Guns* gendered approach is not solely linked to the WPS agenda, it includes various components and references to it (ACCORD Conflict & Resilience Monitor 2020/special edition, Interview with Bineta Diop, 2020). Appointed in 2014, the mandate of the Special Envoy on WPS, Bineta Diop, includes promoting women's voices in conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as advocating for the protection of their rights, including putting an end to impunity on sexual and gender-based violence. *Silencing the Guns* explicitly mentions that the objective of a conflict-free African continent includes the fight against gender-based violence. To study which gender stereotypes the AU embeds in its institutional frameworks, *Silencing the Guns* presents an interesting case because of its five thematic areas linked to peace and security: Political Aspects (A), Economic Aspects (B), Social Aspects (C), Environmental Aspects (D) and Legal (E). All five thematic areas should support the six action items to end all wars in Africa, which include: (i) ensuring accountability in line with collective responsibility to the principle of non-indifference; (ii) eradicating transnational organised crime; (iii) pushing forward conflict prevention, peace-making and post-conflict reconstruction through the African Peace and Security Architecture; (iv) calling for global nuclear disarmament; (v) ensuring agreements on landmines and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons; (vi) and eliminating the root causes of internally displaced persons and refugees. All action items provide a gender lens and therefore an entry point to study which gender stereotypes the AU embeds in specific areas.

2.2 African Women's contribution to building peace in Africa

Despite the African Peace and Security Architecture's (APSA) holistic approach to gender and disarmament (African Union Commission 2015), the assumption dominating *Silencing the Guns* is that a conflict-free African continent can be achieved with an increasing number of women in the armed forces. The strong focus on women in the military to realise *Silencing the Guns* additionally offers room to critically question which stereotypes are perceived as harmful by whom, particularly in light of the AU's strong focus on portraying African women in a specific way. For example, in the slogan "A call to Serve Africa: Women in Peace and Security" (AU 2016b, p. 32), gender mainstreaming is used as an argument to make Africa's armed forces more effective and efficient. This assumption is based on the stereotype of women being peaceful and, therefore, women are making war safe (Shepherd 2016). Through women's increased participation in the armed forces, less sexualised and gender-based violence (SGBV) would occur inside and outside the armed forces. In the case of *Silencing the Guns*, African women are expected to expose themselves as agents of change fighting against SGBV. This phenomenon is known as the gender–protection–participation connection (Shepherd 2016). Although including a critical mass of a marginalised group can lead to a substantive change in a system, it is also evident that the burden to change the system lies on the excluded. Additionally, it reproduces the gendered assumption that women are peaceful and are acting in the interest of the greater good, and men are violent and acting in their individual interests. These gender stereotypes are often reproduced (unintentionally) as general ones throughout various gender policy frameworks, such as the global WPS agenda, from the global to the regional, national and local level (Thomson 2019). However, when it comes to adapting these global frameworks to regional and other levels, it is also observable that political institutions like the AU institutionalise these stereotypes and adapt them to regional and cultural characteristics or even redefine or disrupt them (Hendricks 2017). For example, in line with *Silencing the Guns* and the WPS Agenda, the AU jointly published with the African Union and the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) a book that features 20 African women from across the continent and "amplifies the voices of African Women who have made outstanding contributions towards building peace in Africa" (AU 2023). This could be interpreted as a specific type of agency and epistemological power to define what gender stereotypes mean for whom in different contexts, and which of these stereotypes enter policy frameworks.

3 The power of defining gender

Within the discourse on decolonising the peace and security literature, theories on Third-World Feminism and Post-Colonial Feminism play a significant role (Ahikire 2014; Amos and Parmar 1984; Basu 2016; Mohanty 1988). In Chandra Talpade Mohanty's famous essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses" (1988), Mohanty states that the global hegemony of Global North scholarship assumes a "homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as

a group" (p. 337). As a result, intersecting forms of oppression and privilege are left out (Yuval-Davis 2006). With this essay, Mohanty has built the fundament for a (post-)colonial discussion in mainstream feminist research. In terms of the epistemological power of defining stereotypes, Mohanty elaborates on the idea of how women in the Global South are portrayed as leading an "essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized)" (ibid.). A few years later, Soumita Basu (2016) applied Mohanty's critique to illustrate colonial continuities in WPS governance. Basu argues that "actors in and from the Global South tend to appear as passive recipients of policies developed elsewhere" (p. 364). Considering Mohanty's and Basu's claims regarding colonial continuities in feminist scholarship and WPS research allows a critical examination of how regional organisations in the Global South embed their understanding of gender, peace and security, in particular, to study how their policy frameworks are influenced by assumptions of gender defined as universal as well as by those that are defined as specific for the region. In the African context, researchers like Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi (1997) tried to "make an African sense of Western gender discourses". Oyèrónké claims that Global North social categories are in relation to and in opposition to another category, e.g., women to men. For Oyèrónké, biology is a Western construction for organising the social world, and gender is based on an ideology of biological determinism (ibid.). Although not all gaps were closed to make sense of Western gender discourse, Oyèrónké's contribution opened the discussion about how what is defined as gender is rooted in specific contexts such as historical, philosophical, cultural or/and temporal.

3.1 Eurocentric assumptions and epistemological power

In light of *Silencing the Guns,* militarisation and gender mainstreaming as a means to make the African continent conflict free comes into play. African scholars make the claim that a more assertive African-centred approach is needed to shape interventions, policy advocacy and programmatic approaches to women's rights and security sector governance (Olonisakin and Okech 2011). However, according to Amina Mama (2001), "militarism is the antithesis of revolutionary pan-African visions of Africa as a region freed from the destructive legacies of its patriarchal and colonial history" (2001, p. 4). Following Amina Mama's argumentation, more women in uniform will not finally lead to a conflict-free continent because armed forces are part of upholding the violence of patriarchy and colonialism. The literature mentioned in this section shows that engaging critically about gender stereotypes is not a discourse solely assigned to the feminist discourse in the Global North. The misleading assumption exists that there is a clear divide between the Global North feminist discourse disrupting gender stereotypes and the Global South feminist discourse solely reproducing gender stereotypes (Eckes 2008). It is critical to understand that the impact of history, philosophy and culture on gender stereotyping is not neglected by Global North theories. However, Global North assumptions are often dominantly identified as a set departure point for feminist research. Therefore, the question for mapping gender stereotypes within this research is also, what are

gender stereotypes for whom? With this, various challenges come to the surface. The biggest challenge lies in the question of what assumptions are passing as legitimate knowledge. Who defines what characteristics, skills and behaviour are interpreted as stereotypical and which are not? And who defines which assumptions feed into the circle of reinforcing stereotypes, and who defines which assumptions mirror the actual lived experience of people?

3.2 The reproduction of colonial power hierarchies in gender, peace and security

To engage in a critical reflection regarding epistemological power dynamics of who perceives certain gender stereotypes as harmful, it is necessary to acknowledge the possibility that different assumptions regarding gender can enter an institution simultaneously in different contexts. When are solely region-specific gender stereotypes reproduced, when do hybrid forms occur, which gender assumptions dominate which topics and when is this mix of gender assumptions not distinguishable anymore? Feminist theories and assumptions of gender can coexist in an institution while contradicting each other. Gender stereotypes are the product of how gender is constructed socially (Tamale 2020). Eurocentric assumptions of how this social construct looks are dominating feminist scholarship and, therefore, also the discourse of what is defined as feminine or masculine in the peace and security context (Oyěwùmi 1997). Although gender is a social construct, international frameworks tend to reproduce gender essentialism by assigning specific attributes to be female or male (Pratt 2013, p. 780). These attributes may be natural, biological, or psychological or refer to activities and procedures not necessarily dictated by biology. Gender essentialism, therefore, also plays a vital role in analysing stereotypes in gender, peace and security. Feminist researchers have examined how the victimisation of women has become a dominant focus of the international feminist movement and what consequences this focus has on international frameworks (Puechguirbal 2010). Often associated with children, women are portrayed solely as vulnerable individuals. This phenomenon of gender stereotyping is often found in policy frameworks on fighting gender-based violence. Women are portrayed exclusively as victims because of their femininity, and men as perpetrators because of their masculinity. This reproduces a one-dimensional form of gender identities and, therefore, of the gender-based violence they face. A gender transformative approach is lacking. One result of this stereotyping language in institutional documents is that they remove women's agency and maintain them in the subordinated position of victims. Because of gender essentialism, men experiencing sexualised violence as survivors are primarily ignored. Another argument is that the victim subject has reinforced cultural essentialism, which has finally led to a more significant division between Global North and Global South feminists where women in the Global South are portrayed as victims of their culture, which reinforces stereotyped and racist representations of that culture and privileges the culture of the Global North (Kapur 2002, p. 6). In addition, men of the Global South are solely portrayed as perpetrators. Within that context, a colonial continuity is applied where the Global North saves brown women from brown men (Spivak and Said 1988). Moreover, a strong

focus on women as victims risks protectionist responses from states (Kapur 2002, p. 6). As a result, the one-sided victimisation of women can be instrumentalised for a state-centred understanding of security, which often ends with military interventions. In general, cohesive narratives that move Africa towards transforming gender relations in peace and security processes remain the exception (Olonisakin and Hendricks 2013).

4 Interrogating hypervisibility in *Silencing the Guns*

In the following section, I am explaining how AU's official documents linked to the '*Silencing the Guns by 2020*' campaign were collected and analysed to answer the research question of in which manner institutions, like the AU, embed gender stereotypes in the context of disarmament. Regarding women's visibility, African Feminists like Hakima Abbas and Amina Mama even speak of "a troubling irony in the sudden "discovery" of African women by the AU" (2014, p.2). They argue despite "modest legal and policy inroads (on paper at least)" and "some (often problematic) forms of visibility" (ibid.), women's oppression and exploitation remains the status quo on the African continent. To investigate the "AU's discovery of African women", I illustrate the added value of using the concept of hypervisibility as a tool for analysing gender stereotypes. Applied in Black and African Studies (see Smalls 2018) to analyse the representation of Black people in white-dominated spaces, the concept of hypervisibility argues that hyper-visible groups remain invisible because their concerns continue to be underrepresented, marginalised and othered. Hypervisibility as a concept is not exclusive to Black and African Studies. The concept is also applied to marginalised groups in other contexts, such as the hypervisibility of gender identities in disarmament. Applying hypervisibility means identifying what is framed by the institution as a reference point that presents the standardised norm and what is framed as the exception that needs to be made hyper-visible. In the case of institutionalising global gender regimes, the reference point is white, heteronormative and male (Henry 2017). Hypervisibility does not only help point out where and how marginalised groups are made hyper-visible. It also allows for pointing out which groups are made invisible and how harmful stereotypes are embedded in institutions. For example, men as perpetrators are hyper-visible with respect to gender-based and sexualised violence (GBSV). Only portraying men as perpetrators takes away the multilevel identities. Men can be perpetrators and victims of GBSV at the same time. However, the hypervisibility of men as sole perpetrators leads to a one-sided understanding of gender and leaves out how institutions construct masculinities/femininities. Puechguirbal's analysis of UN documents illustrated how the perpetuation of stereotyping language leads to rendering women, girls and femininities as exceptional, as compared to men and masculinities who are de facto seen as the norm (2010, p. 175). This language stabilises patriarchal binary views of gender roles (ibid.). Resultantly, the gendered underpinnings of power, the gendered dynamics of violence and the gendered nature of institutions remain unquestioned (Myrttinen 2019, p. 91). Moreover, the reproduction of racialised gender stereotypes becomes evident in the context of fighting

violent extremism and terrorism. Compared to white Christian men, non-white non-Christian men are made hyper-visible as a threat, although white Christian men are also involved in violent extremism and terrorism. The racialised construction of masculinities does not stop at the WPS agenda, and racialised hierarchies are already implicit in WPS discourses which reinforce logics of (white) masculinist protection (Parashar 2018). To contribute to the literature questioning the gendered nature of institutions and gendered underpinnings of power, a post-colonial approach is added to the analysis of perpetuating stereotypes in the *Silencing the Guns*. This will not only put the results into the context of gender hierarchies but notably in the context of intersectional hierarchies.

4.1 A feminist-informed analysis of AU documents

To conduct an in-depth analysis of gender stereotypes embedded in African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), data from institutional documents of different lengths and internal and external communication regarding *Silencing the Guns* are used as a source of data collection. The documents included are: the African Union ECHO Magazine's edition from 2020 on *Silencing the Guns* from 2016; the *Silencing the Guns* Newsletter November 2019–January 2020; the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020; the concept note for the Security Council high-level debate on the theme 'Silencing the Guns in Africa: cooperation between the United Nations and regional organisations' from 2019. All documents share the similarity of documenting the institutional framing of disarmament in general and have the potential to shed light on the degree of embedded regional characteristics of gender. First, documents were selected based on their publication date. A comparison of the different time periods will help to shed light on whether and how gender stereotypes linked to disarmament have varied since the introduction of *Silencing the Guns*. Documents include general reports such as the most recent '2nd Continental Report on The Implementation of Agenda 2063' from 2022 as well as specific *Silencing the Guns* documents such as the 'AU Master Roadmap (AUMR) of Practical Steps to Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020' from 2020. Second, documents were selected based on their internal or external purpose. This is based on the assumption that the purpose of communicating internally and externally impacts the way the AU portrays gender roles. Although there is often not a clear distinction on how documents are used for internal and external purposes, it is useful to set up these two categories for data collection, in particular, when it comes to the emphasis on how the AU defines the roles of African women and girls in disarmament on the African continent. For this research, external communication entails AU communiqués in the UN context because the UN provides support to the AU Initiative by coordinating the UN Task Force on Silencing the Guns in Africa. For example, the UN concept note of the UN Security Council's high-level debate on the *Silencing the Guns* in Africa offers an entry point to analyse whether gender plays a role in the AU's external communication. If so, the questions is which gender roles are being highlighted.

4.2 Going beyond the F-Word

Political institutions, in general, avoid using the words 'Feminism' or 'Patriarchy' in their official documents because of the strong activist connotations. Nevertheless, it is worth including both words in a quantitative analysis of studying gender stereotypes because they present the core concepts to coin terms around gender inequality (Kronsell 2006, pp.108–109). A quantitative analysis of the gender-related wording offers a first impression of how visible gender is in the AU's institutional documents. For example, it is a clear indicator of a lacking gender perspective if there is no use of gender-related wording in a *Silencing the Guns* document. This article uses gender-related wording because the coding for this data analysis does not only entail 'women' and 'men'. Considering an intersectional approach, it is vital not to neglect the age dimension. This is, in particular, relevant for the African continent because the median age of its population is around 18 years. Consequently, a high number of people affected by disarmament are children and adolescents. Therefore, the coding list also includes 'girls' and 'boys'. Previous research around gender equality points out that 'women' and 'gender' are used by institutions as synonyms. Yet, the coding list also includes 'gender' but is analysed critically. For this reason, a quantitative analysis of how many times gender occurs could be an indicator of how the AU's gender roles are mainly visible through women, or whether the gender roles are linked to a broader dimension of gender identities. In addition to counting the number of gender-related wording, a feminist-informed research design also analyses the context. The position where gender-related wording in a text occurs provides insights into an institution's use of gender roles. For example, if there is a high density of gender-related wording in the headline, it indicates a strong focus on that topic—another example would be whether the gender-related wording occurs throughout the whole text or in separate blocks. Besides the position, a feminist-informed text analysis includes the linkages of the content surrounded by gender-related wording. Going beyond stir counting of the F-Word in this research includes the analysis of hyper-visible regarding cross-referencing. When it comes to an institutional understanding of gender, the cross-referencing of institutional gender policy frameworks is included in this analysis of hypervisibility. The idea of applying cross-referencing is to study the manner in which different texts around gender and disarmament refer to each other, and what this means for developing an institutional understanding of the topic. For example, a reference to another institutional document on sexual health and reproductive rights results in another policy implication for the institution's work on disarmament than a reference to economic empowerment. Cross-referencing in itself can therefore capture the way texts draw upon other texts to establish legitimacy and authority for their construction of identity (Hansen 2013, p. 12). Although several institutions, including the AU, acknowledged applying gender as a cross-cutting issue, policy documents tend to make certain policy issues hyper-visible through a specific pattern of cross-referencing. In the context of the AU, there is a wide range of gender policy frameworks that can be used for references in *Silencing the Guns*, for example, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol; the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; the

Table 1 Results of quantitative representation of gender-related wording in *Silencing the Guns*

Document	Women	Girls	Men	Boys	Feminism	Gender
African Union's Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2020	4	0	0	0	0	1
United Nations Security Council high-level debate on the theme of *Silencing the Guns* in Africa	2	0	0	0	0	0
African Renewal Interview	10	0	0	0	0	2
African Union ECHO Magazine's edition from 2020 on *Silencing the Guns* from 2016	255	52	0	2	0	81
Silencing the Guns Newsletter November 2019–January 2020	21	1	0	0	0	1
Silencing the Guns Special Newsletter February 2020	35	11	0	0	0	6

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the AU strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018–2028; the African Women's Decade Report 2010–2020, the Continental Results Framework (CRF) for Monitoring and Reporting on the WPS Agenda in Africa; and many more (Budoo 2020; Murithi 2010, p.152). In addition to that, the AU also possesses a vast number of peace and security policies that do not explicitly mention gender in their title, which can be used for cross-referencing such policies on fighting terrorism and extremism.

4.3 Results: Strong focus on women's issues

The results indicate a strong influence of feminist theories focussing on the gender binary of what it means to be a woman. Although every document provides a different length in total: 'women' is the word most often used, whereas 'men' is sometimes not mentioned at all. The focus on African women can be interpreted as a regional character regarding gender policies in the region. The phenomenon also occurs with other Global South institutions, such as the League of Arab States. The results indicate that women are presented as a diverse group regarding age, religion and physical ability. When it comes to the identity maker age, both *Silencing the Guns* Newsletter November 2019–January 2020 and the *Silencing the Guns* Special Newsletter February 2020 dedicate one chapter to 'women and youth'. As shown in Table 1, the quantitative analysis of both chapters confirmed the expected high density of gender-related words in the chapters (Table 1).

However, mentioning patriarchy in the context of *Silencing the Guns* is an exception mentioned by a head of state. The vital need to distance itself from Feminism can be a lesson learned for the Global North that the colonial past is still present and influences which traditions of Feminism find their way into institutional gender policies, and that the Global North actors' universal claim of feminism has been exclusive. However, the focus lies on the gender binary of women when *Silencing the Guns* refers to gender. For example, sexual orientation and gender-diverse people are not introduced. Feminism does not occur once. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that the document does not deal with feminist topics. Despite

Fig. 1 Panelists at the Security Sector Reform and Governance Forum, Djibouti City, Djibouti (2019, Photo © STG/PSD/AUC)

the long traditions of feminism on the African continent, Feminism is perceived as a Global North concept; therefore, political institutions such as the AU are reluctant to use the word. It is worth mentioning that this reluctance is not only spread among Global South institutions, but also in the Global North (see the European Union). However, the analysis also allowed looking for words linked to Feminism, such as patriarchy. As a result, one example was found during the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU. The former AU Chairmen, Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa, stated:

> "We want to focus on ensuring accountability to global gender commitments. We have heard the calls of the women and girls of Africa for liberation from the shackles of patriarchy, violence and economic exclusion." (*Silencing the Guns* Special Newsletter February 2020, p. 8)

4.4 Results: Photo analysis reveals women being the exception

A case where hypervisibility is undebatable is the photo of the AU's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammad, at the High-Level Workshop in Aswan, Egypt 2019 on *Silencing the Guns* (*Silencing the Guns* Newsletter November 2019–January 2020, p. 5). The photo is printed under the section of critical highlights and shows her in a speaking role. Compared to the smaller photos of the two men, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security (p. 3) and the AU High Representative for *Silencing the Guns* in Africa (p. 4), Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammad's photo covers 75% of the page. This exceptional size of the image gives her not only more visibility but also hypervisibility. Not only is Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammad's agency as a woman hyper-visible, but it is also worth mentioning that her traditional African clothing underlines her agency as a woman from the African continent. Another interesting example of hypervisibility is on page 9 of the same newsletter. The photo, shown in Fig. 1, captures an only-men panel at the Security Sector Reform and Governance Forum in Djibouti in 2019.

Behind those men, four *Silencing the Guns* roll-ups are placed in the back with the same woman in uniform. This photo presents an exceptional gender analysis of hypervisibility. Women appear in this context by representing one woman and the same four times. However, the panel consists of four different men. Although men are more numerous, one military woman is hyper-visible in this photo. To conclude, this hypervisibility indicates that the right to equal access to military institutions is one aspect of how feminism is embedded in *Silencing the Guns*. This feminism follows a more neoliberal, Global North approach to gender mainstreaming because it puts the individual's right to work at the forefront.

4.5 Results: Cross-referencing opens the door for gender as a cross-cutting issue

In the case of *Silencing the Guns*, cross-referencing enforces the regional agency and regional characteristics of the AU's gender policy framework. Already in the introduction part, the AU's Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020 refers to the gender policies embedded in Agenda 2063:

> "... in its First Ten Years Implementation Plan, Agenda 2063 stresses the imperative of ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence and violent conflicts and prevent genocide, as part of Africa's collective efforts to silence the guns in the continent by the year 2020" (AU 2016a, p. 1).

The reference to the AU's Agenda 2063 points to a regional agency for governing gender policies. Furthermore, the focus on gender-based violence shows that the AU identifies violence as a pressing issue. Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that the focus on gender-based violence creates a hypervisibility of women's vulnerability and bears the risk of victimisation. Furthermore, the analysis shows that women are often mentioned together with other groups such as 'youth' or 'children' (see Economic Aspects [B] and Social Aspects [C]). This could be interpreted as a form of collectivism, where it becomes evident that women's experiences are embedded into a collective and have consequences for the collective. Furthermore, the African Renewal interviewed the *Silencing the Guns* operations manager, Aïssatou Hayatou, on 23 December 2019. In the last section of the interview, Aïssatou Hayatou draws a connection between African women being agents of change and the global framework: the WPS agenda with its UN SC Resolution 1325.

> "Women are the ones who will drive Africa's prosperity. This is great coming at the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security." (Africa Renewal Interview, August 2019 - November 2019)

This linkage is a reference to the African roots of the WPS agenda. It is an illustrating example of how global frameworks are not only transferred to the regional level, but also how African Feminisms have entered global governance frameworks. Another example is presented by the recurring references to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in the context of *Silencing the Guns* suggests that for the AU, the economic empowerment of women plays a role in the AU's Echo Magazine on *Silencing the Guns* (p. 21). Linking women's economic security to

peace and stability is a significant indicator of a feminist understanding of security. However, it is also worth mentioning that the assumption of women's access to the labour market is prominently researched in Development Studies, which is primarily driven by Eurocentric assumptions. As a result, it is difficult to point out whether this linkage could be seen as an adoption of African Feminism or whether this linkage is made due to an external agenda from development actors located in the Global North. The clear referencing regarding Agenda 63 and *Silencing the Guns* is clearly a product of Africa's attempt to reclaim agency by regionalising gender policies. At the same time, with its reference to the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda, *Silencing the Guns* is influenced by an international framework built on a universal understanding of gender. *Silencing the Guns*, thus, connects the national, regional and global dimensions of gender and security.

5 Discussion

Analysing the gender stereotypes embedded in *Silencing the Guns* has demonstrated how policy frameworks of regional organisations are influenced by norms defined as universal as well as by norms that are defined as specific for the region. Regarding the reproduction of gender stereotypes in policy frameworks, this can result in the following scenarios: (1) The regional organisation reproduces gender stereotypes based solely on the universal norms; (2) the regional organisation reproduces gender stereotypes based solely on the regional characteristics of gender norms; (3) the regional organisation becomes a site where the reproduction of universal and regional norms happens simultaneously. This research has shown that *Silencing the Guns* is the third scenario. To engage in a critical reflection regarding epistemological power dynamics of who perceives certain gender stereotypes as harmful, it is necessary to acknowledge this simultaneousness. Additionally, it is significant to understand different dimensions of racialised hierarchies. When are solely region-specific gender stereotypes reproduced, when is it mixed, which norms dominate which topics and when is it even not distinguishable? The most visible gender stereotype in *Silencing the Guns* is the African woman, portrayed as a warrior or a caring mother figure. Attributes and skills are assigned to be a specific portrait of African women defending African culture and territory. It is worth mentioning that there is no clear definition found of what this means for the AU or its member states. Nevertheless, *Silencing the Guns* focuses on certain dimensions of diversity of women in its policy documents. This is mainly true when it comes to religion, ethnicity or age and has its source in the institutions' philosophy of Pan-Africanism. As a result, women are not solely portrayed as a homogenous group, and their differences are acknowledged. The focus on the African woman could be interpreted as a characteristic of how African feminist traditions have entered the institution, in particular, in the need to distinguish themselves from Western feminist traditions that claim to be universal (Abbas and Mama 2014; Decker and Baderoon 2018; Oyěwùmí 1997). Taking African feminism and universal gender policy frameworks into account, *Silencing the Guns*, therefore, presents an interesting case because it could be an example of how a "combination of radical-feminist intent, gender-friendly language, pragmatic

execution, and context-sensitive indicators may stand a better chance of bringing about more inclusive security practices" (Hudson and Heidi 2017, p. 24). What does this mean for other policies of the APSA and beyond? Analysing similarities and differences regarding which gender stereotypes are embedded in policies from other AU entities, such as the Economic, Social & Cultural Council, could provide more insights into exploring the general institutionalisation of gender assumptions in the AU. Thus, it cannot be neglected that the hypervisibility of women leaves room for doubting whether stereotyping women can ever not be harmful, no matter how a positive stereotype is used to reclaim what it means to be an African woman.

Above all, the results of this research are also an appeal to go beyond the hypervisibility of the category "women". When it comes to getting to the root of the institutional reproduction of harmful stereotypes in the context of a culturally specific understanding of gender, it is necessary to dive into the construction of femininities/masculinities and the political purpose of hegemonic masculine institutions. This means studying the phenomenon when institutions choose to make masculinities invisible and femininities hyper-visible, as well as when a universal angle of masculinities/femininities is applied and when a regional/cultural approach is used.

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