


RESEARCH ARTICLE

NATO's strategic narratives: Angelina Jolie and the alliance's celebrity and visual turn

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(Received 11 June 2020; revised 23 March 2021; accepted 24 March 2021; first published online 10 May 2021)

Abstract

Angelina Jolie's high-profile visit to NATO in 2018 signals a move to brand the alliance's strategic narrative within the language of celebrity through engagement with popular culture. The partnership represents a significant change in the alliance's approach to global security. It also builds on a shift in NATO's self-narrative through the advocacy of gender justice related to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Rather than fading into the background, NATO appears to be pursuing the limelight for the purpose of 'awareness raising' as a tool to implement the WPS agenda. Drawing upon feminist scholarship on the WPS agenda, NATO, and research on celebrity humanitarianism and politics, we provide a critical study of this change in NATO's strategic narrative, through the analysis of visual and textual material related to Jolie's visit to NATO. Our focus is on the significance of this partnership and its contribution to legitimising the alliance's self-defined 'military leadership' in the area of conflict-related sexual violence. While Jolie's visit to NATO opened the alliance to public scrutiny it also symbolised a form of militarism, surrounded by orchestrated visual representations. As such, it only marginally disrupted the militarist logic present in NATO's wider WPS engagement.

Keywords: NATO; Angelina Jolie; Celebrity; Strategic Narratives; Conflict-Related Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence; Women; Peace and Security; Popular Culture

Introduction

On 31 January 2018 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) hosted its first joint press conference with an internationally recognised celebrity. Angelina Jolie's visit to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels was preceded by the publication of a jointly authored op-ed published in *The Guardian*. Her appearance at NATO was visually projected in social media using the hashtag '#weareNATO' and featured in celebrity news magazines including *PopSugar* and *People*, a change from the usual press outlets and audience engaged with the political-military alliance. NATO released 74 photographs of her visit, including 'behind-the-scenes' shots¹. Angelina Jolie is no stranger to such political engagement, having participated in various government-led initiatives to eradicate sexual violence in conflict.² Given Angelina Jolie's celebrity and

¹The online version of this article has been updated since original publication. A notice detailing the changes has also been published at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000310>.

²NATO, 'Visit to NATO by the Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (2018), available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_151258.htm accessed 11 April 2018.

³Annika Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism against sexual violence: Angelina Jolie as global mother', in Laura J. Shepherd and Cait Hamilton (eds), *Understanding Popular Culture and World Politics in the Digital*

humanitarian presence and recognition on the global stage, and within the global entertainment industry, it is perhaps not surprising that footage and commentary were made available to sizeable worldwide audiences. However, and as we shall discuss further below, such celebrity footage tends to be more attentive to the beauty, dignity, and dress sense of the celebrity in question, rather than the substance of the political and ethical message that the individual seeks to highlight;³ in this case NATO's role in responding to conflict-related sexual- and gender-based violence (CRSGBV).

For NATO, this short-lived partnership with Jolie was significant for two reasons. First, it marked the alliance's most public engagement with the issue of CRSGBV to date. NATO's prior engagement with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda had to some extent sidelined CRSGBV.⁴ Second, despite the proliferation of celebrity endorsement and partnerships with international organisations, most notably the United Nations and its agencies,⁵ this was NATO's first engagement with a global celebrity. It therefore represented a significant change in the projection of NATO's self-narrative, visually and textually, particularly for an organisation whose public diplomacy was described by its own Secretary General in 2007 as being 'in the Stone Age'.⁶ As we argue in this article, pairing up with Jolie appeared to be an attempt to engage a public with little, or no knowledge of NATO, but, who nonetheless are interested in Jolie's engagements with global politics. It could also challenge the 'banal militarism' that has defined NATO and left it largely untouched by meaningful public scrutiny.⁷ However, rather than opening NATO to further scrutiny, we argue that the celebrity visit and its digital transmission in popular culture symbolised a different form of mediatised militarism, sustained by orchestrated visual representations made possible through new digital information and communication technologies.⁸

Jolie's engagement with NATO's CRSGBV agenda is in line with her long-standing commitment to the eradication of CRSGBV globally. Jolie has extensive experience working with multiple institutions,⁹ across humanitarian projects¹⁰ and with politicians¹¹ bringing attention to such things as the global refugee crisis and gendered violence.¹² Though our piece is broadly located within research on celebrity activism, our main focus in this article is on the significance of Jolie's partnership with NATO rather than the distinctiveness of Jolie's humanitarianism or her reasons for promoting NATO as a global gender actor. Indeed, Jolie herself admitted on the occasion of her visit to NATO that her knowledge of NATO is limited: 'I've been learning about NATO, where they've been doing some very good work and where they can improve and change.'¹³

Age (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Norm entrepreneurship in foreign policy: William Hague and the prevention of sexual violence in conflict', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13 (2017), pp. 701–21.

³Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

⁴Katharine A. M. Wright, Matthew Hurley, and Jesus Gil Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising From Within* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 121.

⁵Annika Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics in the 21st century', in Lucy B. Hall Anna L. Weissman, and Laura J. Shepherd (eds), *Troubling Motherhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Andrew F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy* (London: Paradigm, 2008); Andrew F. Cooper, 'UN celebrity-driven public diplomacy', in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (2nd edn, New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 187–94.

⁶Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, 'Speech by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Seminar on "Public Diplomacy in NATO-led Operations"', NATO (2007), available at: {<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s071008a.html>} accessed 20 July 2015.

⁷Merje Kuus "'Love, peace and Nato": Imperial subject-making in Central Europe', *Antipode*, 39:2 (2007), p. 269.

⁸Susan T. Jackson, Rhys Crilley, Ilan Manor, Catherine Baker, Modupe Oshikoya, Jutta Joachim, Nick Robinson, Andrea Schneider, Nicole Sunday Grove, and Cynthia Enloe, 'Forum: Militarization 2.0: Communication and the normalization of political violence in the digital age', *International Studies Review* (2020), pp. 1–26.

⁹Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.

¹⁰Annika Bergman Rosamond and Catia Gregoratti, 'Neoliberal turns in global humanitarian governance: Corporations, celebrities and the construction of the entrepreneurial refugee woman', *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2021).

¹¹Davies and True, 'Norm entrepreneurship in foreign policy'.

¹²Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.

¹³NATO, 'Joint Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie' (2018), available at: {https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions_151264.htm?selectedLocale=en} accessed 11 April 2018.

Yet, our contention is that her partnership, albeit brief and not grounded in profound *a priori* knowledge of the alliance, can tell us something about NATO's self-narrative and the stories that NATO seeks to tell about the WPS agenda through a combination of orthodox channels and digital popular culture. We propose that NATO's association with a globally recognised celebrity such as Angelina Jolie has the potential to transform NATO's identity narrative by adding public recognition and glamour to its projected self. Indeed, the study of celebrities, as security actors, offers particular insights, precisely because they are highly visible, and, as such can appeal to otherwise apolitical and perhaps disengaged mass audiences.¹⁴ Specifically, while the reception of such narratives is often overlooked¹⁵ in focusing on NATO's projected self-narrative and its reception in media coverage, we demonstrate how visual representations become integral to shaping the strategic narrative itself and its wider reception. This article therefore makes an important contribution to understanding the reception of strategic narratives and the importance of interrogating visuals. In so doing, we argue that paying attention to popular culture, which celebrity and star power can be constitutive of, is key to understanding the reception of both identity and issue focused strategic narratives given celebrities' questioning of 'any sharp distinction between elite and popular geopolitical discourses'.¹⁶ In taking a critical feminist approach we deepen this contribution by demonstrating how the successful reception of such narratives in popular culture is inherently gendered.

To this end we explore NATO's use of strategic narratives, specifically its identity narrative or what could be defined as its self-narrative, which in turn shapes the issue narrative of CRSGBV. Given the emphasis on the importance of 'seeing' such narratives¹⁷ we draw on both textual and visual representations in our analysis, largely communicated through digital channels, the latter being all the more important when a celebrity is involved in the narrative projection. Our analysis therefore concerns key texts and images released by NATO and Angelina Jolie, along with media and social media coverage. This allows us to determine how the visit was received and projected through (social) media, and specifically the value of the partnership for shaping NATO's self-narrative and the distinct issue narrative of CRSGBV.

We commence our article by introducing our method and material drawing upon scholarship on strategic narratives and visual security studies. In so doing we consider what a critical feminist reading of NATO's self-narrative can add to our understanding of the alliance itself and what it can tell us about the role of celebrity in global politics. We then discuss celebrity as a concept and identify the key premises of celebrity interventions at the global level. Next we locate our contribution within the burgeoning feminist literature on the WPS agenda, and the place of CRSGBV within it, specifically we focus on how the issue narrative has developed over time. This sets the stage for our feminist analysis of NATO's self-narrative and the place of WPS within it, reflecting on how Jolie's gendered personas, advocacy, and track record as a humanitarian framed the fleeting NATO-Jolie partnership and fed into NATO's attempt to frame itself as a 'global military leader' in addressing CRSGBV, through the projection and reception of the visit in popular culture and celebrity.

Strategic narratives: Visual and textual reception

Narratives about celebrities are told visually and textually across texts,¹⁸ often through digital channels. For example, Angelina Jolie's conduct of celebrity activism employs language pertaining

¹⁴Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.

¹⁵Rhys Crilly, 'Seeing strategic narratives?', *Critical Studies on Security*, 3:3 (2015), pp. 331–3; Louise Pears, 'Ask the audience: Television, security and homeland', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 9:1 (2016), pp. 76–96.

¹⁶Matthew C. Benwell, Klaus Dodds, and Alasdair Pinkerton, 'Celebrity geopolitics', *Political Geography*, 31:7 (2012), p. 405.

¹⁷Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Crilly, 'Seeing strategic narratives?'; Pears, 'Ask the audience'.

¹⁸Gillian Rose, 'On the relation between "visual research methods" and contemporary visual culture', *Sociological Review*, 62:1 (2014), pp. 24–46.

to her aesthetically pleasing looks and choice of outfits, and increasingly, those attributes are digitally represented across a variety of texts and visuals.¹⁹ This adds to Jolie's presence and recognition in global politics. Thus, it is necessary to consider what texts and 'images actually do and enable through their circulation'.²⁰ This is often a gendered process whereby celebrities of both genders are assigned stereotypical qualities. For example, texts and visuals telling the story of Sean Penn represent him within Western notions of masculine protection of distant vulnerable others.²¹ Feminist literature on visual security has focused on the visual portrayal of Afghan women as vulnerable others in need of Western protection, which in turn enabled what became a NATO-led intervention.²² Much of the visual security literature has been concerned with how images construct the referent object of security. For example, Lene Hansen's argument is that images can 'constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defence'.²³ However, our focus here is on how texts but also visuals are integral to the legitimisation of the projected strategic self-narrative of NATO as a 'military leader' on CRSGBV²⁴ and in turn the shaping of CRSGBV as an issue narrative through Jolie's visit and their reception in traditional and social media coverage.

The strategic use of narratives enables NATO to settle its preferences and create a story about the self 'to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors'.²⁵ A narrative that has gained widespread acceptance can, moreover, determine what is imaginable or indeed actionable and render an actor 'legitimate and capable'.²⁶ The incorporation of CRSGBV into NATO's self-narrative might not have been imaginable prior to its engagement with WPS in 2007, but has come to be accepted by many of its members and partners and also within the WPS field. For example, NATO has recently been invited to address the Security Council on the issue.²⁷ Thus, a critical feminist interrogation of narratives is necessary because, as Annick T. R. Wibben²⁸ argues:

Security narratives, as traditionally imagined, follow a particular form to impose meaning and create value in what International Relations (IR) considers to be an anarchic world. The continual reproduction of these narratives solidifies historically developed practices-violence practices that insist on the imposition of meanings that privilege state-centered, military forms of security. To challenge these practices, it is not only enough to propose different *contents* but the *form* of security narratives also needs to be tackled.

Relevant to our analysis then and key to developing our contribution in this area is Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle's²⁹ identification of three types of strategic

¹⁹Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

²⁰Matthew Kearns, 'Gender, visibility and violence: Visual securitization and the 2001 war in Afghanistan', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19:4 (2017), p. 492; see also David Campbell, 'Geopolitics and visibility: Sighting the Darfur conflict', *Political Geography*, 26:4 (2007), p. 361.

²¹Annika Bergman Rosamond, 'Humanitarian relief worker Sean Penn: A contextual story', in Lisa Ann Richey (ed.), *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations: Politics, Place and Power* (London: Routledge, 2015).

²²Miriam Cooke, 'Saving brown women', *Signs*, 28:1 (2002), pp. 468-70; Shahnaz Khan, 'The two faces of Afghan women: Oppressed and exotic', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 44 (2013), pp. 101-09; Kearns, 'Gender, visibility and violence'; Katharine A. M. Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan: Gender and the alliance's digital diplomacy', *Media, War and Conflict*, 12:1 (2019), pp. 87-101.

²³Lene Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for security studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:1 (2011), p. 51.

²⁴NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

²⁵Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*.

²⁶Ben Wellings, Serena Kelly, Bruce Wilson, Joe Burton, and Martin Holland, 'Narrative alignment and misalignment: NATO as a global actor as seen from Australia and New Zealand', *Asian Security*, 14:1 (2018), p. 34.

²⁷Clare Hutchinson, 'NATO Statement in the UN Security Council on Con ICT-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence', NATO (2019), available at: {https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_165211.htm} accessed 16 March 2020.

²⁸Annick T. R. Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 47.

²⁹Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*.

narratives: system narratives concerning the nature of the international system; identity narratives; and issue narratives. Identity narratives concern the identities of international actors and ‘are in a constant process of negotiation and contestation’.³⁰ Issue narratives ‘are strategic in the sense they seek to shape the terrain on which policy discussions take place’.³¹ At the issue level, NATO has sought to convince their publics that ‘ending’ CRSGBV is possible. However, gendered violence is often represented as a problem confined to non-Western states, which serves to reinforce the masculinist Western protection logic prevalent in global politics.³² In our analysis we therefore interrogate the co-constitutive nature of the projection and reception of identity and issue narratives.

The key contribution of this article thus stems from our analysis of NATO’s crafting of its identity narrative or self-narrative and importantly its wider reception, which in itself has an impact on a wider issue narrative, specifically the matter of CRSGBV. As we show below, NATO’s self-narrative has sought to ground the alliance within the values laid out in its foundational treaty, rather than its militarist purpose, with an increasing focus on WPS matters. Jolie’s visit added visibility and engagement with a new type of audience, lending credibility to NATO’s role in an issue area that it has not engaged with as publicly before. The role of celebrity therefore underscores the importance of including visuals in our analysis in order to ‘see’ narratives³³ and understand the meaning of their content, through their representation and interpretation.³⁴ As we have noted, the site of reception and the role of visual representation is often overlooked in studies of strategic narratives with the notable exceptions of Rhys Crilley’s³⁵ work on identity narratives and Louise Pears on issue narratives.³⁶ However, in focusing on the narrative NATO seeks to project *and* the media coverage of the visit, we show how visual representations become integral to its reception in wider celebrity and popular culture, thus shaping the strategic narrative itself. In this case through foregrounding celebrity and star power in our analysis we expose how a deeply gendered focus on Jolie’s beauty and maternity is key to shaping the reception of NATO’s strategic narratives.

Celebrities as security actors

A growing number of critical International Relations (IR) scholars recognise the importance of considering the constitutive effects of popular culture on world politics.³⁷ Rather than focusing on official documents, speeches, and statements, such scholarship zooms in on photography,³⁸ cinema,³⁹ fine arts and literature,⁴⁰ cartoons,⁴¹ and celebrity⁴² as ‘serious sites of

³⁰Ibid., p. 7.

³¹Ibid.

³²Iris Marion Young, ‘The logic of masculinist protection: Reflections on the current security state’, *Signs*, 29:1 (2003), pp. 1–26; Hannah Partis-Jennings, ‘The (in)security of gender in Afghanistan’s peacebuilding project hybridity and affect’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19:4 (2017), pp. 411–25.

³³Crilley, ‘Seeing strategic narratives?’.

³⁴Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, p. 125.

³⁵Crilley, ‘Seeing strategic narratives?’.

³⁶Pears, ‘Ask the audience’.

³⁷Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, ‘Pop goes IR? Researching the popular culture-world politics continuum’, *Politics*, 29:3 (2009), pp. 155–63; Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Hamilton and Shepherd (eds), *Understanding Popular Culture and World Politics in the Digital Age*.

³⁸Lene Hansen, ‘How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib’, *Review of International Studies*, 41:2 (2015), pp. 263–88.

³⁹Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁰Kyle Grayson, ‘How to read Paddington Bear: Liberalism and the foreign subject in *A Bear Called Paddington*’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15 (2013), pp. 378–93.

⁴¹Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for security studies’.

⁴²Bergman Rosamond, ‘The digital politics of celebrity activism’; Bergman Rosamond, ‘Global motherhood and celebrity politics’.

enquiry'.⁴³ Hansen's work⁴⁴ identifies a constitutive and interactive relationship between visuals and 'written and spoken discourses'. Key here is the position that visuals are not 'subordinated to the texts', rather, 'visuals interact with visuals' and 'texts'.⁴⁵ Cultural constructions such as these often contain references to imminent security threats and foreign policy challenges, and as such provide textual and visual platforms for the construction of global politics often communicated through digital channels.⁴⁶ Thus, it is increasingly through popular culture that discourses and practices of peace and security are constituted and communicated. Representations of violence and security 'matter'⁴⁷ and enable us to make sense of key security developments. Here we focus on textual and visual representations of celebrity in global politics, many of which are communicated through digital means.⁴⁸ Our position is that the aesthetically appealing images as well as textual accounts of Angelina Jolie at NATO are effective ways in which NATO's can draw attention to its emergent self-narrative as a gender just actor committed to the eradication of CRSGBV.

Celebrity is typically defined as a distinct form of fame that is intimately linked with capitalism and enabled by mass media.⁴⁹ Celebrities, are 'highly visible, famous and recognisable' and those characteristics are often mediated and constructed through mass media.⁵⁰ A particular feature of contemporary celebrity culture is the ability of celebrities to communicate their ethical messages to global audiences and doing so in speedier and more visible ways than governments, NGOs, and political leaders.⁵¹ The digitalisation of politics, philanthropy, and humanitarianism has enabled the likes of Angelina Jolie, Sean Penn, George Clooney, and many others to intervene in causes that they deem of moral significance, with CRSGBV matters being a key example here.⁵² Thus, celebrities 'hail national and international audiences in the way only presidents, royalty and prime ministers can hope to achieve'.⁵³ Celebrities, moreover, have 'a unique capacity to reach out to and mobilise otherwise apathetic publics, and sometimes manage to give powerful voices to the disenfranchised in society and on the world stage'.⁵⁴ Whether famous individuals give voice to the unheard is a matter of debate, yet, 'people model themselves in part on the lives of those they admire'.⁵⁵ From this follows that visual and textual exposure to celebrity advocacy and humanitarianism could be effective in evoking interests and empathy among fans, and, often doing so through traditional and social media.⁵⁶

Key here is Andrew Cooper's⁵⁷ research on 'celebrity diplomacy' and his contention that there is an 'advantage of linking individual star power to a collective project' to attract attention to

⁴³Cait Hamilton, 'World politics 2.0: An introduction', in Shepherd and Hamilton (eds), *Understanding Popular Culture and World Politics in the Digital Age*.

⁴⁴Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for security studies', p. 53.

⁴⁵Ibid.; Hansen, 'How images make world politics'; Kearns, 'Gender, visibility and violence'.

⁴⁶Shepherd and Hamilton (eds), *Understanding Popular Culture and World Politics in the Digital Age*.

⁴⁷Penny Griffin, *Popular Culture, Political Economy and the Death of Feminism: Why Women are in Refrigerators and Other Stories* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 1.

⁴⁸Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

⁴⁹David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Hilde Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism: Mediated Interventions in the Global Public Sphere* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁰Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*, pp. 28–9.

⁵¹Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

⁵²Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Natalie Florea Hudson and Alexandra Cosima Budabin, 'When advocacy securitizes non-state actors and the circulation of narratives around sexualized violence in conflict', in Michael J. Butler (ed.), *Securitization Revisited: Contemporary Applications and Insights* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

⁵³Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, p. 3; see also Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*.

⁵⁴David Marsh, Paul 't Hart, and Karen Tindall, 'Celebrity politics: The politics of the late modernity?', *Political Studies Review*, 8:3 (2010), p. 333.

⁵⁵Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 13.

⁵⁶Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*.

⁵⁷Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, p. 7.

global injustices. The boundaries between politics, diplomacy, and celebrity are increasingly blurred, giving rise to new modes of diplomacy and advocacy that at times replace ‘public action in favor of personal diplomacy’.⁵⁸ However, celebrity diplomacy does not replace politics but rather ‘complements and challenges traditional forms of statecraft and diplomacy in ways that are not without controversy’.⁵⁹ Indeed, beyond diplomacy at a global level ‘celebrities have become increasingly important in international development assistance’.⁶⁰ Their ethical legitimacy, in part at least, is derived from the recognition of their potential impact among national governments, politicians, and international organisations such as the UN.⁶¹ While celebrities often work on their own initiative, setting up foundations or visiting conflict-affected areas,⁶² they also are invited by a variety of actors to lend their names and fame to certain global issues.⁶³ National governments have drawn on celebrity in shaping their own identity narratives, one example being singer Rihanna’s appointment as an Ambassador by Barbados to promote the nation’s education, tourism, and investment.⁶⁴ NGOs also frequently use celebrities to shape issue narratives, drawing media attention to their cause and to raise funds.⁶⁵

Yet, the role that celebrities perform in global governance is not straightforward since often they appear to be ‘far from altruistic’, but rather ‘ideological’, ‘self-serving’, and promoting the ‘celebrity brand’ and embedding the ‘very global inequality it seeks to redress’.⁶⁶ As such, they inspire ‘narcissistic solidarity obsessed with our own emotions’ rather than ‘suffering others’.⁶⁷

The work of Alexandra Budabin and Lisa Ann Richey on celebrityisation of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo,⁶⁸ the study by Natalie Florea Hudson and Alexandra Budabin⁶⁹ of the role of non-state actors in securitising sexual violence in conflict and Annika Bergman Rosamond’s engagement with celebrity anti-war and interventionism⁷⁰ have made important contributions to our understanding of celebrities as security actors. Yet, less attention has been paid to celebrities’ explicit support for (political-) military actors such as NATO. Our critical feminist study of Angelina Jolie’s celebrity partnership with NATO, then, contributes to widening the scope of our understanding of the role and value of celebrity to global security structures and shaping both issue and identity narratives. Our specific intention here is to investigate how Angelina Jolie’s celebrity status and associated humanitarianism can contribute to the legitimisation of NATO’s strategic narrative. Here we do not determine the ethical legitimacy of Jolie’s support for NATO’s role in promoting CRSGBV matters, rather our ambition is to bring light to celebrities’ role in global security politics (or lack thereof).

⁵⁸Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 79; Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*.

⁵⁹Michelle Pace and Annika Bergman Rosamond, ‘Political legitimacy and celebrity politicians: Tony Blair as Middle East envoy 2007–2015’, *Middle East Critique*, 27:4 (2018), pp. 383–98; see also Benwell, Dodds, and Pinkerton, ‘Celebrity geopolitics’.

⁶⁰Lisa Ann Richey and Alexandra Cosima Budabin, ‘Celebritying conflict: How Ben Affleck sells the Congo to Americans’, *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development*, 7:1 (2016), p. 27.

⁶¹Bergman Rosamond, ‘Global motherhood and celebrity politics’.

⁶²Bergman Rosamond, ‘Humanitarian relief worker Sean Penn’.

⁶³Davies and True, ‘Norm entrepreneurship in foreign policy’.

⁶⁴Rihanna appointed as ambassador by Barbados, *BBC News* (2018), available at: {<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-45609656>} accessed 5 January 2021.

⁶⁵Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*.

⁶⁶Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism the Ideology of Global Charity* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

⁶⁷Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator*, p. 79; Dan Brockington, *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p. 23.

⁶⁸Richey and Budabin, ‘Celebritying conflict’.

⁶⁹Hudson and Budabin, ‘When advocacy securitizes’.

⁷⁰Annika Bergman Rosamond, ‘The cosmopolitan-communitarian divide and celebrity anti-war activism’, in Liza Tsaliqi, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteris Huliaras (eds), *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics Changing the World?* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

Contesting Women, Peace and Security as an issue narrative

Emerging from United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, and subsequently reinforced through the adoption of nine further related resolutions,⁷¹ the WPS agenda was ground-breaking. It calls for women's empowerment and involvement in peace negotiations and peacekeeping missions to enhance the prospects for long-lasting peace and security, while acknowledging women's specific vulnerabilities. The issue of CRSGBV is integral to the agenda and envisaged as a threat to international peace and security.

Despite its pronounced commitment to gender-just peace, the WPS agenda contains mechanisms, discourses, and practices, which, at times, are inconsistent with feminist commitments to demilitarisation and peace, as numerous feminist scholars have noted.⁷² Further, this language can actually reinforce militarist and Western imperialist positions.⁷³ Yet, as Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond note, there are 'a variety of political discourses present in national and international debates on the WPS agenda', providing 'arenas for collaboration between non-military and military actors, which challenge and contest the use of militaristic language and practice'.⁷⁴ It is an imperative therefore to consider whether the implementation of the agenda has 'resulted in narrow, self-interested, and even militaristic responses to complex social problems?'⁷⁵ thus shaping the issue narrative.

On CRSGBV specifically, WPS frames the issue within racialised language by frequently representing men from conflict-affected areas as the predominate perpetrators, serving to deflect from the prevalence of such violence in 'peacetime' states⁷⁶ or among peacekeepers.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the reductive character of WPS frames the issue as an individual, rather than systemic problem, and women's participation in peacebuilding as a means to address the issue.⁷⁸ Moreover, adding women and stirring, in a liberal sense, does not necessarily disrupt the gender order of military institutions, but rather ensures the sedimentation of masculinised norms that are in turn linked to militarism.⁷⁹ This narrative also mandates a state-based response underpinned by an assumption that restoring state authority and bringing perpetrators to justice will end CRSGBV.⁸⁰ This in turn echoes NATO's own problematised approach to CRSGBV, understood as a 'weapon of war', focusing on recruiting *enough* women to NATO forces on the premise this will support their transformation.⁸¹ Next, we examine NATO's self-narrative as a WPS actor before considering what the addition of Jolie and an increased emphasis on celebrity, aesthetics and the visuals might do to that story and the wider issue narrative of WPS and CRSBV specifically.

⁷¹The ten WPS resolutions are: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

⁷²Sam Cook, 'Security Council Resolution 1820: On militarism, flashlights, raincoats, and rooms with doors: A political perspective on where it came from and what it adds', *Emory International Law Review*, 23 (2009), pp. 125–40; Laura J. Shepherd, 'Making war safe for women? National Action Plans and the militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Political Science Review*, 37:3 (2016), pp. 324–35; Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond, 'Re-politicising the gender-security nexus: Sweden's feminist foreign policy', *European Review of International Studies*, 5:3 (2018).

⁷³Soumita Basu, 'The Global South writes 1325 (too)', *International Political Science Review*, 37:3 (2016), pp. 62–374.

⁷⁴Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond, 'Re-politicising the gender-security nexus', p. 35.

⁷⁵Natalie Florea Hudson, 'Securitizing women's rights and gender equality', *Journal of Human Rights*, 8:1 (2009), pp. 53–70.

⁷⁶Gina Heathcote, 'Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: Progressive gains or dangerous development?', *Global Society*, 32:4 (2018), p. 380.

⁷⁷Marsha Henry, 'Peacexploitation? Interrogating labor hierarchies and global sisterhood among Indian and Uruguayan female peacekeepers', *Globalizations*, 9:1 (2012), pp. 15–33.

⁷⁸Heathcote, 'Security Council Resolution 2242', p. 380.

⁷⁹Annica Kronsell, *Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defense: Militarism and Peacekeeping* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸⁰Sara Meger, 'The fetishization of sexual violence in international security', *International Studies Quarterly*, 60:1 (2016), p. 153.

⁸¹Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 122.

NATO's self-narrative: A WPS actor in the making

While the self-identity of NATO primarily is that of a political-military alliance, it has engaged with gender issues for some time, pre-dating its adoption of a policy on WPS in 2007.⁸² Yet, it is only recently that this work has moved from the margins to the epicentre of the alliance, which has changed the way the alliance projects itself as an actor in international politics through its strategic narrative.⁸³ As Matthew Hurley argues, storytelling has been central to institutionalising WPS at NATO, serving to 'reinforce a wider narrative of *positive progression* and inevitable harmony between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and NATO "values" constructed by the alliance; a narrative that is premised on NATO's understanding of itself as a key, responsible international actor'.⁸⁴ Such an engagement with WPS has contributed to a core part of NATO's public face, the promotion of democracy and freedom across the world,⁸⁵ with, as Katharine A. M. Wright argues, support for WPS being part of that quest.⁸⁶

Key to NATO's evolving self-narrative is its embrace of new forms of digital communication, with NATO responding to the proliferation of social media and a turn to digital diplomacy in global politics.⁸⁷ For example, social media has been used to visually project a select few senior women in NATO, belying the gendered reality of an organisation dominated by men in decision-making positions.⁸⁸ This self-narrative has also been defined by the distinct masculinist protection logic, with NATO justifying its military interventionism on gendered grounds.⁸⁹

NATO's response is in part reflective of the constraints of a multilateral institution built on consensus decision-making, limited by its members' priorities, and sensitive not to implicate themselves as perpetrators.⁹⁰ NATO's initial policy position on WPS in 2007 made no mention of sexual violence in conflict, although it was introduced in the resulting military command.⁹¹ BI-Strategic Command 40-1 narrates NATO as a protector of women from CRSGBV, while upholding the alliance's standards in operational conduct on the ground.⁹² This narration is carried through in its 2011 revised policy, which describes how the WPS resolutions make provision for responses to CRSGBV, but it does not outline NATO's specific responsibilities.⁹³ The 2014 revision of NATO's WPS policy and action plan detail for the first time NATO actions on CRSGBV, including the development of military guidelines and their integration into operational

⁸²Katharine A. M. Wright, 'NATO's adoption of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: Making the agenda a reality', *International Political Science Review*, 37:3 (2016), pp. 350–61; Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*.

⁸³Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'; Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 14.

⁸⁴Matthew Hurley, 'Watermelons and weddings: Making Women, Peace and Security "relevant" at NATO through (re)telling stories of success', *Global Society*, 32:4 (2018), pp. 436–56.

⁸⁵Kuus, "'Love, peace and Nato'", p. 269; Merje Kuus, 'Cosmopolitan militarism? Spaces of NATO expansion', *Environment and Planning A*, 41:3 (2009), pp. 545–62.

⁸⁶Wright, 'NATO's adoption of UNSCR 1325'; Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'; see also: Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 108.

⁸⁷G. R. Dimitriu, 'Winning the story war: Strategic communication and the conflict in Afghanistan', *Public Relations Review*, 38:2 (2012), p. 203.

⁸⁸Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 31.

⁸⁹Hurley, 'Watermelons and weddings'; Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'; Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*.

⁹⁰Laura Hebert, 'Analyzing UN and NATO responses to sexual misconduct in peacekeeping operations', in Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg (eds), *Making Gender, Making War Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

⁹¹Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 120.

⁹²NATO, 'Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1 Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspectives in the NATO Command Structure including Measures for Protection during Armed Conflict' (2009), available at: {http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_09/20090924_Bi-SC_DIRECTIVE_40-1.pdf} accessed 12 December 2012.

⁹³NATO, 'NATO/EAPC policy for implementing UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and Related Resolutions' (2011), available at: {http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-25EE1764-ED25FDD4/natolive/official_texts_76395.htm?selectedLocale=en} accessed 3 January 2013.

planning,⁹⁴ with the military guidelines adopted in 2015.⁹⁵ Hence at the time of Jolie's visit, NATO was making some inroads to address CRSGBV, but lagged behind the wider international impetus to address CRSGBV. It also was not actively seeking to project its understanding of CRSGBV in shaping the wider issue narrative.

It is worth noting here that Jolie's visit coincided with the first month in office of Clare Hutchinson, newly appointed to the role of NATO Secretary General's Special Representative on WPS. Hutchinson's address to the UN Security Council in April 2019 on CRSGBV contrasts significantly with the language of both Jolie and Stoltenberg just 15 months prior. It was a departure from NATO's previous (and Jolie's own) narrow focus on CRSGBV as a 'tactic of war', rather she argues that 'sexual violence stems from fundamental gender inequalities. Focussing on solely protective and preventative solutions is limited and insufficient.'⁹⁶ Hutchinson's intervention at the Security Council shows the importance but also the limits of individuals in shaping institutional narratives from within. It should be noted that beyond Hutchinson's intervention, NATO's policy commitments continue to narrowly define sexual violence in conflict as a weapon of war. This apparent significant departure and Hutchinson's leadership on WPS at NATO may indicate why Jolie did not return to NATO in the 'coming months and years' as she had stated she would.⁹⁷ And while Jolie was billed to return to NATO (virtually) for a Digital Dialogue on Conflict Related Violence in June 2020 she failed to show at the last minute.⁹⁸ Another explanation could be Jolie's view of how NATO was approaching the issue. Prior to her successful partnership with UK Foreign Secretary William Hague on PSVI, Jolie initially refused the invitation to engage because of a fear it would turn into 'a lot of talking ... when something very practical had to be done'.⁹⁹

Angelina Jolie's 2018 visit to NATO

A critical feminist reading of Jolie is integral to understanding how her star power, and the issues or institutions she lends it to, shapes the way in which strategic narratives are received. Like a number of famous people, Angelina Jolie possesses a private and public self, with the latter being a 'staged activity, in which the human actor presents a front or a face to others while keeping a significant portion of the self in reserve'.¹⁰⁰ Of course no single story can capture the persona of Angelina Jolie, rather it 'is a composite of glamorous mega-mainstream star, influential humanitarian, power mom, part of a celebrity couple and radical personality'.¹⁰¹ Several scholars have attributed her sense of obligation to her dual role as a mother, combining the maternal care of her children with her compassionate approach to women and children and other vulnerable categories in need. She is what Annika Bergman Rosamond defined as a 'global mother', which is also a term used by Lisa Ann Richey and Dan Brockington¹⁰² in describing her maternal

⁹⁴NATO, 'NATO/EAPC Action Plan for the Implementation of the NATO/EAPC Policy on Women, Peace and Security' (2014), available at: {http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_06/20140626_140626-wps-action-plan.pdf} accessed 29 August 2017.

⁹⁵NATO, 'Military Guidelines on the Prevention of, and Response to, Conflict Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence' (2015), available at: {http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/2015/MCM-0009-2015_ENG_PDP.pdf} accessed 20 October 2016.

⁹⁶Hutchinson, 'NATO Statement'.

⁹⁷NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

⁹⁸Author's attendance as an audience member at the Digital Dialogue.

⁹⁹Julian Borger, 'Angelina Jolie and William Hague form unlikely double act to tackle rape in war', *The Guardian* (2013), available at: {<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/mar/27/angelina-jolie-william-hague-war>}.

¹⁰⁰Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaction Books, 2001), p. 11; see also Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*, p. 117.

¹⁰¹Anne Jerslev, 'Talking about Angelina: Celebrity gossip on the Internet', *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 12:1 (2014), p. 109; see also Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

¹⁰²Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'; Lisa Ann Richey and Dan Brockington, 'Celebrity humanitarianism: Using tropes of engagement to understand North/South relations', *Perspectives on Politics*, 18:1 (2020), pp. 43–59; Mary Mostafanezhad, 'Angelina Jolie and the everyday

care beyond borders. Jolie's pursuits of global motherhood then are rooted in 'her lived experiences as a mother of six children (biological and adopted) combined with her mega stardom and privileged position in the world economy', which 'place her well to intervene in discourses and practices on global justice, rights and violence'. Her performance of maternal care in global politics has often taken the shape of support for women and girls suffering at the hands of forceful displacement sexual violence in conflict.¹⁰³ What is more, Jolie's commitment to the eradication of CRSGBV is situated within her preference for cosmopolitan conceptions of global obligation and face-to-face encounters.¹⁰⁴ In her words:

I have met survivors from Afghanistan and Somalia, and they are just like us with one crucial difference. We live in safe countries with doctors we can go to when we're hurt, police we can turn to when we're wronged, and institutions that protect us. They live in refugee camps ... in areas where there is no law, no protection, and not even the hope of justice. They struggle to keep their children safe, and if they admit to being raped, they are likely to face more violence and social rejection.¹⁰⁵

As an actor Jolie has appeared in blockbusters and directed her own films, including *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (covering CRSGBV in the Bosnian War). Aside from her artistic work, Angelina Jolie is known for her roles as a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador (2001–12) and, more recently, as a Special Envoy to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2012–present). She also launched and co-led the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) with former Foreign Secretary William Hague,¹⁰⁶ and is now a Professor of Practice at the London School of Economics teaching on the MA in Women, Peace and Security. We contend here that the legitimacy of Jolie, in part at least, has derived from her numerous and varied engagements with the issue of sexual violence in conflict, which can be of value to other more conventional security actors who may lack credibility in the area of WPS, such as NATO. Moreover, that the value and subsequent reception of such engagement has to be understood against the wider gendered backdrop of her positioning as a 'global mother'.¹⁰⁷

Thus, Jolie is highly visible in the entertainment industry and in global politics. That visibility, moreover, has been amplified by the digitalisation of celebrity diplomacy and politics, ensuring that visuals portraying Jolie, either on her humanitarian trips to conflict zones, or in her official UNHCR role are dispersed globally.¹⁰⁸ The digital circulation of images of Jolie promoting the eradication of CRSGBV and issues pertaining to the ongoing global refugee crisis during her many overseas trips,¹⁰⁹ we argue, is key to securing the wide reception within popular culture of her visit to NATO. Such media footage mixes projections of Jolie as a (white) saviour and a global mother supporting survivors of sexual violence, with imagery of her 'hanging out' with the likes of former British Foreign Secretary William Hague and now NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (Figure 1). Her legitimacy then as a humanitarian actor is underpinned by racialised and gendered logics as well as Jolie's privileged position in global politics.¹¹⁰ The invitation

geopolitics of celebrity humanitarianism in a Thailand–Burma border town', in Richey (ed.), *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North–South Relations*, pp. 27–47.

¹⁰³Bergman Rosamond and Gregoratti, 'Neoliberal turns in global humanitarian governance'; Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Davies and True, 'Norm entrepreneurship in foreign policy'.

¹⁰⁴Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'; Mostafanezhad, 'Angelina Jolie and the everyday geopolitics'.

¹⁰⁵Angelina Jolie, 'Remarks from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Special Envoy Angelina Jolie', 12 June 2014.

¹⁰⁶Davies and True, 'Norm entrepreneurship in foreign policy'.

¹⁰⁷Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.

¹⁰⁸Van den Bulck, *Celebrity Philanthropy and Activism*.

¹⁰⁹Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.

¹¹⁰Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'.



Figure 1. Angelina Jolie with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in his office.

Source: NATO, 'Visit to NATO by the Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (2018), available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_151258.htm accessed 11 April 2018. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>.

to NATO in 2018 has contributed to securing her status as one of the world's most powerful celebrity diplomats. Yet, we should ask whether somebody like Jolie really challenges the current international security structure because 'most celebrities do not fundamentally challenge statist practices and discourses of sovereign integrity and capitalism ... but reproduce these through their privileged position in celebrity society.'¹¹¹ In what follows we turn to Jolie's engagements with NATO, seeking to unpack the reasons for the alliance's decision to join forces with the star and drawing attention to the relatively short-lived nature of that partnership, as well as the often underappreciated complexity of CRSGBV issues.

The first thing to note is that NATO does not have a celebrity liaison office nor have there been previous engagements with global celebrity on the scale of Angelina Jolie's visit to the alliance.¹¹² The impetus for Jolie's engagement with NATO is not known so it is unclear whether the drive came from Jolie or NATO.¹¹³ At this stage we should also note that though we initially expected

¹¹¹Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism', p. 105.

¹¹²While there have been celebrity visits to NATO, these have not been from globally recognised stars, nor visits aimed at drawing attention to NATO from a global audience. For example, in 2005 the Eurovision song contest winner Ruslana and a group of Ukrainian celebrities visited NATO HQ and met the Secretary General (NATO, 2005). The purpose of the visit was to examine 'how celebrities could help in Ukraine's membership aspirations and work to break down lingering Cold War stereotypes' (NATO, 2005). There was neither press conference nor wider media coverage outside Ukraine.

¹¹³Given NATO has no track record of engaging global celebrities, it seems likely it relied on an individual within NATO to make the meeting possible. The approach to Jolie did not come via the WPS Office given the post had been effectively vacant prior to Clare Hutchinson taking up the role in January 2018 coinciding with Jolie's visit to NATO. The US Ambassador to NATO is not present in any of the smaller meetings and if the approach had come through the US delegation (or any other delegation) we could expect them to be a visible presence accompanying Jolie. A person we do find present in all

that Jolie's visit would mark the start of a long-term relationship between her and NATO, it turned out to be a short lived collaboration. Apart from her 2018 visit as far as we know no other visit has taken place and, as we have discussed, while she was billed as returning to NATO in June 2020 for a virtual event she was a last minute no-show. At the joint NATO press conference Jolie articulated that 'I am very honoured that I will be working with him [the Secretary General] over the coming months and years' and 'there is a lot more work to be done and so one of the countries we [NATO and Jolie] have been focusing on, possibly being one of our first to visit, is Afghanistan'.¹¹⁴ Given Jolie's frequent appearance at the UN as well as her long-term commitment to the eradication of sexual violence in conflict and the destiny of the world's refugees it is a little surprising that only one such high-profile visit took place. That a long-term partnership did not come to pass tells us something about both NATO and the role of celebrity in security. However, it does not mean that supporting particular causes across organisational and national contexts has no constitutive effects. The frequency with which images of Jolie at NATO appeared in digital and social media and continue to do so leads us to conclude that the alliance's efforts have not been insignificant, lending evidence to the wider 'celebrification' of NATO's WPS work and further contributing to shaping NATO's self-narrative, as well as legitimising NATO's projection of CRSGBV as an issue narrative.

The invocation of celebrity to engage with an issue narrative is significant both because, as discussed above, NATO engaged relatively late with CRSGBV, but also because CRSGBV is not a global issue without controversy; it is messy and contested.¹¹⁵ This provides a challenge for policymakers who inevitably rely on simplification in dealing with the issue¹¹⁶ with more nuanced understandings of CRSGBV far less likely to capture headlines.¹¹⁷ It also provides an opportunity for an intervention by an actor such as NATO to shape the issue narrative concerning CRSBV, and at the same time their own self-narrative, with simpler understandings more likely to capture popular cultural imaginaries. A partnership with celebrity further facilitates such action and while Jolie is often elevated as an expert on gender justice and repression, her preference for rapid solutions, at times, appears to be divorced from more long-term thinking, even if her 'star power' has elevated the issue to global attention.¹¹⁸ Her rhetoric then is located within a wish to end sexual violence in conflict 'once and for all', though the issue is complex and demands long-term structural solutions and the disruption of global and domestic patriarchy. For example, the UK's PSVI, spearheaded by Jolie and Hague, was informed by a 'limited and simplistic framing of what is and what is not',¹¹⁹ with the lack of leadership, strategy, and funding leading to a 'risk that programming inadvertently causes harm to survivors'.¹²⁰ Yet, whenever Jolie speaks the world has a tendency to listen, regardless of the shortcomings of some of the projects (or organisations) that she pairs up with.

of the meetings bar one is then-Deputy Secretary General and US Diplomat Ambassador Rose Gottemoeller, who is also seen in video footage taking the lead in introducing Jolie to other NATO Officials (Hutchinson, 'NATO Statement in the UN Security Council'). She is also a known supporter of the WPS agenda and so uniquely positioned within NATO at that time to make the connection.

¹¹⁴NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹¹⁵Harriet Gray and Anja K. Franck, 'Refugees as/at risk: The gendered and racialized underpinnings of securitization in British media narratives', *Security Dialogue*, 50:3 (2019), p. 201.

¹¹⁶Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 4.

¹¹⁷Gray and Franck, 'Refugees as/at risk', p. 201.

¹¹⁸Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, pp. 34–5; Mark Wheeler, 'Celebrity diplomacy: United Nations' goodwill ambassadors and messengers of peace', *Celebrity Studies*, 2:1 (2011), p. 15.

¹¹⁹Gray and Franck, 'Refugees as/at risk', p. 201.

¹²⁰Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 'The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative' (2020), available at: <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-UKs-preventing-sexual-violence-in-conflict-initiative.pdf> accessed 27 January 2020.

Angelina Jolie's visit to Brussels in 2018 marked a change in NATO's public diplomacy practices through engaging global celebrity for the first time, while adding visibility and recognition to its work on CRSGBV issues and providing an opening for NATO to shape the issue narrative as well as its own self-narrative. Given that NATO had in 2018 trailed behind wider moves to address sexual violence in conflict, teaming up with Angelina Jolie, whose involvement in the eradication of CRSGBV exceeds that of NATO, appeared to be a smart move. To reconstitute its own self-narrative, NATO made productive use of the publicity surrounding Jolie's visit through the use of a live-streamed press conference, video shoots, and photo opportunities (See, for example, Figures 1–6). The story telling surrounding Jolie's visit was preceded by a joint op-ed that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Jolie published in *The Guardian*. As noted previously, media coverage of Jolie's also featured in outlets such as the *Daily Mail Online*, *PopSugar*, and *People*. Jolie's presence at NATO could therefore be viewed as smart diplomacy, and an important step in retelling the story about the alliance using celebrity and online outlets to engage a global audience. What is more, by retelling its identity narrative and by adding celebrity to its plot NATO has sought to attract audiences that otherwise would have little knowledge of what NATO *is* or *does*.¹²¹ The coverage of Jolie's appearances at NATO followed the same logic as her appearances elsewhere with visuals being employed to capture global audiences and secure the wider reception of the strategic narrative. As Roland Bleiker¹²² argues 'images and visual artefacts do things. They are political forces in themselves. They often shape politics as much as they depict it.' The highly visual visit was therefore an exercise in what we term the 'beautifying' of NATO through invoking celebrity and aesthetically pleasing visuals, and using social media effectively in so doing.

The press release and 74 'behind-the-scenes' images NATO released of the visit¹²³ emphasise both the importance of visuals, but also give us a preview of Jolie's itinerary. In a similar vein to her UN field visits, Jolie met with senior officials in a variety of formats, including a one-to-one with the Secretary General Jen Stoltenberg in his private office, meeting later with Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller and Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Curtis Scaparrotti to be briefed by NATO's gender advisors in Afghanistan and Kosovo via teleconference.¹²⁴ Jolie also met with the NATO Special Representative on WPS Clare Hutchinson and the Chief of the International Military Staff Office of the Gender Advisor Magdalena Dvorakova (Figure 2).

Significantly, Jolie participated in a specially convened joint meeting of NATO's highest decision-making bodies; the North Atlantic Council and Military Committee, which 'focused on NATO's efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence' (Figures 3 and 4). At the meeting she sat next to the Secretary General, which is something largely unprecedented. Unsurprisingly given her star status, her walk around NATO headquarters attracted attention from staff who were quick to snap photographs of Jolie, and take 'selfies' of themselves on their mobile phones, adding a new dimension to the coverage and reception of the visit on social media (as a number of NATO Officials commented on Twitter) (Figure 5). The joint press conference with Stoltenberg was also given in front of a packed press gallery (Figure 6).

While the WPS agenda, (and more so CRSGBV issues) are highly contentious and political, the partnership between Jolie and NATO is presented as frictionless and depoliticised, or as *People* magazine described 'the latest stop in a whirlwind tour [by Jolie] that has combined business with pleasure'.¹²⁵ Whereas Jolie championed NATO's role in her visit and surrounding

¹²¹Kuus, "Love, peace and Nato"; Kuus, 'Cosmopolitan militarism?.'

¹²²Roland Bleiker, 'Mapping visual global politics', in Roland Bleiker (ed.), *Visual Global Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 3.

¹²³NATO 'Visit to NATO'.

¹²⁴NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹²⁵Phil Boucher and Peter Mikelbank, 'Angelina Jolie urges NATO to target sexual violence in conflict zones', *People* (2018), available at: {<https://people.com/movies/angelina-jolie-urges-nato-to-target-sexual-violence-in-conflict-zones/>} accessed 26 February 2020.



Figure 2. Angelina Jolie and Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller attend a teleconference with mission commanders and gender advisors, including Secretary General's Special Representative on Women, Peace and Security Clare Hutchinson and Chief of the IMS Office of the Gender Advisor Magdalena Dvorakova.

Source: NATO, 'Visit to NATO'. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: {<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>}.

publicity, she was quick to distance herself where a less positive and progressive image of NATO was presented. For example, a question on addressing impunity given 'NATO is seen in large parts of the world as the vehicle of American imperialism', led Jolie to respond that she is

joining NATO as a humanitarian. I am here to be working, you know I am not a military personnel but I am here to help to work on the side of where NATO does training that affects their relationship to the civilians on the ground and their accountability to the civilians on the ground and their impact.¹²⁶

Her interventions sidestep the question at hand and conveys the idea that NATO is somewhat detached from those who suffer on the ground. It rests on an assumption that she, though a celebrity, is more connected to the survivors and victims of sexual violence. This discursive logic lacks reflection of Jolie's own location within privilege, power, and the colonial and gendered logics of Western humanitarianism.¹²⁷ Further, she upholds the masculinist protection logic that defines states' participation in NATO-led military operations for the purpose of saving sufferers beyond borders. This contributes to the projection of a depoliticised reading of the CSRGBV issue narrative,¹²⁸ itself necessary to support NATO's self-narrative as a gender just military actor.

Our focus here is not on Jolie's activism but what this partnership, however fleeting, means for NATO's self-narrative, potential to shape CRSGBV as an issue narrative, and importantly its

¹²⁶NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹²⁷Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

¹²⁸Gray and Franck, 'Refugees as/at risk'.



Figure 3. Angelina Jolie sits next to Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the specially convened joint meeting of the North Atlantic Council/Military Committee.
Source: NATO, 'visit to NATO'. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: {<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>}.



Figure 4. Angelina Jolie addresses the joint meeting of the North Atlantic Council/Military Committee.
Source: NATO, 'visit to NATO'. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: {<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>}.



Figure 5. NATO staff snap pictures on their phones as Angelina Jolie is accompanied on her tour of NATO HQ by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. *Source:* NATO, 'Visit to NATO'. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: {<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>}.



Figure 6. Angelina Jolie and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg address the press conference. *Source:* NATO, 'Visit to NATO'. Image used under NATO's 'fair use' policy: {<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/68162.htm>}.

reception in the media and among wider audiences, including what questions the press reported on. There were opportunities in the press conference for more critical engagement with NATO's CRSGBV work, for example, one reporter from the *Wall Street Journal* asked: 'Is NATO and the Resolute Support Mission [in Afghanistan] doing enough to protect children from sexual exploitation by NATO trained forces?', a highly sensitive issue for NATO members.¹²⁹ In their replies, Stoltenberg stated that NATO has 'done a lot', without being specific on what that was and Jolie responded that 'Afghanistan is a country I have been to a few times, very dear to my heart' and 'there is a lot more work to be done'. Neither of these questions, nor the beleaguered responses, were picked up on in any of the media coverage, and thus this more critical account of NATO did not permeate popular culture and were therefore missing from the reception of NATO's self-narrative. As we go onto discuss, such coverage focused on Jolie's looks, motherhood, and jet-set lifestyle. This corresponds to previous findings on the reception of Jolie's activism, often stripping out the politics to focus on the aesthetics.¹³⁰ In this case, contributing to shaping a self-narrative of NATO as an actor for gender justice and further contributing to a wider depoliticised CRSGBV issue narrative. Next, we provide an analysis of the issues arising from NATO's efforts to transform its self-narrative to become a leading actor in the field of CRSGBV, focusing on its attempts to position itself as a 'military leader' on tackling CRSGBV and constitutively introducing 'awareness raising' of NATO's role in addressing the issue as a tool in and of itself to address CRSGBV thus shaping the wider issue narrative.

Military leadership on CRSGBV

Our analysis of the visit, press conference and resulting coverage find an attempt to constitute NATO as a military leader in responding to CRSGBV. The quest for leadership prevails in contemporary efforts to tell the story of NATO as a 'gender-just' military alliance. However, the articulation of that specific theme rests on an assumption that sexual violence in conflict is solely a 'tactic of war' and neglects the potential of NATO troops to be perpetrators, rather than just 'reporters' of sexual violence. In the *Guardian* op-ed on NATO's response to CRSGBV, jointly authored by Stoltenberg and Jolie, NATO is constituted as a defender of democratic values and CRSGBV as a 'tactic of war'. In their words:

We believe that Nato [*sic*] has the responsibility and opportunity to be a leading protector of women's rights.

In particular, we believe Nato can become the global military leader in how to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict, drawing on the strengths and capabilities of its member states and working with its many partner countries.¹³¹

The desire to become a global leader, moreover, is linked to NATO's willingness to take on board a responsibility for the eradication of CRSGBV and therefore contribute to shaping the wider issue narrative. The bilateral partnership with Jolie and her previous CRSGBV advocacy adds legitimacy to that quest for leadership. It also echoes NATO's wider engagement with WPS, which has been carried out through partnership with external actors.¹³² For example, Jolie's visit was later claimed as evidence by the Secretary General that NATO was 'doing Women, Peace and Security'.¹³³ Jolie's role is both to bring CRSGBV-related issues to NATO's attention, but also to confer legitimacy on NATO's self-narrative as a world leader. She does so by highlighting the

¹²⁹Hebert, 'Analyzing UN and NATO responses'.

¹³⁰See also Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

¹³¹Jens Stoltenberg and Angelina Jolie, 'Why Nato must defend women's rights', *The Guardian* (2017), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/10/why-nato-must-defend-womens-rights>} accessed 11 April 2018.

¹³²Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'.

¹³³Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 14.

need 'to make NATO the global leader, [the] military leader in this area'¹³⁴ and her visit and partnership with NATO adds visibility to that leadership role.

This articulation of NATO's self-narrative was picked up in traditional and social media coverage with *People* quoting the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's assertion that 'NATO has the responsibility to be a leading protector of women's rights.' Jolie and Stoltenberg gave a long press conference, so it matters what is reported on. The focus on these particular lines is significant because they narrate NATO within gender binaries, pertaining to the alliance being a 'saviour'/good and those who commit CRSGBV as inherently evil, again reinforcing the masculinist and racialised protection logic evident in NATO's wider engagement with WPS,¹³⁵ and reinforcing a simplified issue narrative concerning CRSGBV belying its reality.¹³⁶

The projection and reception of Jolie was highly visual. While the focus of the co-authored *Guardian* op-ed is NATO, the article features just one photograph, a close-up portrait of Jolie with minimal makeup and a sombre look on her face.¹³⁷ The visual representation of Jolie, a leader in her own right and a supporter of NATO can add rigour to its search for CRSGBV leadership. The digital coverage in *PopSugar* focuses on Jolie's ability to enable NATO in its efforts to 'raise awareness' of the issue of sexual violence.¹³⁸ In *PopSugar*, Jolie's attire is visually projected, drawing attention to her beauty in 'a black off-the-shoulder dress', although the photograph included is a press shot of Jolie and Stoltenberg shaking hands during the press conference.¹³⁹ The focus on Jolie's appearance and beauty, rather than the substance of the visit, is thus reinforced by the use of photographs of Jolie's NATO visit, all of which were taken during the press conference. Her beauty was also front and centre of the *Daily Mail Online's* coverage: 'The Oscar-winning actress, 42, wore a caped black dress and matching heels for her meeting with NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg.'¹⁴⁰ The visual element of this coverage focuses on Jolie picking up her handbag following the press conference with 'Jens' [Stoltenberg] seemingly helping her. This is reflective of the gendered and often shallow projection of celebrity humanitarianism, being attentive to the beauty, dignity, and dress sense of the celebrity in question, rather than the message they seek to deliver.¹⁴¹ The visual projection of Jolie is a mechanism to draw readers in, and, represent her as an agent of change adding legitimacy and knowledge to NATO's self-narrative as a CRSGBV leader, and ensuring its reception and contributing to its acceptance by the audience. For example, in an interview in *Elle* magazine, conducted by John Kerry, Jolie's work with NATO is constituted as a training and protection strategy, and as a way of 'getting more women in the military'.¹⁴²

In a similar vein, The *Daily Mail Online* frames Jolie's visit to NATO as 'the latest stop on Angelina's tour of Europe', prior to meeting France's First Lady Brigitte Macron to 'discuss her recent visit to Jordan and urge members of the UN Security Council to resolve the conflict in Syria' and before attending 'a beauty launch at the Guerlain headquarters'. The *Daily Mail Online* only touches briefly on the purpose of Jolie's visit to NATO by citing the *Guardian*

¹³⁴NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹³⁵Hurley, 'Watermelons and weddings'; Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'; Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*.

¹³⁶Gray and Franck, 'Refugees as/at risk'.

¹³⁷Stoltenberg and Jolie, 'Why Nato must defend women's rights'.

¹³⁸Monica Sisavat, 'Angelina Jolie visits NATO to fight for women's rights, and world leaders should pay attention', *PopSugar* (2018), available at: {<https://www.popsugar.co.uk/celebrity/Angelina-Jolie-NATO-Headquarters-Belgium-January-2018-44544511>} accessed 28 May 2019.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Eve Buckland, 'Angelina Jolie visits NATO headquarters in Belgium to discuss prevention of sexual violence against women in warzones ... as her tour of', *Daily Mail Online* (2018), available at: {<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-5334467/Angelina-Jolie-visits-NATO-headquarters-Brussels.html>} accessed 24 February 2020.

¹⁴¹Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'.

¹⁴²John Kerry, 'What Angelina Jolie is fighting for now', *Elle* (2018), available at: {<https://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/a16642591/angelina-jolie-march-cover-2018/>} accessed 11 April 2018.

op-ed that ‘Angelina and Jens united for’ to enquire ‘how the NATO alliance could be a role model and “leading protector” of women’s rights, and ending gender-based violence’.¹⁴³ The attention and focus on Jolie, rather than NATO, constitutes the alliance as ‘everyday and unremarkable’, while the association with celebrity makes it ‘morally good’, contributing to what Merje Kuus¹⁴⁴ describes as ‘banal militarism: an unremarkable assumption that the military apparatus is ethically grounded and capable for achieving peace’. This form of militarism is compounded with the use of new media technology with social media and a focus on visuality enabling ‘traditional and new actors involved in processes of militarization to communicate their messages in novel ways, in real time, and to potentially larger audiences at a lower cost than was previously possible’.¹⁴⁵

Jolie’s visit, moreover, creates awareness of CRSGBV matters, while reassuring NATO member states and beyond that the alliance is taking action by highlighting the significance of the agenda. Jolie’s celebrity status, as well as her official role as a UN Special Envoy, adds force to NATO’s quest for global CRSGBV leadership.¹⁴⁶ As the *Metro.Style* coverages notes, ‘the full-time mother isn’t just an Oscar-winning actress and director, she’s also been the Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’.¹⁴⁷ We suggest here that the visual storytelling that surrounds Jolie’s visit as a high-ranking UN diplomat adds visibility and credibility to her actions, while being key to raising positive associations for NATO with a cause, and, among audiences that the alliance does not usually reach. Moreover, it can be linked to NATO’s position that ‘awareness raising’ in itself constitutes action on CRSGBV, which we discuss next.

Awareness raising

At the joint press conference by ‘NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie’ during her visit to NATO HQ in Brussels, it was repeatedly noted that raising awareness about CRSGBV is a means to trigger action.¹⁴⁸ Stoltenberg stated that ‘words are important, awareness is important because that’s the first step towards action’.¹⁴⁹ Awareness has therefore become part of NATO’s WPS work and response to CRSGBV and is linked with its self-narrative as a military leader.

Jolie’s association with NATO sparked a significant increase in awareness of the alliance, with many media and social platforms across the globe extensively covering her visit to Brussels, including, as noted above, celebrity focused publications that NATO would not usually feature in. What is more, many of the readers of such texts are likely to be women, a stark contrast to the usual demographic engaging with NATO.¹⁵⁰ The hashtag ‘#WeAreNATO’ was used extensively by different NATO Twitter accounts, both individual and institutional. Jolie’s visit was discursively constituted as part of NATO’s public diplomacy efforts, with one Twitter user commenting:

Like every day at #NATO, it’s all about security – but today along w @UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie, it’s about doing more for #WomenPeaceSecurity. Delighted to be part of the beating heart of NATO’s public diplomacy #WeAreNATO.

¹⁴³Buckland, ‘Angelina Jolie visits NATO’.

¹⁴⁴Kuus, “‘Love, peace and Nato’”, p. 369.

¹⁴⁵Jackson et al., ‘Forum: Militarization 2.0’.

¹⁴⁶Bergman Rosamond, ‘Global motherhood and celebrity politics’.

¹⁴⁷Sara de los Reyes, ‘Angelina Jolie aces her multi-hyphenate life: Here’s how she does it’, *Metro.Style* (2018), available at: {<https://metro.style/people/celebrities/angelina-jolie-aces-her-multi-hyphenate-life/8167>} accessed 24 February 2020.

¹⁴⁸NATO, ‘Joint Press Conference’.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Author’s personal correspondence with a NATO official.

This reinforces Katharine A. M. Wright's¹⁵¹ findings that WPS has served as an effective public diplomacy tool for NATO. Certainly, Jolie's visit and subsequent press coverage seems to bear out the utility of messaging on WPS for engaging with 'new' audiences and contributing to the wider reception of this strategic narrative. However, it is not evident how raising awareness among these audiences can address the issue of sexual violence in conflict or challenge the masculinist protection and militaristic logic that surround it.¹⁵²

When we turn to how the message on CRSGBV projected by NATO and Jolie was received, we see that nuance is lost, again undermining the efficacy of awareness raising as action on CRSGBV, but contributing to NATO's self-narrative that projects its role as a military leader for gender justice. For example, *Metro.Style* perpetuates an essentialised view of women in conflict – lacking agency and power – a position that Jolie herself ascribed to the victims of sexual violence at the press conference:

The leading lady expressed her concern about women undergoing emotional, physical, and psychological distress during these trying times, and how adding sexual violence to the formula would undisputedly leave them scarred and pained, for life.¹⁵³

As has been noted above, a critical feminist reading of Jolie's diplomacy and humanitarianism finds that digital and traditional media tends to constitute her activism within the language of maternal care.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, *Daily Mail Online* coverage of Jolie's visit to NATO focused on her global motherhood: 'The mother of six flashed a smile as she shook hands with Jens during the photo call before she was treated to a tour of the military base', with her advocacy work presented as a nice addition to her lifestyle but the issue itself, CRSGBV, left interrogated.¹⁵⁵

Awareness raising, leadership, and training are intertextually linked across texts,¹⁵⁶ with Jolie stating that 'we are going to focus on training, reporting, monitoring and awareness as a way of ending impunity'.¹⁵⁷ NATO's military leadership on this issue is presented as raising awareness among its partners of their need to do more to address CRSGBV together with the alliance, in terms of supporting increasing women in the military and offering training of military staff. NATO's awareness raising helps to sustain its self-narrative as a competent actor working to eradicate CRSGBV, assigning incompetence and malfunctioning to the armed forces of others. Thus, its self-narrative is imbued with innocence, locating the alliance in juxtaposition to other less competent states. This is evident in the *Guardian* op-ed, which emphasises NATO's leadership role in 'helping to raise the standards of other militaries', a message that is reinforced in Stoltenberg's comments at the press conference: 'NATO is training partner militaries around the world. We will look to strengthening existing training on combatting sexual violence'.¹⁵⁸ This emphasis is reflective of NATO's wider engagement with the WPS agenda to-date, which has prioritised relationships with partners, leading to an external facing focus to its WPS work.¹⁵⁹ Jolie's visit when read in this wider context also presents her as a partner to NATO, bringing

¹⁵¹Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan'.

¹⁵²The narrow focus NATO and Jolie take in their understanding of what sexual violence in conflict is, how it emerges and what the response should be, could, nevertheless detract from calls to recontextualise sexual- and gender-based violence in conflict against wider patterns resulting from imbedded gendered inequalities in societies. See also Meger, 'The fetishization of sexual violence'.

¹⁵³Reyes, 'Angelina Jolie aces her multi-hyphenate life'.

¹⁵⁴Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Bergman Rosamond, 'Global motherhood and celebrity politics'; Richey and Brockington, 'Celebrity humanitarianism'; Mostafanezhad, 'Angelina Jolie and the everyday geopolitics'.

¹⁵⁵Buckland, 'Angelina Jolie visits NATO'.

¹⁵⁶Stoltenberg and Jolie, 'Why Nato must defend women's rights'; NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'; Kerry, 'What Angelina Jolie is fighting for now'.

¹⁵⁷NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Wright, 'NATO's adoption of UNSCR 1325'; Wright, 'Telling NATO's story of Afghanistan', p. 118.

her expertise, celebrity, and UN status to NATO's cause through creating awareness, with NATO in turn supporting her in her aims to address CRSGBV by bringing its political-military leadership to bear to bring partners 'into line'.

Moreover, NATO's leadership through awareness raising invokes increasing women in the armed forces as a solution to impunity, and as such, further shapes the issue narrative. For example, a direct link was made by Jolie between 'NATO's potential role in helping to create greater global accountability and deterrence for crimes against women in conflict zones' and a need to 'increase the representation of women in militaries', which she raised during her visit to NATO.¹⁶⁰ This builds on the *Guardian* op-ed in which Jolie states that 'Nato's senior military leaders, have a vital role to play in being positive role models, and promoting the role of women in the military.'¹⁶¹ This also shows that NATO's quest for leadership is constitutively linked to its emphasis on women's representation in the military. However, this largely ignores that this co-constitutive relationship is gendered, assigning specific qualities to women soldiers. Thus, both NATO and Jolie employ gender binaries by assuming that adding women to the military would solve the problem of sexual violence in conflict. NATO has previously articulated this idea as part of the 'added value' NATO ascribes to the recruitment of more women into its armed forces.¹⁶² However, the employment of such stereotypical notions of women soldiers' distinct ability to eradicate CRSGBV and end impunity disregard the structural and gendered roots of such violence. Yet, Jolie through her partnership with NATO, brings her global celebrity credentials to bear in shaping the issue narrative on CRSGBV and therefore the shape of subsequent policy discussions.¹⁶³ She also contributes to NATO's self-narrative by presenting the alliance as a 'role model', belying the reality that women remain significantly underrepresented in NATO's armed forces.¹⁶⁴ Finally, there are few signs of Jolie critically reflecting on the militarising logic and the 'banal militarism'¹⁶⁵ that underpin such thinking and NATO's CRSGBV leadership more broadly.

Conclusions

This article has examined the significance of Angelina Jolie's visit to NATO in January 2018 for the alliance, both in terms of its approach to the wider WPS agenda and its projection, but *also* the reception of its self-narrative through engaging with celebrity and visuals to shape the distinctive issue narrative of CRSGBV. Our analysis shows that in an increasingly connected digital world, visuals and texts have become inseparable and co-constitutive of each other, with a visit by a celebrity creating awareness of NATO's self-narrative as a military leader in addressing CRSGBV. Likewise, Jolie's reception by NATO adds to her celebrity diplomat/humanitarian credentials and brand by constituting her visually and textually as a bilateral partner of the alliance. Our study then contributes to emergent research on the role of individuals and celebrity in advancing the WPS agenda.¹⁶⁶ It also raises questions regarding celebrities' engagements with security and defence actors such as NATO on CRSGBV matters, in particular since the alliance, despite its commitment to gender-justice, also contains discourses that are not necessarily in line with critical feminist quests for demilitarisation and peace. As we have argued, Jolie's visit to NATO opened the alliance to public scrutiny, however, its transmission in popular culture symbolised a form of militarism that was orchestrated through visual representations, and, as such only marginally disrupted the militarised logic present in NATO's wider WPS engagement.

¹⁶⁰NATO, 'Joint Press Conference'.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*, p. 111.

¹⁶³Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁴Wright, Hurley, and Ignacio Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military*.

¹⁶⁵Kuus, "'Love, peace and Nato'".

¹⁶⁶Bergman Rosamond, 'The digital politics of celebrity activism'; Hudson and Budabin, 'When advocacy securitizes'.

Our article also provides an important contribution to work on the little studied role of celebrity in the security and defence sector and the value of foregrounding celebrity and popular culture from a gender perspective in interrogating the reception of strategic narratives. We have demonstrated that for actors such as NATO, the ‘right’ celebrity can extend their reach beyond the audiences that it would usually engage with. Moreover, superficial coverage of the visit in the celebrity press served to associate NATO with the ‘goodness’ of Jolie’s humanitarian credentials, even if NATO itself was not always the focus of that coverage. Angelina Jolie was portrayed as a bilateral partner of NATO, rather than working for the alliance. Despite opening up NATO to further scrutiny pertaining to its involvement with the WPS agenda, the visit and awareness raising did not challenge the ‘banal militarism’¹⁶⁷ underpinning NATO, but rather marked a temporal shift to its grounding in celebrity and popular culture. While Jolie’s celebrity status evoked interest among global audiences and as such raised the awareness of NATO as a promoter of WPS matters, the ethical and gender-based substance of her visit and nuance of subsequent interventions were lost in the extensive coverage of her aesthetic appeal. This points to the significance of critically studying the role of individual celebrities in constituting security discourses and practices in global gender politics.¹⁶⁸

Jolie’s visit marked a reaffirmation of NATO’s adoption of the WPS agenda as a core theme of its global brand and self-narrative, beautifying NATO through the projection of celebrity and with a strong emphasis on visual projections of the Jolie-NATO partnership. The visit and its wider reception emphasised NATO’s role as a ‘military leader’ in addressing CRSGBV through ‘awareness raising’, in particular the training of partners and increasing women in (partner states’) militaries, avoiding implicating NATO or its member states in an issue that has proved sensitive for the alliance.¹⁶⁹ That narration, however, does not critically engage with the militarism underpinning NATO’s thinking on CRSGBV. Yet, as our analysis shows, we should be cautious before we claim that ‘awareness raising’ constitutes actual implementation of the WPS agenda. Nor should we assume that that it is sufficient in addressing the issue of sexual violence in conflict. The issue narrative surrounding NATO’s engagements with CRSGBV, moreover, forewent broader structural understandings of its grounding within the domestic patriarchy, and the essentialised and much problematised assumption that adding women to the military can in itself address the issue of CRSBV. Our analysis and findings therefore reinforce the importance of interrogating strategic narratives and the stories of WPS told by NATO to understand how they have been institutionalised,¹⁷⁰ adding to this the importance of including their reception through stories told, and visuals projected, in wider media coverage and popular culture. We also identify the need to interrogate the co-constitutive effects of the projection and reception of identity and issue narratives, something which future work could further interrogate.

Acknowledgements. Previous versions of this article have been presented at the 2019 British International Studies Association (BISA) annual conference, the 2019 European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG), the Gender Research Centre at Bristol University, and Lund University. The authors would like to thank the discussants and audiences for their valuable comments, along with the anonymous reviewers. Thank you to the Marianne och Marcus Wallenberg Stiftelse/Foundation for their support in the writing of this article.

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¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Bergman Rosamond, ‘Global motherhood and celebrity politics’.

¹⁶⁹Hebert, ‘Analyzing UN and NATO responses’.

¹⁷⁰Wright, ‘Telling NATO’s story of Afghanistan’; Hurley, ‘Watermelons and weddings’.

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