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Number 1 / July 2022
ISSN 2039-8573 online

Published by
Università del Salento
Department of Human
and Social Sciences

IdPS

Interdisciplinary Political Studies



**UNIVERSITÀ
DEL SALENTO**



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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda: time to gild the cracks?

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Twenty-two years after the adoption of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), this Special Issue aims at presenting an informed and critical discussion about the current stage of conceptualisation and implementation of the so-called “WPS Agenda”, taking stock of the analyses and critiques that have been published on the occasion of its 20th anniversary.

Unanimously approved on 31 October 2000, Res. 1325 is the first resolution to explicitly mention the impact of war on women and their contribution to conflict resolution for lasting peace, establishing four distinct axes of intervention (“pillars”) for grounding the concept of gender mainstreaming in the field of international security, namely: “participation, prevention protection, relief and recovery” (UN, 2000).¹

Over the past two decades, the WPS Agenda has become a key tool to strengthen the effectiveness of national and international efforts in conflict prevention and resolution and to mainstream a gender-sensitive approach to security worldwide. It has pursued these objectives by promoting the active participation of women in security-related activities, introducing new indicators to develop gender-sensitive analyses of conflict, post-conflict and post-revolution contexts, as well as addressing the challenges of women’s inclusion and equal opportunities in the armed forces and especially in peacekeeping operations.

After Res. 1325, the UNSC adopted nine Resolutions² in order to spell out the norm of gender mainstreaming in the field of international security, focusing on ensuring women’s active and effective participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes as well as on raising awareness on the persistence of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and promoting actions for its prevention and contrast.

¹ It is common to distinguish four pillars. 1. Participation: increasing the numbers of women involved in the field of security and assigning them meaningful roles and active tasks for the management of conflict and post-conflict situations. 2. Protection: detecting and contrasting instances of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. 3. Prevention: developing gender-sensitive indicators and monitoring systems for the early detection and prevention of conflict-related violence. 4. Relief and recovery: meeting women and girls’ needs in conflict management actions, such as repatriation and resettlement; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes; assistance to internally displaced peoples and refugees; humanitarian assistance.

² The UNSC resolutions constituting the normative core of the WPS Agenda are the following: Res. 1325 (2000); Res. 1820 (2009); Res. 1888 (2009); Res. 1889 (2010); Res. 1960 (2011); Res. 2106 (2013); Res. 2122 (2013); Res. 2242 (2015), Res. 2467 (2019), and Res. 2493 (2019). The texts of all the Resolutions are available at:

<https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions>

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Up to now, ninety-eight UN member states have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) for the implementation of Res. 1325, programmatic documents aiming to adapt the measures and instruments envisaged by the WPS Agenda to the different national contexts, in order to achieve the goals established in the WPS resolutions.³ Likewise, eleven Regional Action Plans (RAPs), including the European Union and the African Union's ones, have been adopted so far in order to implement the objectives of the WPS normative framework at regional level (WILPF, 2022). However, the implementation record is especially diverse: while some states (e.g. Denmark, Germany) have adopted up to four NAPs, progressively finetuning and expanding their understanding of security from a gender-sensitive perspective, other states (e.g. Egypt or Algeria) have not developed a meaningful debate on the implementation of Res. 1325 so far and they have not adopted any NAP. Some states (e.g. China, Israel, Russia, Turkey) have been (at least intermittently) participating in international discussions concerning the definition and advancement of the WPS Agenda, but they did not adopt any NAP.

All in all, the global debate around WPS has been growing, involving many actors and inspiring other movements, such as that for "Youth, Peace and Security" (UNSCR 2250, 2015). Nonetheless, there is wide international consensus that much remains to be done, also considering the fact that some key players have recently shown a clear will to diverge from the strong consensus pushing for a different role for women in peace and security.⁴

As Paul Kirby and Laura Shepherd (2021) highlight, "points of fracture" and cracks that have emerged in the WPS architecture undermine both the conceptualisation and the operationalization of its principles, while hampering the implementation of initiatives and programmes. These cracks have emerged as the result of inner tensions as well as of external obstacles that the WPS Agenda needs to overcome to obtain a transformative impact.

Among the main conceptual cracks, there is the WPS' problematic relationship with the 'securitarian paradigm' and with militarism (Shepherd, 2016; 2020; Aroussi, 2021; López Castañeda & Myrntinen, 2022), as well as the unbalanced weight assigned to the Agenda's pillars (Pearson, 2020; Shepherd, 2020). In particular, states' insistence on 'protecting' women during armed conflict, together with the visibility garnered by sexual violence committed by combatants and armed actors against women, have contributed to reinforce one of the most widely critiqued aspects of the WPS Agenda: its 'essentialism', i.e., the tendency to reduce men and women to stereotypical images of actors performing gendered roles (Ní Aoláin & Valji, 2019; Hall, 2021). Some scholars have underlined that the Agenda treats women primarily as 'victims to protect' rather than 'agents of change', denying them the possibility of being considered as autonomous actors with the capacity to shape peace and security processes, and they have moved relevant critiques to its capacity to promote a broader concept of diversity in security-related fields (Hagen, 2016; Cohn, 2017; Davis & Stern, 2019; Haastrup & Hagen, 2020; Clark, 2021; Henry, 2021; Riddle, 2022). In this regard, several critics have underlined the Agenda's narrow focus on women and insufficient engagement with men and masculinities (Myrntinen, 2019; Duriesmith, 2020; Wright, 2020),

³ The process of implementation of the WPS Agenda has been constantly monitored by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), one of the actors that have been actively promoting the adoption and the implementation of the Agenda as a step towards the redefinition of security within the international arena. An updated list of NAPs and RAPs as well as data regarding the implementation of Res. 1325 are available at: <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>

⁴ For instance, Russia submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council on 29 October 2020 explicitly seeking to dilute the WPS Resolutions' normative commitment. However, only China, South Africa, Vietnam and Indonesia voted in favour, and the draft resolution did not pass (UN, 2020).

its neglect of LGBT+ people (Hagen, 2016) and lack of attention for intersectional aspects (Stienstra, 2019; Stavrevska & Smith, 2020; Henry, 2021), therefore proposing simplistic accounts of conflict-related harm and overlooking potential contributions to conflict management and peace processes. Some researchers have stressed the limits of strategic instrumentalism and risks of co-optation by neoliberalist and militarist forces (Goetz, 2020; Lyytikäinen & Jauhola, 2020; Shepherd, 2020). Others have instead underlined the ‘colonial frame’ of the WPS Agenda and widely shared assumptions framing the “‘Global North’ as the conceptual, material and (not least) institutional home of the (WPS) resolutions” (Basu, 2016, p. 362), which have marginalised the ‘Global South’ in WPS discourse and practice (Parashar, 2020).

Empirical cracks include the apparently unbridgeable gender gap among peace mediators and peacekeepers (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2020); the continuous exclusion of female ex-combatants from peace negotiations; episodes of ‘malestreaming’ and women’s ‘sidestreaming’ in ongoing security sector reform programmes and female human rights activists’ limited involvement in peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Goetz & Jenkins, 2020; Haring, 2020; Newby & Sebag, 2021); ‘selectivity’ in applying Res. 1325 and the nine subsequent resolutions to some conflicts (e.g. those outside our borders) and not others (e.g. those ‘at home’) (Ní Aoláin and Valji, 2019). Recent research in this field shows that there is a lack of awareness about the content and scope of the WPS Agenda among scholars as well as practitioners working on security-related issues (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Jansson & Eduards, 2016; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Meger, 2019). As a matter of fact, the WPS Agenda does not apply to conflict or post-conflict settings only, but it addresses destabilising factors that are common concerns for every society, such as terrorism, forced displacement and migration. Moreover, the Agenda is often perceived as a women’s rights and gender equality issue, rather than a security issue, thereby neglecting the importance of security concerns related to gender equality for the political-military, the economic and environmental, as well as the human dimensions (Fellin, 2018). Another problem is the lack of participation of the male counterpart, that often perceives the WPS Agenda as a ‘women’s issue’, to the debates concerning the gender-sensitive transformation of the security sector. On a technical side, one of the biggest limits to Res. 1325 worldwide is the lack of dedicated resources for its implementation together with adequate monitoring and evaluation systems (WILPF, 2019). Moreover, while civil society organizations (CSOs) and female activists are the driving agents promoting the WPS Agenda, their dialogue with governmental actors is often problematic (Deiana & McDonagh, 2018; Fellin, 2018; Björkdahl, & Mannergren Selimovic, 2019; Naraghi-Anderlini, 2019). In the majority of the countries that adopted a NAP, there are no mechanisms that could facilitate cooperation among government entities, parliaments, CSOs, academia, regional and international organizations. In other words, there is a lack of effective dialogue between different stakeholders and CSOs are scarcely included in the implementation process, which is often perceived as a ‘top-down’ process (WILPF, 2019). Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on the implementation of the WPS Agenda, *de facto* de-prioritising this dossier both at national and international level, since gender issues are considered a sort of ‘luxury’, to sideline in times of crisis. Moreover, confinement measures have caused a drastic increase of the mechanisms of domestic violence (UN Women, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2021), while opening new challenges such as in the field of socio-economic security and the ‘digital divide’ (Dharmapuri & Shoemaker, 2021).

This Special Issue aims at further enriching this debate, by collecting articles that critically shed light on and explore some of the main cracks of the WPS Agenda. Adopting a multidisciplinary stance, it advances original theoretical and practical tools and strategies in order to ‘gild the cracks’ and advance the discussion on the most salient gender-related

aspects concerning international security. Also, it tries to integrate, or at least to fruitfully complement, academic and non-academic knowledge on the WPS Agenda, involving in various ways scholars, practitioners, experts and activists.

Inspired by the metaphor of the ancient Japanese art of Kintsugi, that allows to repair broken pottery with a special mixture of glue and gold – pursuing the double aim of reducing waste and creating beauty and value – the authors who contributed to the Special Issue cast a critical but constructive gaze on the vicissitudes that have been marking the life of the WPS Agenda so far. Notwithstanding the geographical, disciplinary and methodological differences and the diverse appraisals of the WPS Agenda as a political and academic endeavour, all the contributors share the need of keeping the debate on gender equality and gender mainstreaming among the priorities for the different actors operating in the field of international security.

The Special Issue stems from a research project on the implementation of Res. 1325 in the Western Balkans and North Africa that has been conducted throughout 2020 by a team of researchers based at Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies (Pisa, Italy) in partnership with Agency for Peacebuilding (Bologna, Italy) and funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.⁵ While some authors have been participating in the project’s activities since its inception, others joined with the occasion of the call for abstracts for this Special Issue, contributing to strengthening its theoretical significance and to widen its geographical scope.

The Guest Editors would like to thank all the contributors as well as the scholars, activists and students who have participated to the project’s activities. Likewise, they would like to thank the Editorial Committee of Interdisciplinary Political Studies for their constant support and professionalism and all the reviewers for their generous efforts towards improving the articles. They are grateful to Prof. Francesco Strazzari for his scientific coordination of the WEPPS project and for encouraging them to embark on this journey, as well as to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for its financial support. Finally, they would like to extend their gratitude to Bernardo Monzani and Mikhail Silvestro Sustersic for all the stimulating exchanges and collaborations on the issues connected to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

The Special Issue consists of ten contributions: while each one focuses on the empirical or theoretical analysis of specific cracks, all taken together delineate a wide and varied research pathway.

The first contribution (della Valle & Piras, 2022) is the transcription of an interview to Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, Director of the Centre for Women, Peace and Security of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Founder and Executive Director of the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), conducted by the Special Issue’s Guest Editors during a particularly sensitive time for the WPS Agenda, i.e. Fall 2021. In the light of the events following the sudden US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the issue of the precariousness of women’s rights in conflict and post-conflict situations re-emerged vividly, showing once again the topicality and the urgency of the questions lying at the core of the WPS Agenda. Ten months later, in the face of the chaotic succession of events that led to

⁵ The project “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Peace and Security – WEPPS”, coordinated by Prof. Francesco Strazzari (Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa), has developed around three main axes: a) research on WPS implementation in Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo through qualitative methods (literature review, desk analysis and interviews); b) a dialogue and training program, called “The Women Peace and Security Agenda in the pandemic”, involving professionals in the field of WPS (women activists, representatives of local institutions and CSOs, international agencies and NGOs) in the four target-countries, aimed at facilitating the exchange of expertise and creation of transnational networks; and c) collecting and publishing articles to foster critical analysis of the challenges in WPS implementation.

the outbreak and stalemate of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Naraghi-Anderlini's knowledgeable and passionate testimony strongly resonates with the experiences of all the researchers and activists who care about the protection and the inclusion of women as agents for peace during and after any conflict, constituting a point of reference for all the other articles of the Special Issue.

In the second article, Emily Sullivan, Robert Nagel and Jeni Klugman (2022) investigate the correlation between the participation of women in national armies and states' compliance to international humanitarian law, reviewing and discussing the relevant literature and proposing to recast the debate on women's participation to the sector of national and international security starting with the explicit acknowledgement of three features that are often overlooked: women's diversity, agency, and capacity for violence.

In the third article, Silvia Cittadini and Clara della Valle (2022) problematise the (locally contested) diffused narrative presenting the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina as exemplary with regard to the integration of women in post-conflict settings, by investigating the tension between national institutions and civil society actors in the understanding and promotion of peace and security. Fotini Bellou and Kalliopi Chainoglou (2022) shift the look towards the Eastern Mediterranean in the fourth article, comparing the different strategies of implementation and non-implementation of the WPS Agenda that have been pursued by the governments of Greece, Cyprus and Turkey. The fifth article (Dogan, 2022) narrows the focus of the analysis on the Turkish case: relying on Gramscian insights, Sevgi Dogan links the non-implementation of the WPS Agenda with the broader backlash *vis-à-vis* the norm of gender equality which characterises the recent policies undertaken by the Turkish government, investigating the role of intellectuals in the spread of anti-gender ideas. Henry Myrntinen (2022), in the sixth article, sheds light on the different localisation processes that have been undertaken in five countries belonging to the post-Soviet constellation (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine), pointing out at the tensions and original reconfigurations of the WPS Agenda's patterns and practices that have emerged in this area.

Both the seventh and eighth articles focus on Maghreb and allow to compare the WPS Agenda's implementation processes that have been unfolding in two post-revolutionary contexts: Tunisia and Morocco. Clara della Valle (2022) focuses on Tunisia and investigates the extent to which the WPS debate and practice has incorporated Tunisian women's agency and has informed change at the local level, by looking in particular at the dimension of 'participation' in the adoption and implementation of the 2018 NAP and problematising the 'securitarian paradigm' that has shaped international discourse on WPS. Sara Borrillo (2022) reconstructs the specificities of the Moroccan case, paying attention to the ongoing internal political debate as well as the regional ties, in order to explain why the WPS Agenda does not appear as a national priority for Moroccan decision makers and why the first NAP has been adopted only in 2022. In the ninth article, Alexandra Cosima Budabin and Natalie Hudson (2022) consider the possibilities and constraints for greater inclusion and participation of women human rights activists in the framework of the WPS Agenda, looking at the evidence provided by the patterns of activism within North-South transnational networks of solidarity, and especially at how women belonging to the Darfur and Congolese diasporas interact with US allies to fight sexual violence in their home countries.

Finally, Elisa Piras (2022), relying on the literature on norm diffusion and norm contestation and connecting it to contemporary political-philosophical debates, presents a critical discussion of the main conceptual cracks endangering the WPS Agenda and argues that, in order to "gild the cracks", researchers should adopt an experimental approach, looking for new heuristic resources in other disciplines.

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EDITORIAL

Powered by caring: daily struggles to keep the WPS Agenda alive

Interview with Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini

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Abstract

*This interview originated from the encounter between the guest editors of the Special Issue and Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini during the activities of the project “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Peace and Security (WEPPS)”. The interview was held via Zoom on the afternoon of October 1, 2021. At the time, the international community was dealing with the consequences of the sudden US withdrawal from Afghanistan that occurred on August 31. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini is a British-Iranian activist and researcher who has acquired about twenty-five years of experience in the field of women, peace and security. Having participated as a civil society leader to the drafting of UNSC Resolution 1325, she has worked in several projects and initiatives concerning women’s participation to peacebuilding processes. Founder and Executive Director of the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), she spearheads the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL). She is the author of *Women Building Peace, What they do, Why it Matters* (Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2007). In 2011, she was appointed as the first Senior Expert on Gender and Inclusion on the UN Mediation Standby Team. She has been working in a number of conflict situations in different regions of the world (e.g. Somalia, Libya, Syria, Nepal). In 2019, she joined the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) as Director of the Centre for Women, Peace and Security. In 2020, she was awarded an MBE for her services to International peacebuilding and Women’s Rights.*

Keywords: WPS; Civil society; Women's rights; Conflict; Afghanistan

1. Your academic and professional record on issues related with women and security is remarkable. We would like to focus on your commitment for the drafting and implementation of the WPS Agenda during the last 25 years. Looking back at its developments, do you think that it was worth the effort?

I’ll talk about it considering three different aspects. Am I exhausted? Absolutely. Am I angry? Beyond any vocabulary in any of the four languages that I speak. Do I think that the essence of what we fought for twenty years ago is still valid? Yes. To be clear, I refer to the reasons that drove our actions: the need to rethink peace processes and more in general the way we think about war and peace, or to put it better, the way we think about humanity

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in the midst of war and peace; the need for including alternative voices in international security, especially the voices of women peacebuilders – women who run to the problems, young people who are caught in the problems, basically society. In a nutshell, do I still believe that we need to have peace processes that are by definition inclusive and multi-stakeholders? I think *everything that we said twenty years ago is still valid*.

Twenty years ago, we were dealing with Rwanda, Somalia and Sierra Leone, and other horrific wars. Today we are living with a new set of horrific wars, some ongoing for the two decades and more. So, I do not think that conceptually we were wrong; we were ahead of our time. Twenty years on, world leaders are talking about inclusion and making statements about having women at the negotiation table, saying that “of course women should sit at the table” – but they are still not. Some would say that the Agenda was just window dressing, or putting lipstick on a pig, a way for governments who are perpetuating war to co-opt women and hide behind a peaceful mask. I think that the Agenda - which is radically transformative in many ways - has not been taken seriously enough for it to be co-opted in that way; it is still so marginal to the constantly changing political and diplomatic leadership that we see around the world.

The absolute lack of interest and concern for the lives of Afghan women, twenty years ago and now, is indicative of how little actually women – or the lives of people caught in the midst of war – matters to those who sit in Washington or London and are enabling these wars. For eight years diplomats sat in Doha and negotiated with the Taliban. For eight years, systematically, Afghan women and their international advocates asked why Afghan women were not in Doha, why they did not have a seat at the negotiation table as an independent delegation. We were told that the Taliban do not speak to women, but what effort was genuinely made to change the design of those talks? Just because the Taliban said no, did not mean that Qatar or the US or other countries should have followed suit. I don't think enough was done. What effort was made to bring the issue of civilian protection or the rights of women, or the *lives* of women into the negotiations? Now, when we look at the results of the negotiation process - a humanitarian disaster, women's lives at risk and that healthcare, education, basic services are unavailable for them and the likelihood of war increases every day that goes by. The power brokers present a distorted picture, once again. Now they say: “first we have to do humanitarian work, then we will open the space for a political dialogue”, as if women's lives is just a political matter and not a humanitarian imperative too. They persist in excluding women in the search for solutions. Look at the mess they have created.

The essence of the WPS Agenda is a universal experience and demand: it crosses time and geography. *The WPS Agenda is about human experiences in a time of conflict and crisis*. Every time there is a conflict, women emerge as peace actors; every time there is a conflict, or a crisis, women's rights are violated. There is something about the universality of the experience of war that we captured twenty years ago and that is always valid – even if the Agenda was not there.

How has the Agenda been kept alive? It has been kept alive by civil society and activists who have been working hard for its survival, and by a new generation of people who are coming into institutions such as the diplomatic services. There, a handful of people are continuing to keep it alive, focusing on addressing specific needs of women in conflict. In conflict settings we see two sides of the story: those who care for power and those who are powered by caring. This Agenda has been brought to life because people care. Should it be

at a higher political level? Yes, it should be at the core of anything that has to do with diplomacy now, but it is not. One reason is that within our bureaucracies, the same people are appointed and reappointed. So, why should we expect the same guys that showed no interest in women's participation or rights in Yemen, to suddenly become gender-sensitive once they get a position in humanitarian affairs? I think this reveals the lack of learning and accountability in our systems. People in key positions are unable to learn from experience and people who fail still move upwards to new job and reproduce the same mistakes in different contexts.

From a very bureaucratic/administrative standpoint, the experience or practical commitment to bring inclusion in the design of mediation processes or of humanitarian aid programmes has not been a criterion for professional advancement or for leadership, it has not been a criterion on which you are held accountable if you do not apply it. That comes back to *political will*: people lose their jobs if they are perceived to be corrupt – at least, we hope this is the norm – but they do not lose anything if they disregard the principle of inclusion or gender responsiveness. Actually, we often see that the opposite happens. The ones who do push for an inclusive Agenda get thrown out of development and aid agencies, because they are going against the vested political interests of member states, they are questioning the way things are done and creating problems. For instance, if you look at the Yemen peace process, the Yemen national dialogue was designed to be as inclusive as it could be. There was representation of women's groups, youth groups, tribes, political parties, within each entity there were meant to be 30% women. As a designed process and as a process for engagement it was quite unique. But the envoy who worked on and fostered the inclusivity in the national dialogue was sidelined; somebody else was appointed and the original work was erased.

2. The current Afghan situation is a (fatal) test bench for the WPS Agenda and more in general for the UN conceptions of peacebuilding and conflict management that have been developed during the last fifty years or so. At the moment, you are working for guaranteeing the protection of women and human rights' activists/peacebuilders who are in the country. Could you please explain to us which are the main risks at stake for the achievement of peace in the country and how could the international community reclaim an active role for envisaging and realising a viable peace process?

In Afghanistan as well as in other contexts we have seen a huge increase in threats against women peacebuilders during the last three or four years. In order to respond to this situation, by the end of 2020 ICAN produced three reports within the framework of the global campaign *She Builds Peace*.¹ The first, *Recognizing Women Peacebuilders: Critical Actors in Effective Peacemaking*, aimed at acknowledging women peacebuilders as a distinct category of activists. There is overlap with human rights and with other types of practices, but there is a specificity of being a peacebuilder. They have unique approaches and play an important role as interlocutors and connectors between parties, within any conflict situation. They are the ones who mediate with armed groups, engage with governments, represent the voices of the community, try to find solutions. In the last few years, there has been a double sided

¹ The three reports are available online: <https://icanpeacework.org/shebuildspeace/>

rise in threat levels against peacebuilders. On the one hand, identity-based violent extremism has increased with the suppression and control of women as a central ideology. On the other hand, state authoritarianism has increased and with it space for civil society and has diminished. Peacebuilders were caught in the middle: with societies very polarised, they are targeted by both sides. So, in addition to calling for recognition, we also researched and published the *Protecting Women Peacebuilders. The frontline of sustainable peace* report and operational guidance. We focused on providing context-specific information, envisaging ways that governments could ensure protection on the ground through the daily work of embassies and agencies and considering the possibility that activists might be evacuated and extracted in exceptional cases. Lots of countries – including my own, the United Kingdom – endorsed that framework with enthusiasm. But Afghan crisis has shown that their enthusiasm was not accompanied by serious commitment. When it came to the evacuation of Afghan women peacebuilders or those in the security sector that were directly at risk from the Taliban, very few states offered visas or assistance. Nobody thought about the reasons why these people are at risk. There are multiple reasons that should be taken into account: in Afghanistan, women in the public space are especially vulnerable; women peacebuilders are performing activities that are outside of their traditional gender roles – they are doing peace and security work, contributing to violence prevention, justice, deradicalization – and they work in programs and projects that are funded, directly or indirectly, by the international community. They had links to the previous Ministry of Interior, they worked with the government or they had interlocutors in the government, even if they were independent. Now, these connections with the international community and with the previous government put them at risk. Moreover, some of these peacebuilders are very young women, unmarried, and many of them belong to minority groups such as the Hazara or Tajik: they are easily stigmatised for their unconventional activities and they now face threats of forced marriage. So many woman peacebuilder had multiple targets on their back – as women, as public figures or security actors, as members of a minority community and as unmarried women. Our governments talk at length about women’s rights, but they did not act.

The majority of those waving the WPS flag failed the litmus test of Afghanistan. Some of them were enthusiastic at the beginning and they showed intentions of helping with the resettlement, but they have not given the visas, others behind the scenes tell us “we will take a few people here and a few there”, but this is not enough. We do not have a few people who need help: we have a list of over 2000 people who are currently facing threats – activists, their families, journalists, judges. Families are important in this case: at times, children were kidnapped to get at the mothers. Activists are targeted in specific ways, but their families share the risk.

In addition there were about 3797 women police officers. They are all at risk as well. They were trained by Turkish and Japanese institutions in programmes led by UNDP. But no one went to save them. From my perspective of feminist peacebuilder, I was always wary of the emphasis on ‘women in the security’ side of the WPS Agenda, because it diminishes the emphasis on peace and the Agenda becomes one of ‘women in the army, women in the police’. In Afghanistan the US and other put much emphasis on women in the security sector. These women always had a tough time, since they were being attacked by the Taliban and they were targets within their own communities. Some joined the police because they were

at risk of being forced into marriages they did not want. Their choice was between sexual slavery or public service. Now, they are stuck. My question is: is it my responsibility as a civil society representative to protect them, or is the UN's job? The protection and livelihoods of women who served in the police, women who are community workers and others should be integral to the negotiations on humanitarian aid. But they are absent from the sphere and locked out of the politics too.

3. As is often the case with several ongoing conflicts (beside Afghanistan, we would mention at least Syria, Lybia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar as examples) and with their implications (international displacements and international migrations), the accounts offered by politicians and media risk to present women mainly as victims, defenseless sufferer of violence. However, the situation is much more complex and nuanced. Could you please highlight the different roles and contributions that women have been performing in Afghanistan during the last twenty years? What risks are they facing, and who might be helpful allies for them?

In the twenty years of the US and NATO presence in the Afghanistan, the media and policy narrative was typically negative. The impression given was that nothing positive was occurring. There was never reporting on the social transformations that were taking place. In the aftermath of the withdrawal, we suddenly saw the numerous women judges, journalists, musicians, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs there. We saw that women were working in many sectors: civil society, public health, education, and academia. The women and girls were participating in many spheres that are integral to peace - as being able to go to school, to work, to be present in the arts or sports, etc. Not all women have been able to do so, of course: the situation has been especially difficult for women in the rural areas of the country and it is undeniable that twenty years of war and military occupation have had a terrible impact on people's opportunities. But there were many encouraging signs including in the vibrant civil society.

Advocates of women peacebuilders have always maintained that, in order to find sustainable solutions to the conflict, the political and diplomatic processes ought to rely on effective and continuous dialogue, which could be attained only through an inclusive process. Even now, Afghan women should be involved in the ongoing talks on security and humanitarian issues, but they are being locked out by Western men, Afghan men, Arab men - *it is men talking to men, over and over*. The tragedy is that the US used women's rights as a excuse for their initial invasion and occupation, even though the real reason was to get Osama bin Laden. Now the Taliban is punishing women and girls for that reason.

In effect, both sides are trafficking in women and girls, but the truth is that neither side really cares about women's and girls' lives. The issue of women's rights is just a bargaining chip that the international actors and the Taliban seem to use. It is sometimes hard to distinguish the West's and the Taliban's behaviours vis-à-vis women: even when they state that women are important, their actions reveal misogynistic and racist attitudes.

4. In a piece published by Le Monde at the beginning of the Summer, you have highlighted the impressive work conducted by Hassina Neekzad and her Afghan Women's Organisation for Equality. One of their initiatives included male decision-makers and opinion leaders in a number of activities aimed at fostering dialogue and resolving conflicts nonviolently. As far as you know, in the current situation, is the initiative still ongoing? Has the work done for weaving a network of alliances within the Afghan civil society proven to be successful?

Many men who were part of the network are at risk now, because there has been no real attempt at engaging the Taliban in a constructive discussion about the peacebuilders' rights and safeguards. The men were also working to prevent violence in their home, preventing early marriages of little girls, peacefully resolve disputes. Of course, the dialogue alone would have not solved all the problems, but the lack of inclusive dialogue with the Taliban has been a striking feature of the last twenty years; the international community missed the opportunity to widen the space for reimagining social relationships in Afghanistan. The international community that was involved in the Doha talks never facilitated or enabled space for Afghan peacebuilders to engage with the Taliban and to propose possible alternatives to the fundamentalist interpretations the movement espoused.

Throughout my career, I have been combining advocacy, research and practice, always trying to practice what I was preaching and assessing the results of any choice I made. I know that dealing with complex actors such as states and international organisations can be challenging, even daunting. One day you can get a great agreement on paper – as we did in Somalia in 2012, when we facilitated an agreement on the representation of women in the parliament and in the government – and the next day those same signatories, including the international community, ignore their own commitments and revert to business as usual. I have seen how intransigence, inertia and vested interests ruin negotiations. When we formed ICAN and the network Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), we relied on the hypothesis that if we worked with independent local women's organisations, helping them to be rooted and relevant in their communities while connecting them globally, these organisations and their work would be sustainable and safer. We assumed that if organisations are independent and rooted in their local community, activists can work safely, because they are trusted. But the Afghanistan case raised many issues. We saw that Afghan organizations or journalists affiliated with Western entities received help and were rescued. While people working for local civil society organisations are stuck. Since they live in the provinces and they are well-known in their small communities, they run higher risks and they deserved to be protected by the international community. So, if I think now at the academic debates on contemporary peacebuilding, I find the idea of decolonising post-conflict and peacebuilding laudable in theory but it seems that the colonising model is the one that saves your life. If anything goes wrong, some 'white saviours' will come and fight for you, give you a visa and get you out of the country. It is even true in my own case. We have been able to help some families because of their organizational affiliation with ICAN or the LSE research work. Thousands of others do not have such connections.

If I look beyond Afghanistan, we are working with partners – local women-led peace organizations in forty countries – such as Cameroon and Syria. On the one hand, I think this is great; on the other hand, this petrifies me: who is going to be there and to support them if their lives are at risk because some local thug or some government does not like what they are doing and what they are saying? Where is the international community when local

peacebuilders are at risk? We need international institutions and governments that champion WPS to acknowledge, value and offer protection to these people if needed.

5. During the last three years, you have been Director of the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security. What are, according to you, the difficulties and the potentiality that ongoing academic research on the WPS Agenda and more in general on issues concerning women and security is facing? Would you have any suggestions for young researchers who are entering the field?

I have been giving this some thought and I see three main challenges ahead. First, I think one of the difficulties is that this field of study has become everything and anything: it has become a bucket for gender diversity, gender identity, and gender theory. Although these issues all matter in different ways, there is a risk of the theoretical gender work diverting the attention from the original core of the project, which was the creation of a space to allow women to be engaged in international or global peace and security issues. There is a risk of this Agenda being siloed into ‘gender or women’s studies’ only. Whereas in reality it is an interdisciplinary field of practice and research. We need dialogue and collaboration with people in international relations, security studies and peace studies, environmental studies etc – those who have little understanding or have not been particularly welcoming towards the WPS Agenda. There is also a risk of too many labels. Referencing feminism can be very stimulating within academic spaces, but it can hinder our actions on the field and create misunderstandings or even danger, especially when it is applied to the cultural and political contexts in which women peacebuilders are working. I often practice my feminism implicitly instead of presenting myself as a ‘feminist’. I think that it is important to acknowledge the labelling and performative forms of feminism versus the substantive, value based feminist approaches that can be integral to our work. Many people profess feminism aloud while acting against equality and equity.

Second, I am firmly convinced that research is needed to ground advocacy and practice. I have always researched and analyzed issues before engaging in advocacy. That said, I believe there is still insufficient research on how women choose to engage. It is important to know what strategies women use, how they use cultural and traditional norms to further their own ideas of change and transformation. For instance, in a place where motherhood conveys authority, women peacebuilders use their maternal identities to demand accountability and pursue justice and peace. This is not essentialist. It is recognition of their sources of power and influence. In my own experience, I have drawn on my various identities – as a mother, as a Muslim woman, as an Iranian – etc as a means of connecting and enabling my mediation work. It is important to respect and understand how women draw on their identity and reframe their agency.

Thirdly, in terms of research, I would like to see analysis and case study work to explain the limitations to the Agenda’s implementation within governments and institutions. There is a mountain of evidence that we have been collecting throughout twenty years concerning the benefits of inclusive processes, but still, practices do not change. Why is that so? I call it the triple-A syndrome of *apathy, ad hocery, and amnesia*. We need to understand whether this syndrome is caused by individual, institutional or systemic factors, allowing people who fail to go on repeating the same mistakes. We also need to examine academia. I have seen

many people with degrees in International Relations, Security or Development Studies who came to work in development agencies or diplomacy without any gender perspective. They were never taught anything about the WPS Agenda or the possibility of adopting a gender perspective when dealing with security issues. Some now play key roles in conflict management and peacebuilding, but they were not trained in gender analysis or taught these international policy frameworks during their formative years. This is also related to the disconnect between academia and the practitioners in this realm. If we adopt a *self-reflexive stance vis-à-vis* our community, we might reflect on some crucial questions. How many scholars have co-authored any piece of research with local experts or activists? How many scholars have acknowledged the value and the pioneering character of publications from NGOs or non-western organizations? It would also be helpful to research all the struggles and compromises that have characterised the development of the Agenda during the last twenty years, to explain the origin of each resolution and allow fair assessments of its limitations as well as achievements.

These may be uncomfortable conversations, but they would and could be transformative in their impact.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women in National Security and International Humanitarian Law Compliance

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Abstract

In recent years, national governments have started to use the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda to advocate for increasing women's participation in national militaries. This has raised questions regarding women's potential impact on compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL). In this article, we examine existing evidence and arguments on the potential impact of women's increased participation in national militaries and decision-making on international security and IHL compliance. We find some theoretical support for the idea that increasing the participation of women in the national security sector and national militaries may lead to increased IHL compliance through the prioritization of non-violent policies and improved decision-making. However, a substantive body of research on the limits imposed by the substantive gendering of institutions and idealization of masculine traits and practices calls women's potential impact on IHL compliance into question.

Keywords: WPS; International Humanitarian Law; War Crimes; Institutions; Gender

Introduction

In 2020, when then President-elect Biden was considering nominations for cabinet positions both lawmakers and scholars advocated for the nomination of Michèle Flournoy (Brooks, 2020; Seligman et al., 2020). She had previously served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Obama administration. In the days leading up to the eventual announcement of Biden's pick, retired general Lloyd Austin, the potential of a woman at the head of the Pentagon prompted the resurrection of a cartoon first popularized in 2016 (when polls suggested Hillary Clinton would become the first woman to serve as U.S. president). The cartoon (see Figure 1) shows a man and a woman in a hijab in a mountainous environment, suggesting to the viewer that it is set in Afghanistan or Pakistan, and three drones, one of which identified through a U.S. flag has just released an explosive ordinance



Figure 1. Popular cartoon in 2016 and 2020 (Wallman, 2016)

The cartoon prompts the viewer to reflect on several aspects of U.S. foreign policy, including the gendered and racialized dynamics of drone warfare (Wilcox, 2017). The meme suggests that historic first time appointments of women to positions of power are meaningless to people in countries where the U.S. military conducts operations because the underlying structures and policies of imperialism remain unchallenged (Shaw, 2013). This in turn prompts a larger question related to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda's efforts to increase women's participation at all levels of security institutions, including national militaries. It specifically, raises the question: if a woman were to lead the Pentagon (or the White House), would this result in substantively different decisions when it comes to warfare and the compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL)?

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 1325, which is the foundation of the WPS agenda. The ten UNSC resolutions that established the WPS agenda between 2000 and 2019 have repeatedly referenced IHL, calling upon member states to uphold the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto and to condemn violence against women and girls, particularly conflict-related sexual violence, as violations of IHL.¹ Scholars and advocates have called attention to the unbalanced relationship between the Agenda's pillars, specifically the essentializing dynamics that emphasize women's protection from primarily conflict-related sexual violence while neglecting women's participation as agents of change (Shepherd 2020; Pearson 2020). While advocates of the WPS agenda often frame women as agents of peace, some countries' WPS implementation efforts have involved efforts to boost women's participation in the military. For example, the 2017–2022 Canadian National Action Plan (NAP) seeks to enlarge women's share in the Canadian military from 15% to 25% (Government of Canada, 2017). Nonetheless, women's participation as combatants and its potential influence on IHL compliance has

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 287. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, 8 June 1977, 1125 UNTS 3

received less attention. This raises the question of how increased participation of women in armed forces might shape military conduct including compliance with IHL.

In this article, which is conceptual and synthetic in nature, we examine the potential impact of women's increased participation in decision-making on national and international security, including in national militaries, with a particular focus on IHL. We contribute to the discussion of how can women impact international security and the perpetration of war crimes (Cohen 2013a; Loken 2017; Mehrl 2020; Steflja & Trisko Darden 2020) in two ways: first, we shift the focus to state militaries instead of rebel groups, and second, we consider the role of individuals, institutions, agency, and power in IHL compliance. We take stock of three bodies of literature: (1) IHL and the role of principal-agent dynamics; (2) gendered institutions in international security; and (3) women's agency and potential for violence. While we acknowledge that political leadership and militaries are different institutions, we posit that insights from research on women's participation in political leadership can inform our expectations for women military leadership. The article concludes by arguing that it is critical to recognize women's agency without essentializing them, while also distinguishing between the nominal participation of women in security institutions, and a fuller, more transformative type of participation.

International Humanitarian Law & principal-agent dynamics

The fundamentals of IHL

IHL is the body of law regulating the conduct of hostilities in armed conflict. IHL, composed of customary law norms, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols there to, and other additional treaties, regulates how an armed conflict is conducted, which weapons and munitions can be used, and how non-combatants (e.g. prisoners and civilians) ought to be treated (Byers, 2005). The core guiding principles of IHL are distinction, proportionality, and necessity. The principle of distinction mandates that participants in a conflict must make every effort to distinguish between uninvolved civilians, civilians actively participating in conflict, and enemy combatants. Enemy combatants and actively participating civilians can be legally targeted, whereas other civilians and their property cannot. The principle of proportionality prohibits a military action that would have a greater negative effect on civilians than what is considered proportional to the potential military gain of the action. Finally, the principle of necessity allows for certain negative outcomes, such as civilian casualties, if those outcomes are deemed necessary to realize a certain military purpose. This principle can be used either to permit missions that would generate civilian casualties or to prohibit dangerous missions that are not deemed militarily necessary (Klugman et al., 2021).

IHL (non-)compliance as reflecting strategic decisions

In some situations, IHL violations represent strategic military decisions. Drawing on the concept of power-to-hurt (Schelling, 1960)– i.e. the capacity to impose costs an opponent cannot reciprocate– much of the literature focuses on the unlawful killing of civilians as a strategy to weaken an adversary's morale and diminish its war-related capacity (Valentino, Huth and Croco, 2006). Civilians, in the terms of Carl von Clausewitz, therefore, are a *center of gravity*, “a focal point where physical and psychological forces come together” that belligerents should target, or in the case of one's own, defend (Echevarria, 2002: 12). Some types of conflicts and opponents are more likely to trigger a strategy of civilian victimization. For example, Valentino et al. (2004) note that the targeting of civilians as a strategy is more likely during guerilla wars because guerilla armies are more likely to rely on local civilian populations for logistical support. Similarly, governmental or military

leaders may be more likely to implement a strategy of civilian victimization in wars of territorial conquest to avoid potential rebellions and deter attempts at territorial reconquest by the adversary (Downes 2008).

The same reasoning helps explain why longer wars are significantly positively correlated with a higher likelihood of a range of IHL violations including mass killing of civilians and abuse of prisoners of war (Valentino et al. 2006; Wallace 2015). Decision-makers see weakening and demoralizing adversaries through civilian victimization as the best way to swiftly achieve victory at an acceptable cost. For example, in February 1945 the allied forces perceived the bombing of Dresden, Germany, which resulted in an estimated 25,000-35,000 civilian deaths as a necessary and acceptable cost in bringing the war to an end. In prolonged wars, desperation can set in and “incentives to comply with international laws or uphold democratic norms can be overwhelmed by the desire to survive and protect one’s own citizens” (Valentino et al 2006; Downes 2008).

The overwhelming majority of politicians and high-ranking military commanders making these decisions have been men in male dominated institutions. Yet, the gendered nature of their decisions is often overlooked. The gendered identities, roles, and behaviors of governments, militaries, and civilians are fundamental to understanding the decisions that they make. Governments divide combatants and civilians along gendered lines (Enloe 1983; Elstain 1987; Carpenter 2003, 2005; Sjoberg 2013). Governments historically perceived and framed women as both biological and cultural reproducers of the nation in need and deserving of protection (Yuval-Davis 1997; Peterson 1999) – which is also reflected in the framing of IHL (Kinsella 2004). Consequently, governments prioritize protecting these strategic centers of gravity (Carpenter 2003, 2005; Nagel 2019). Hence, “civilian victimization can be read as a proxy for ‘women,’ not *as women* per se but in their roles as the (gendered feminine) symbolic center” (Sjoberg 2013, p. 201 emphasis in original).

Civilian targeting does not have to kill only women nor does that have to be the perpetrators’ intention (Sjoberg 2013, p. 202). A government’s desire to protect its civilians and its failure to provide the protection is equally, or even more important. The targeting of civilians hurts the regime, not necessarily or exclusively by diminishing its fighting capacity, but by undermining its reputation as the protector. A gendered understanding of the power-to-hurt argument emphasizes that killing civilians is an attack on the opponent’s masculinity. Laura Sjoberg (2013) summarizes the gendered nature of Valentino et al.’s argument, “intentional civilian victimization is, consciously or not, an attack on the masculinity (and therefore will to fight) of the enemy, carried out by the destruction of the feminine” (p. 202). The IHL violation of targeted killing of civilians is thus tied to the masculine nature of states, their roles and reputations as protectors (Kinsella, 2004).

Policymakers and scholars, however, often ignore these gendered dynamics arguing that these strategic, high-level decisions are rational. Part of these “rational” considerations are questions of reciprocity and retaliation. Reciprocity functions both at the organizational and individual level, and can generate both positive and negative IHL compliance *behavior* (Morrow 2007). In conflicts in which all parties have publicly accepted the standards of IHL, principals are cognizant that their violation of those standards, whether through the abuse of prisoners, the targeting civilians, or any other crime, may entice the other side to respond in kind (Morrow 2014; Wallace 2015). In line with this, Adam Chilton (2018) found evidence that, at least for democracies, an expectation of reciprocity increases the likelihood of compliance with IHL. Mutual agreement to abide by the pre-determined standards of IHL can help de-escalate decision-making processes and allow adversaries to realize their shared goal of mutual restraint (Morrow 2014). The influence of reciprocity becomes more challenging when commanders face an adversary that is not publicly committed to IHL, for

example a rebel group, because principals can become asymmetrically limited by their commitment to humanitarian standards (Chilton 2018).

The cartoon in the introduction suggests that even if women reach the top of the military hierarchy and are in positions to influence decisions on a strategic level, it will not improve IHL compliance. The cartoon presents an implicit criticism of the hierarchical and oppressive systems (militarism, racism, and capitalism) in which these strategic decisions take place. This entails that even the “rational” decisions of reciprocity or retaliation are shaped by structures and systems that limit the impact of individuals. This then suggests that for increased participation of women to impact strategic-level IHL compliance, would require profound change in the guiding principles and norms of these systems and governance institutions, which would take significant time to manifest.

When does IHL (non-)compliance reflect a principal-agent problem?

Decisions to (not) comply with IHL are made at different levels, from elected political leaders or authoritarian dictators, to force commanders, to individual soldiers. One common characteristic of all levels, however, is that the vast majority of decisions are made by men, who dominate leadership down through the field level of the military. We examine this gender aspect below.

Political leaders and commanders typically order certain types of actions that can correspond to IHL violations, such as the bombing of civilian targets, the use of chemical weapons, the use of landmines, or the violation of a ceasefire agreement. Other violations such as the abuse of civilians, the abuse of prisoners of war, or sexual violence, can be perpetrated by individual soldiers acting on their own volition (Butler et al. 2007; Morrow 2007; Nagel & Doctor 2020).

Notwithstanding popular narratives of ‘rape as a weapon of war’ (Crawford 2017), in the majority of conflicts there is little evidence of ordered rape as a tactic or ‘weapon of war’ (Cohen 2016).² The principal-agent relationship between commanders and soldiers, including differing goals between the commanders and soldiers, is an important factor (Butler et al. 2007). Commanders’ loss of control over troops, lack of accountability, or a culture of toleration and impunity, can all contribute to an atmosphere in which soldiers commit IHL violations such as wartime sexual violence (Butler et al. 2007; Wood 2018).

Evidence suggests that commanders rarely explicitly order sexual violence, instead individual combatants often initiated it (Cohen 2016; Wood 2018). Yet, even if it is not a top-down *policy*, the toleration of such acts without enforcing punishment creates the space for wartime rape to become a *practice* (Wood 2018). Reasons why a commander might tolerate practices of violence include a lack of empathy for the suffering of the victims, insufficient status or resources to enforce rules, or the scarcity of the time or energy needed to address the issues while focused on a conflict (Wood 2018). Amelia Hoover Green (2018) proposes that this permissive attitude towards soldiers’ violent misbehavior stems from what she calls the commander’s dilemma. To build a force capable of winning wars, commanders need to “cultivate violence” among their soldiers, or at the very least raise their tolerance for witnessing and perpetrating violence. This is difficult for commanders to do while also deterring or punishing unordered violence against civilians (Hoover Green 2018). Hoover Green (2018) also finds that attempts to control this violence through punishment and reward are rarely successful, and IHL violations that occur at the agent level could be more effectively combated through changes in recruitment, training, and socialization practices.

² There are notable exceptions though including Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Democratic of the Congo (Schneider, Banholzer and Albarracin, 2015)

Gender is integral to these questions of recruitment, training, and socialization practices that affect individuals' IHL compliance. Militaries are built around idealized warrior masculinities that select for and reward violent tendencies (Enloe 1983, 2000, 2014; Elshain 1987; Sasson-Levy 2011; Brown 2012; Karim & Beardsley 2017; Wood & Toppelberg 2017). Militaries' organizational cultures emphasize obedience, loyalty to the unit and institution, individual resilience, and the production of violence. The emphasis on violent domination contributes to pervasive sexual harassment and assault of women who are serving in the military (Firestone & Harris 2009; Turchik & Wilson, 2010; Castro et al. 2015). Attempts to mitigate such violence and ensure discipline have tended to fail because they are not sufficient to overcome the underlying culture of dominance and brotherhood (Wood & Toppelberg 2017). Research on UN peacekeeping missions shows that sexual abuse and exploitation of civilians is associated with poor military discipline (Moncrief 2017). This suggests that understanding the gendered socialization of individual soldiers can help explain IHL violations that are not explicitly ordered.

Gendered Institutions - Adding women and stirring?

Institutions, including different parts of the government such as legislatures, the executive branch, defense ministries, and national militaries, are nominally and substantively gendered (Goetz 2007). Meaning, men have captured these institutions through historical and continued over-representation and selection processes that privilege qualities traditionally associated with masculinity such as "strength, power, logic, boundary setting, control, and competitiveness" (Hooper 2001, p. 44). While women's greater presence in institutions can disrupt the nominal gendering, this does not guarantee that the institutions would substantively change (Chappell & Waylen 2013). Exchanging "female and male bodies in traditionally masculine arenas does little to disrupt either the symbolism or practices of the gender order" (Hooper 2001, p. 52). Ultimately, levels of women's participation in national militaries, particularly at decision-making levels, remain too low for definitive conclusions to be drawn about the potential for the participation of women to impact the strategies or behaviors militaries. This section will engage with theoretical arguments and early evidence surrounding women's ability to alter the substantive gendering of political institutions and how it applies to militaries. Militaries are unique institutions, however, evidence from research on women's participation in legislatures and the executive branch of governments offers applicable insights on how the increased participation of women in military settings might lead to increased IHL compliance.

Women in legislatures

Scholars have shown that women's political empowerment in the form of legislative representation is potentially a key factor in reducing IHL violations by preventing armed conflict in the first place and de-escalating or stopping ongoing armed conflicts. Greater inclusion of women in national legislatures has been linked to reduced chances of military action in interstate disputes (Caprioli 2000; Caprioli & Boyer 2001). Similarly, in domestic conflicts, a higher share of women in the legislature reduces the likelihood of intrastate armed conflict onset, and increases the chances of transitioning from war to peace in intrastate conflicts (Melander 2005). The link between gender equality in a society and low levels of conflict extends beyond parliamentary representation. Higher levels of female labor force participation and lower fertility rates are also correlated with lower levels of intrastate armed conflict (Caprioli 2005). Higher levels of women's participation in public life (i.e. the legislature, judiciary, executive, labor force, and education) play an important role for this as they are associated with higher chances of negotiations occurring in intrastate conflicts (Nagel 2020). In line with this, higher levels of women's legislative

representation increase the likelihood of successfully ending intrastate conflicts through negotiated settlements (Best et al. 2019) and decrease the risk of conflict recurrence (Demeritt et al. 2014).

One possible explanation for these statistical trends is that when elected to legislatures, women can channel their activism into policies and shape governments' spending priorities. Greater numbers of women in legislatures are associated with increases in welfare spending (Bolzendahl & Brooks 2007). Importantly, this is also a policy priority for women in post-conflict contexts where they tend to prioritize welfare spending over military spending, reducing the risk of conflict recurrence (Demeritt et al. 2014; Shair-Rosenfield & Wood 2017). The accumulating evidence thus suggests that women in legislatures are less likely to prioritize military spending and consequently less inclined to see the military as the first or only option in the foreign policy toolbox. This could prevent, shorten, and de-escalate conflicts, which reduces the likelihood of IHL violations. However, globally, women make up only 25.5 percent of national legislatures (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2020) and decisions of war and peace are often the remit of the executive branch in which women are even more severely under-represented.

Women in the executive branch and national security

National security institutions, including defense ministries and national militaries, are nominally gendered in the historic and continued over-representation of men also known as 'gender capture' (Goetz 2007). Besides men's over-representation in legislatures, executive branches also continue to be overwhelmingly masculine. There are still 119 countries that have never had a woman leader (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2020). As of April 2020, there were only 21 countries in which women served as defense ministers (Wittenberg-Cox 2020).

Militaries themselves continue to make it difficult for women to ascend to leadership positions. Only 20 states have even taken legal steps to open combat positions to women, which are often a necessary starting point for attaining leadership positions in the armed forces (Fitriani et al. 2016; Soules 2020). At the same time, the share of women in positions of military decision-making is rising in a number of countries including Israel and Canada. Research suggests states in which women are more integrated in the labor force and in political institutions such as national legislatures are more likely to lift policies excluding women from combat roles (Barnes & O'Brien 2018; Soules 2020).

Recent research finds that women in foreign policy leadership positions try to balance the demands of meeting expectations of fulfilling both traditionally "masculine" leadership and "feminine" cooperative behavior. Governments with women in foreign policy leadership positions are more active in foreign policy (Burns & Bowling 2021). Increasing the number of women as chief executive, defense minister, or foreign minister leads to more extreme cooperative foreign policy while also leading to more conflictual foreign policy actions relative to when only men occupy these positions (Burns & Bowling 2021: 15). This suggests that increasing the number of women in the executive branch will result in different policies, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Below we discuss the potential mechanism and effects of increasing the number of women in foreign policy positions.

Positive effects of diversity on decision-making and IHL compliance

One mechanism through which increases in women's participation in the executive branch and national security sector might improve IHL compliance is by improving decision-making processes. There is accumulating evidence that more diverse teams make better decisions. Diversity in thinking styles, knowledge, opinions, information, skills, values and beliefs among team members allows them to bring together intellectual resources, combine skills,

incorporate different ideas, and consider distinct perspectives (Phillips 2014; Wang et al. 2016). Diverse teams thereby are more likely to engage in vigilant problem solving and avoid group think (Janis & Mann 1977; Janis 1982).

Diversity is important for decision-making because it can prompt innovation and new ideas through two pathways. First, nominally the presence of people representing a range of gender, racial, and generational identities, has the potential to positively disrupt the process. Similar group members often believe they have the same information and share preferences, which impedes effective exchange and processing of information, and hampers creativity (Antonio et al. 2004; Phillips 2014). “Simply adding social diversity to a group makes people *believe* that differences of perspective might exist among them and that belief makes people change their behavior” (Phillips 2014, p. 35). Using mock jury experiments, Samuel Sommers finds that juries consisting of Black and white participants deliberated longer and considered a wider range of information than homogeneous groups (2006, p.606). When in heterogeneous groups, white participants “raised more case facts, made fewer factual errors” and interpreted and weighted evidence differently (Sommers, 2006, p. 606). He writes that “knowing that they would have to justify their judgement to a diverse group can activate whites’ sense of accountability, an experience which previous research suggests would lead to more complex thought processes and affect how individuals weighted the trial evidence” (Sommers 2006, p. 607). Difference in appearance prompts group members to expect differences in perspectives and work harder to find consensus. Besides the nominal pathway of disrupting homogeneous groups, the second mechanism through which diversity can improve decision-making through introducing substantively different viewpoints. People who are different from another in terms of race, gender, nationality, and/or ethnicity bring distinct experiences, information, values, and preferences to the table (Phillips 2014).

Even in national security contexts where decision-making is often thought of as an individual act undertaken by an executive or defense minister, this is rarely true. These decision-makers are typically surrounded by advisors, cabinets, and other consultative groups in which these diversity dynamics would be expected to come into play. While much of the research on the benefits of diversity on decision-making focuses on civil and corporate environments, the logic is broadly seen to extend to military decision-making as well. For example, over the last two decades the British army has shifted its policies and rhetoric surrounding female participation from an emphasis on equal opportunity to an emphasis on diversity and its tangible benefits for military effectiveness (Woodward & Winter 2006).

IHL compliance can be understood as good decision-making because it has numerous benefits, and because it is in a state’s self-interest to comply. First, a government’s IHL compliance is likely to elicit reciprocity thereby increasing security for its forces and civilian citizens by precluding illegal attacks on them (Morrow 2014). For example, in 2001 during the conflict in South Sudan prior to South Sudan’s independence, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) signalled its intentions to comply with IHL by signing a Deed of Commitment to abide by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Geneva Call 2011). The Government of Sudan reciprocated by ratifying it two years later explicitly pointing to the SPLM/A commitment as a factor in its decision (Geneva Call 2011). On the other hand, violating IHL can prompt in-kind retaliation. For example, during the Bosnian war, Bosnians were more likely to target Serbian civilians after Serbians had intentionally killed civilians (Schneider et al 2012). Another benefit of IHL compliance is that it increases conflict actor’s legitimacy (Fazal 2018). Violating IHL, on the other hand, can elicit public condemnation from both domestic and international observers or even criminal prosecutions.

In light of the strategic and political benefits, IHL compliance can be seen as good decision-making. The evidence that diverse teams produce better decisions suggest that diversifying national security leadership by increasing the number of women could have the positive side-effect of improving IHL compliance.

Substantive gendering

State institutions such as foreign ministries, defense ministries, or national armies, tend to adopt different types of masculinities (Karim & Beardsley 2017). For example, Connell highlights the dominant form of masculinities at display in “the physical aggression of front line troops or police, the authoritative masculinity of commanders, and the calculative rationality of bureaucrats” (Connell 1987, p. 128). In the realm of national security in particular, citizens often demand leaders to show strength and offer protection, while disapproving of leaders who do not meet their expectations (Sjoberg 2013, p. 162; Enloe 2014). Mirya Holman et al. found that during times of security threat or crisis, people look for political leaders with stereotypically masculine characteristics such as leadership abilities and confidence (Holman et al. 2011, 2016). They further found through multiple survey experiments that the public tends to perceive women leaders as less competent in military, defense, and foreign policy decision-making (Holman et al. 2011).

Institutional cultures and their substantive gendering help explain why women in these institutions frequently defy expectations of traditional feminine gender norms and perpetrate or order not only violence, but violence that violates IHL. For example, in the military, men expect women to adapt their behavior to fit in (Szayna et al. 2015). Since women in politics are already perceived as less competent in military, defense, and foreign policy decision-making and less likely to be appointed as defense ministers in countries engaged in armed disputes (Holman et al. 2011; Barnes & O’Brien 2018), they often have to adopt idealized masculine traits to succeed in politics and climb to leadership positions (O’Brien 2015). Adopting and performing these masculinities means women are likely to enact similar policies to men in the same positions (Schramm & Stark 2020; Imamverdiyeva & Shea 2022).

Scholars have suggested that, in some cases, women may even be more aggressive than men when in leadership or decision-making positions precisely because they have risen to power in a male-dominated environment, adopting masculine traits and characteristics, and may feel the need to demonstrate that they are “strong” leaders that will not be intimidated (Caprioli & Boyer 2001b; Schramm & Stark 2020). Madison Schramm and Alexandra Stark (2020) argue that the idealization of masculine values affects foreign policy decision making even under women leaders. They contend that women leaders adopt and perform traditionally masculine traits such as toughness to gain and maintain status in political elite circles. Combining cross-national data and case studies of Turkish prime minister Tansu Çiller and Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, they show that this results in more bellicose behavior from women as heads of democratic governments, who are more likely to initiate armed conflict than their male counterparts (Schramm & Stark 2020). This further calls into question to what extent women’s nominal representation and participation in decision-making can positively affect IHL compliance if the substantive masculinization of institutions and systems remains unchanged.

Institutions and practices of violence

Militaries are masculinized environments where violence is accepted, normalized, and expected. Violence is a military’s *raison d’être*. The forceful domination of others is fundamental to military training and masculine initiation practices. Because gender is a relational construct, the performance of violent masculinities in these socialization and

training practices is rooted in the denigration of femininity (Tickner 2001; Wood & Toppelberg 2017). That also helps explain why men often sexually assault women (and other men) (Wood & Toppelberg 2017) and why women themselves engage in the same violence along with their male counterparts (Sjoberg 2016). This functions on multiple levels as Wright and colleagues demonstrate how NATO reproduces a hegemonic masculinity both internally and internationally as an institution through the marginalization of others – women and persons of color (Wright et al. 2019).

Many anti-militarist feminists note that the entrenched masculinities in state militaries render it unlikely that the mere presence of female bodies affects to substantive behavioral or cultural change in these institutions, compared to legislative or civilian institutions (Enloe 1983; Runyan & Peterson 2014). When women enter such organizations, they are socialized in these cultures, which often center on masculine and misogynistic norms. Refusing to participate in these types of violent behavior can bring significant social and safety risks for female combatants who rely on the loyalty and comradery of their male counterparts (Cohen 2013).

Women who enter historically masculine military organizations as individuals or in small numbers are more likely to be socialized to accept pre-existing cultural norms than to meaningfully disrupt those norms through their presence (Loken, 2017). Research suggests that women may not be able to alter the dominant masculine culture of an armed organization until they are present in greater numbers and reach a certain “critical mass” (Schaefer 2015). Research focusing on civilian organizations and electoral politics has found that until women’s representation reaches a “critical mass,” they are often subject to the dynamics of tokenism, which can bring on “sexual harassment, performance pressure, role entrapment, and self-distortion” (Childs & Krook, 2008; Kanter 1977; Schaefer 2015, p. 31; Hudson 2012).

However, it is unclear what level of representation would constitute a “critical mass” in military environments. In most countries, women are severely underrepresented in military decision-making, and in combat positions more broadly, representing a small minority within their units (Fitriani et al. 2016; Moore 2020; Soules 2020). Even in countries that have taken a progressive “critical mass” approach to integrating their armed forces, such as Canada, Sweden, Australia, and Norway, the established representational thresholds are often not met, and have to be lowered (Schaefer 2015; Klugman et al. 2020). Expecting a small minority of women serving in various branches and positions to positively transform the culture and practices of national militaries or even just their small units places a disproportionate burden on them. Furthermore, it diverts attention from men and their responsibility to foster a culture that respects human rights and guarantees compliance with IHL.

While military organizations might be particularly resistant to change, it does not mean that change in these environments is impossible. Duncanson and Woodward (2016) argue that militaries have the capacity for change and are comprised of people with an interest in bringing about institutional change. The authors draw on Cockburn (1989) to highlight how even small changes can lay the foundation for more transformational institutional change further down the line, indicating that women’s participation initiatives in militaries are not futile even if dramatic cultural changes are not immediately apparent. The involvement of female bodies in traditionally masculine activities is necessary to destabilize the gendered notions of activities as masculine and feminine. This is particularly important because placing women in traditionally feminine roles that entrench essentialist assumptions undermines women, their contributions, and adds undue burdens on them (Kronsell 2012). One example of this danger is the recruitment of women to “increase operational

effectiveness” which can produce self-fulfilling prophecies of female service members attempt to meet expectations by fitting into gender-stereotypes (Wilén 2020).

Some evidence suggests that the participation of women in national militaries has begun to change the identities of those organization. For example, Rosamond and Kronsell (2018) find that, through the participation of women in dialogic peacekeeping in Afghanistan, the Danish and Swedish militaries became more cosmopolitan in nature and shifted their focus away from traditional war-fighting towards other practices that emphasize “human security.” In this way the authors see the participation of women as having fundamentally altered the identities, cultures, and practices of these organizations. However, for these organizational changes to take place, it is of critical importance to have both well-intentioned and also well-placed individuals (Wright et al. 2019).

Women’s agency and potential for violence

Despite stereotypical assumptions about the peaceful nature of women, there is ample evidence that women have not only participated in armed conflicts, but that they have violated IHL. In Nazi Germany, women serving in various positions including as nurses, secretaries, and guards also participated in the torture and killing of Jewish and disabled civilians (Lower 2013). Women have also perpetrated a range of IHL violations when serving as combatants or decision-makers for national militaries and governments. For example, there are 47 women on the list of “Category 1” genocide suspects in Rwanda (Hogg 2010). Category 1 suspects are those who are believed to have played a role in planning, organizing, instigating, and leading the genocide. The women on this list served in a range of decision-making positions, including as military commanders and government ministers (Hogg, 2010; Trisko Darden, 2015). Rwanda’s former Minister of Family and Women’s Development, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, was tried and convicted for genocide and rape as a crime against humanity (Steflja & Trisko Darden 2020). Another high-profile example is former acting President of the Republika Srpska Biljana Plavsic. In 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indicted Plavsic on charges of genocide. She plead guilty to the charge of crimes against humanity in exchange for the ICTY prosecutors abandoning genocide charges (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, p. 153).

Women serving in the United States military during the occupation of Iraq have been implicated in war crimes through participating in verbal, physical, and sexual torture of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib (McKelvey 2007). Eleven soldiers, including three women Military Police (MP) members, Lynndie England, Sabrina Harman, and Megan Ambuhl, were accused and convicted of war crimes for the mistreatment of Iraqi detainees. Harman claims that she was following orders and did not know “about the Geneva Convention or any other prohibition that would have forbidden her behavior” (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, p. 71), while Ambuhl argues that they did not have agency in their decisions (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, p. 72). Ambuhl further contends the U.S. military scapegoated them and the other women (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007).

Brigadier General Janis Karpinski (demoted to Colonel following the revelations of abuse at Abu Ghraib) was the commander in charge of overseeing detention centers including Abu Ghraib. In 2003, she had become the first woman in U.S. history to occupy a command post in a combat zone (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, p. 75). She had 3,400 reservists, mostly MP under her command and oversaw 16 US military detention centers in Iraq. Karpinski insists she did not know of the torture until it was investigated (Karpinski & Strasser 2005). She also contends that other U.S. military commanders in Iraq did not want to see her succeed and intentionally hid the abuse from her (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007). Karpinski points to systemic problems in the military and claims that the abuses “were the result of conflicting orders and confused standards extending from the military commanders in Iraq all the way to the

summit of civilian leadership in Washington” (Karpinski & Strasser 2005, p- 5 quoted in Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, p. 77). Like Harman, Karpinski maintained that the soldiers followed interrogation guidelines and that U.S. military scapegoated them. The release of the Bush administration torture memos in 2009 vindicated Karpinski’s stance that this was a systemic problem. Below we further explore the question of women’s agency, autonomy, and power.

Agency, autonomy, and power

In Abu Ghraib just as in Nazi Germany, women and men held responsible for war crimes claimed they were following orders and that they did not have full agency and decision-making power in those situations. Under customary IHL, every combatant has the duty to disobey an unlawful order (*Customary IHL - Rule 154. Obedience to Superior Orders*, no date). However, this assumes that all combatants have both an understanding of their obligations as well as the agency and power to disobey. Harman notably claimed that she was unaware of the Geneva Convention or any other IHL obligations (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, p. 71).

Further, US media outlets depicted Lynndie England as lacking agency. She was “portrayed as being told by her boyfriend [another soldier convicted for his role in the torture] to pose for pictures and hold onto leashed Iraqis” (Lobasz 2008, p. 327). A court found Lynndie England unable to assess her own guilt because the manipulation by her boyfriend could have been so severe that she lost her sense of right and wrong and denied her attempt to plead guilty (Sjoberg, 2007: 96). This further entrenched the image of a ‘naïve girl led astray’ and corrupted by the masculinized environment of the military.

Feminists disputed this narrative and asserted that women break laws just as men do and that they have agency in these decisions (Lobasz 2008; Sjoberg 2007). Ignorance of IHL, the masculinized environment of the military and the armed conflict, and the authority of and obedience to senior men soldiers are important factors in providing context for the actions of Harman, Ambuhl, and England, and their participation in war crimes. However, they do not absolve them or negate their agency. As Laura Sjoberg writes: “the tendency to deny them agency in those decisions is one fraught with gender subordination. It is borne out of a discomfort with women’s agency in acts of violence, stemming from a stereotype of women as innocent and incapable of violence” (Sjoberg 2007, p.98).

The US Department of Defense (DoD) publicly appears to embrace women’s potential for violence and contributions to fighting. It views the WPS strategic framework as a way to “build a more lethal force by providing the tools necessary to reduce operational risk in a multi-domain environment, and recruit and fully leverage a diverse and innovative fighting force” (US DoD 2020, p. 10). This should raise concern among WPS advocates as it contradicts the Agenda’s founding spirit of anti-militarism (Shepherd 2016).

Conclusion

Women’s participation in all matters of peace and security is a pillar of the WPS agenda and an important normative commitment. However, the assumption that increasing the participation of women in national security apparatuses will automatically increase peace, security, and compliance with IHL requires careful engagement. There is evidence that suggests increased representation of women in decision-making positions might lead to greater IHL compliance. Women’s participation in legislatures and public life is connected with decreases in violent conflict, and women in legislatures and executive foreign policy positions can have positive effects by decreasing military spending and heightening cooperative behavior. If the same relationship exists for security institutions, then increasing women’s participation could reduce IHL violations.

In this article, we identify one potential mechanism for change through which women’s participation in security institutions could decrease IHL violations: by diversifying decision-

making groups. Diverse decision-making groups have been shown to consider a broader range of perspectives and engage in more thorough deliberative processes, ultimately arriving at better decisions. Given that IHL compliance affords governments strategic advantages such as inducing reciprocal compliance from adversaries, it can be considered a “good” decision. One could expect that more diverse security leadership groups would more often decide to abide by IHL to maximize “good” decisions.

However, despite these potential positive impacts of increasing women’s participation in national security institutions, WPS and IHL advocates must also contend with the fact that from Nazi Germany to the modern-day United States, women have violated IHL. We argue that to make sense of this tension, it is critical to fully recognize women’s agency, while also distinguishing between the nominal participation of women in security institutions, and a fuller, more transformative type of participation. National militaries have been built on centuries of violent masculinity, and it would be unrealistic to expect small numbers of women entering into those spaces to disrupt rather than adopt that dominant culture.

Women in national security have important, but heterogeneous effects on foreign policy. Reviewing literature on the impact of women’s increased participation in decision-making on national and international security, including in national militaries, we find that while there is potential for women to improve IHL compliance this is likely to be conditioned by several factors: which position women occupy, the number of women in the institution, the substantive gendering of the respective institution, and the power and agency that women hold in their positions. These contextual factors combined with the facts that women are not a monolithic group and not inherently more peaceful, mean that advocacy for increasing women’s participation in decisions on peace and security to improve IHL compliance is overly simplistic. This has important implications for advocates, practitioners, and policy makers tasked with implementing the WPS agenda. Earnest efforts to increase women’s participation in all decisions of peace and security need to acknowledge women’s diversity, their agency, and their capacity for violence.

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Funding

This publication is part of a research project that received funding from the Principality of Liechtenstein’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their constructive and helpful feedback. We would further like to thank Mara Redlich Revkin, Orly Maya Stern, Charli Carpenter, and Katrina Lee-Koo, who all have contributed to the research project in meaningful ways.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women movements' perspective on the WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Assessing “human security” and peacebuilding

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Abstract

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the first countries in the Western Balkans to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) and it is currently completing the implementation of its third NAP. More than a decade after the adoption of the first NAP, however, not all the parties concerned agree on what results have been obtained: while national institutions highlight achievements in the sectors of security and defence, women's movements claim that these measures have failed to promote a different understanding of peace and security. Given this context, the article aims to further investigate this tension by analysing how the concept of “human security” and more substantial involvement on the part of local civil society could improve the impact of the WPS Agenda at the local level.

Keywords: Res. 1325; Women's CSOs; Gender-based violence in war; Securitarian paradigm; Localisation

Introduction

The recent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the conflict that devastated the country from 1992 to 1995 played an essential role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) choosing to adopt Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) in 2000.¹ Indeed, violence against women was widely used by nationalist groups during the entire conflict as a weapon of war and a means of achieving ethnic cleansing. This conflict has shown the world, once more,² that wars are not an exclusively “male affair” but rather also irremediably affect the lives of women even as the latter are completely excluded from decision-making and the reparations set aside for war victims (Stiglmeier, 1994; Skjelsbæk, 2001; Weitsman, 2008; OSCE & LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, 2020). It has therefore contributed to reinforcing an awareness of the importance of recognising women both as victims of war and agents of peace and

¹ For more details about this Resolution and the others constituting the “Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda” as well as the instruments to implement it at national and regional levels, see the Introduction to this Special Issue.

² Without going back to much earlier wars, see for instance the activism around “Comfort Women” and sexual slavery during WWII.

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consequently including them in peace tables and negotiations at all levels as well as in the structures intended to ensure peace and security (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2020).

The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina has not only shown the relevance of gender violence in the context of war, it has also highlighted the consequences of wholly excluding women from peace talks. The Dayton talks leading to the Peace Agreement in 1995 have often been criticised for having legitimised the authority of the nationalist parties that have engaged in conflict, fuelling ethnic tensions. Indeed, it is widely agreed that, instead of leading towards reconciliation, this agreement has crystallised the conflict by dividing the country into a complex structure of autonomous entities that make Bosnia and Herzegovina an administrative nightmare, with three nations, two entities, ten autonomous cantons and an independent district. Women were completely excluded from the talks leading up to the agreement even though numerous women's organisations were at the forefront of promoting reconciliation through initiatives that transcended ethnic divisions. Their exclusion reinforced the idea that war and peace are an entirely male domain, completely omitting gender issues from the discussion and preventing the introduction of perspectives with the potential to reconcile the tensions underlying the war (Thomasson, 2006; Björkdahl, 2012; Deiana, 2018; Women Organising for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Syria, 2018; Berry & Rana, 2019).

Within this framework, Res. 1325 and the following resolutions that constitute the so-called "Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda" have represented an important opportunity to place the issue of gender at the centre of attention in sectors where women have usually remained invisible. Driven by these aims, the Bosnian activists who have been working since the end of the conflict to support war victims, promote reconciliation and advocate for women's participation in decision-making have also supported the adoption of the WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Thomasson, 2006; Helms, 2013; Rošul-Gajić, 2016). It is also thanks to their efforts that, in 2010, the country was one of the first in the Western Balkans and Europe to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing Res. 1325. Since 2010, three NAPs have been adopted promoting a series of initiatives aimed at favouring women's participation and introducing a gender perspective³ into a series of sectors connected to peace and security.

Nevertheless, there is disagreement over what the implementation of the Agenda in this country has really achieved. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks quite high on the Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 (56th out of 170 countries) (Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2021) and some authors have highlighted valuable achievements by the Bosnian NAPs, such as the capacity to introduce the concept of gender mainstreaming into defence and security sectors (Tomić, 2015; OSCE & LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, 2020) or attention to the concept of "human security" and the capacity for coordination among the different actors (Deiana, 2018), a series of doubts and issues have been raised. The main criticism regards the NAPs' ineffectiveness in addressing a political system that is still monopolised by nationalist parties with no real interest in adopting a gender perspective and who instead seek to use international norm adoption to reinforce the legitimisation of their power. So far, therefore, the Agenda has failed to substantially de-masculinise the Bosnian political scene and foster women's participation. In this context, observers critique the focus on including women in the classic sectors of security and defence on the grounds that it reproduces a militarised idea of peace and security (Helms, 2013; Deiana, 2018; Doeland & Skjelsbæk, 2018).

³ The term "gender perspective" refers to an approach that takes into account gender-based differences and relations of power in all sectors of society. In this regard, see: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1197>

Given the importance of the Bosnian case for the adoption of the WPS Agenda and its relatively early implementation in this country, an analysis of the above-mentioned shortcomings and potential directions for improvement can contribute to the broader debate on the local-level reception and impact of the Agenda. As a number of scholars have noted, one of the main conceptual “cracks” or “points of fracture” (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021; della Valle & Piras, 2022) in the WPS Agenda is its complex relationship with the “securitarian paradigm” and the unequal weight of the Agenda’s various pillars, i.e. its excessive focus on prevention/protection at the expense of participation (Pearson, 2020; Shepherd, 2020). The Agenda’s emphasis on the necessity of “protecting women” as “victims of war”, together with a primary focus on sexual violence against women during the armed conflict, has been criticised for treating women primarily as “victims to protect” rather than “agents of change”, autonomous actors with the capacity to shape peace and security processes (Cohn, 2017; Davis & Stern, 2019). This framing has reinforced the international community’s tendency to provide paternalistic protection for women (Sjoberg & Peet, 2011) as well as the failure of states, advocates and scholars to recognise women’s resistance to inequitable and ill-conceived conflict resolution as a valid exercise of political power (Ní Aoláin & Vahli, 2019).

In light of these considerations and with the aim of contributing to the debate on the WPS Agenda, the first section of this article begins by presenting the context in which the WPS Agenda has been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to analyse the local-level impact of initiatives carried out as part of the three NAPs adopted to date. This analysis allows us to investigate the evolution of the Agenda’s implementation in the country and how civil society has been involved, highlighting some points of fracture that threaten to derail cooperation among the different actors. The second section then focuses on those initiatives with the potential to favour cooperation between institutions and civil society and to promote a broader understanding of “security”, in particular in the field of “human security” and peacebuilding. This analysis also considers initiatives implemented by local civil society that, although not part of the NAPs, do pursue objectives in line with the WPS Agenda by promoting the recognition and visibility of women’s role as peace agents. Through this analysis, the article aims to investigate how further involvement by local civil society might improve the impact of the WPS Agenda at the local level. In so doing, it intends to show how important the work carried out by local women’s organisations and institutions is for reinforcing the WPS Agenda, fostering as it does a different understanding of security with the recognition of women’s role as “agents of change”, and reinforcing the impact of local initiatives implemented in the field of “human security”.

The article analyses data collected in 2020⁴ through literature reviews, document analysis and sixteen semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders based in Bosnia and Herzegovina – national institutions and agencies, activists, international organizations (IOs), civil society organizations (CSOs)⁵, and experts in the field of WPS. The interviewees touched

⁴ Research was carried out as part of the 2020 project “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Peace and Security – WEPPS”, implemented by a team of researcher based at the Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa (Italy) under the scientific coordination of Professor Francesco Strazzari, in partnership with Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) in Bologna (Italy). Funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the WEPPS project developed around three main axes: a) research on WPS implementation in Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo through qualitative methods (literature review, desk analysis and interviews); b) a dialogue and training program, called “The Women Peace and Security Agenda in the pandemic”, involving professionals in the field of WPS (women activists, representatives of local institutions and CSOs, international agencies and NGOs) in the four target-countries, aimed at facilitating the exchange of expertise and creation of transnational networks; and c) collecting and publishing articles to foster critical analysis of the challenges in WPS implementation.

⁵ This article uses the term “civil society organisations” to refer to both local associations and non-governmental organisations.

on the adoption and evolution of the Agenda in the country, the main results achieved, the lessons learned and main challenges, also taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addressing all of these topics, we paid particular attention to the involvement of civil society in the different phases of WPS Agenda implementation as well as the general population's participation in and acceptance of WPS discourse and practice.

The WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina: history, results and shortcomings

As mentioned above, Bosnian women have not only suffered the gender-based violence perpetuated systematically by nationalistic groups; they have often been active promoters of peace as well. Women's organisations were the first to organise meetings bringing together people from different ethnic groups as part of initiatives of reconciliation at a time when the political debate was still divided along ethnic lines (Thomasson, 2006; Björkdahl, 2012; Helms, 2013; Rošul-Gajić, 2016). This activism was not immediately recognised and supported by IOs but, thanks to the work of international feminist foundations, the claims of these local activists have begun to be heard, thereby pushing national institutions to adopt a series of measures to promote gender equality in all sectors of society (Cockburn, 2013; Doeland & Skjelsbæk, 2018). A Law on Gender Equality was adopted in 2003 establishing a series of measures to meet the international standards on this matter and creating an Agency for Gender Equality as part of the Ministry on Human Rights and Refugees. The role of this agency is to coordinate all measures aimed at reinforcing gender equality, such as the Action Plan for Gender Equality that is renewed every four years (Sarajevo Open Center, 2019).

In this context, the Agency for Gender Equality began working together with women's organisations to push for the adoption of the WPS Agenda in the country with the objective of improving women's participation in typically male sectors and valorising their role in peacebuilding processes. As a result of these efforts, the first NAP was adopted in 2010, lasting for three years, until 2013. A Coordination Table bringing together representatives of the national institutions and particularly the Ministries of Defence and Security with civil society was established from the very beginning to favour cooperation between different actors. This collaboration resulted in defining eight main objectives to be included in the NAP, objectives that some interviewees have characterised as "ambitious" (interviews 1, 2 and 3). The plan aimed to increase women's participation in decision-making, the police and armed forces, and peacekeeping missions; to combat human trafficking; to support female victims of war; to carry out de-mining; to train public officers in Res. 1325 principles; and to foster cooperation with civil society. This large number of objectives and indicators hindered the implementation and monitoring of the first NAP, and so from the second NAP (2014-2017) onwards the number of objectives was reduced to three: improving women's participation in decision-making, the police, armed forces and peacekeeping missions; promoting "human security" with the introduction of a gender perspective; and improving the conditions and approach for implementing Res. 1325.

Reducing the number of objectives has helped improve efforts to implement and coordinate the activities, but it has also rendered them more institutionalised and centralised, a process also reinforced with the third NAP (2018-2022). As Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2019) likewise note, while women's associations and organizations have been crucial in pushing for the implementation of the WPS Agenda and adoption of the first NAP, their role in implementing NAP objectives has been gradually reduced from the second NAP onwards. They have been considered mostly "service providers, stepping in where states or institutions were unable or unwilling" (p. 432). The Ministries of Defence and Security in particular have taken on an increasingly leading role in implementing the NAPs, endeavouring to increase the number of women in the armed forces and police. In

these sectors, revising recruiting processes has resulted in an increase of female recruits from 4.6% of total recruits to 8% in only a few years (interview 3) (Ahmic, 2019).

Furthermore, in order to introduce a gender perspective in these sectors, local institutions have created centres and professional figures specialised in this area and organised a series of studies to analyse the obstacles women recruits encounter when entering these traditionally male environments. Many of our interviewees from national institutions and IOs have thus acknowledged the engagement of the Ministries of Defence and Security in achieving tangible results in these fields and in introducing a gender perspective in male-dominated sectors (interviews 2, 3, 4, 6, 8). Furthermore, a number of results have been obtained thanks to cooperation with the English Ministry of Defence: it has worked with its Bosnian counterparts in the implementation of the WPS Agenda and in the promotion of the cultural change necessary to introduce a gender perspective also within the higher ranks of military structures (interview 8).

Nevertheless, other actors have raised some criticisms and doubts regarding the actual outcomes of investment in these sectors. The most critical voices have been representatives of civil society, actors who – as also acknowledged by officers of IOs (interviews 7 and 8) – have seen their role in implementing the WPS Agenda in the country progressively reduced. Some of them have observed that granting more attention to defence and security structures has overshadowed the goal of promoting a different understanding of peace and peacebuilding, which does not go through these institutions (interviews 7, 10, 11, and 16). Others have raised doubts about the idea that increasing the number of female recruits will lead to a de-masculinisation of these sectors (interviews 5 and 14). In general, the main critique has been the lack of a real political will to shift the system towards a gender perspective, thus preventing the realisation of initiatives that would have a major impact on society (interviews 6, 9, 11, 13, and 15). A representative of Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation commented on the situation by saying that:

Now when you speak with some senior woman leaders or senior activists, most of them would say that the situation was better fifteen years ago than now, that politicians were more open to dialogue for the adoption of these goals than they are now, so all in all the process has been quite unsatisfactory. (interview 11)

A representative of a local CSO was even more critical when talking about the parties in power:

They don't care about Res. 1325 or any other resolution, [they] simply don't care. It is very low on their list of priorities [...] Everything that the EU puts in front of them they will sign, but it will never be implemented, that's why we are stuck. (interview 13)

These criticisms parallel the findings of previous research on WPS Agenda implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Doeland and Skjelsbæk (2018), for instance, raise the doubt that the NAPs may have been adopted exclusively to present this country as a progressive state and gain international support while in reality there is no genuine interest in actually implementing it. Along the same lines, IOs have also been criticised for fostering the maintenance of the *status quo* instead of supporting civil society movements and protests that could bring about change (Helms, 2013; Deiana, 2018). The lack of a genuine political commitment to achieving gender equality is also reported by Deiana (2018) when she claims that the ability of WPS implementation to advance gender equality in the country has been limited while nationalist political parties have used it to maintain power. Similar

considerations emerge in the report “Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in OSCE Region” (OSCE & LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security 2020). Although the report recognises achievements in promoting the WPS Agenda within the armed forces, it also identifies continuing challenges stemming from a political and institutional environment that does not favour gender mainstreaming.

In light of these criticisms, it seems valid to ask whether increasing the number of women in sectors that remain largely dominated by men can effectively challenge a system characterised by patriarchal values. And indeed doubts on this point have already been raised by other feminist scholars (Berry & Lake, 2021). When it comes to women’s participation in decision-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the results obtained from implementing the gender-equality legislation and plans appear quite unsatisfactory. The results of the last parliamentary elections are case in point. The Law on Gender Equality (2003) introduced a quota system that has been translated into a series of dispositions ensuring that the number of female electoral candidates amounted to slightly more than 40%. However, the final share of women elected came to only 16% of the entire parliament (Sarajevo Open Center, 2019).

According to Deiana (2018), the reasons for these poor results lay not in the flawed application of the quota system, but rather in a political environment monopolised by nationalist parties not in favour of women’s participation. As also highlighted by other scholars, the post-Dayton political system is unable to tackle and overcome nationalist rhetoric and inter-ethnic conflict – leaving other issues, such as gender equality, unaddressed (Thomasson, 2006; Björkdahl, 2012; Hadziristic, 2016). As a consequence, the adoption of international standards and norms on gender equality takes place only at the formal level, without substantially changing the social and political situation as would be required.

The persistence of a patriarchal system based on values that marginalise women’s voices highlights the necessity of reinforcing cooperation between institutions and local organisations, as some of the interviewees also asserted. While on one hand women’s organisations have the potential to offer an innovative and critical perspective on the implementation of the WPS Agenda, on the other hand they can ensure it has a major impact at the local level. For their part, national institutions offer the professionalisation and structures necessary to attract international funding and carry out larger projects. A local expert and researcher, indeed, noticed that local civil society lacks the professionalisation and coordination necessary to advance structured proposals and apply for international funding. In the words of one of our interviewees, ‘although we have a very strong civil society network of different organisations, they were usually never able to articulate a policy proposal’ (interview 16).

Nevertheless, the interviews conducted during this study seem to suggest that such cooperation is hindered by one main point of fracture dividing the two different actors: the way they conceive of defence and security and believe they should be achieved. While Bosnian institutions mostly aim to include a gender perspective in the classic sectors of defence and security (the police and armed forces) by increasing the ranks of women, CSOs instead seek to address women’s participation in peacebuilding and promote a different model of peace and security, one that does not revolve around the armed forces. As mentioned above, local activists and experts question whether the actions carried out so far can substantially change the Bosnian political system with its nationalist and patriarchal values. Civil society is often thus very critical of national institutions, viewing them as unwilling to change the current situation, and calls for a complete overhaul of the system (interviews 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 15). For instance, a local representative of an IO states:

Now I am having a problem finding partners in the NGO sector, because even if they are interested in implementation, they remain critical from a feminist perspective. [...] NGOs within Res. 1325 were interested in peacebuilding and women's participation in peacebuilding, instead this resolution has been translated as 'we have to increase the number of women in the military and police' and, therefore, towards militarisation, while NGOs want to work on peace and conflict resolution, so these are two opposing perceptions and in our NAP we went straight towards the institutions, which means increasing the number of women in the military and security. (interview 7)

Women's civil society organisations' participation in implementing the NAPs: "human security", localisation and peacebuilding

In light of the fracture highlighted in the previous section, the key question that arises is whether there is space to reconcile the different perspectives on security held by national institutions and women's associations?

In order to answer this question, it seems interesting to look at the attention that Bosnia and Herzegovina's second and third NAPs have paid to the concept of "human security". Introduced in 1995 by the UNDP, this term refers to protecting human dignity in multiple senses – including from gender-based violence, violent extremism, the vulnerable conditions of migrants and refugees (including with respect to human trafficking), economic inequalities, health risks, and the damage caused by natural disasters and pandemics. The term is thus aimed at expanding the concept of "security" to include a broader range of threats not considered in the traditional definition of "hard security" (Kaldor, 2006). Despite some criticisms raised in regard to the capacity of this concept to effectively break the north-south divide in WPS discourses, it has also been recognised its potential for addressing security's challenges in developing countries (Acharya & Christie, 2008).

Given this aim, the focus on "human security" in the second and third NAPs has the potential to broaden the range of actions carried out under these plans and increase their impact at multiple levels, including locally, while promoting a broader understanding of "security". Along with measures to improve women's participation in the classic structures of defence and security, these last two plans have also introduced a number of initiatives in the following sectors: migration/refugees, human trafficking, natural disaster management, domestic violence, small and light weapons control; and combatting violent extremism and terrorism.

In the management of migration, the implementation of the WPS Agenda in the country has resulted in introducing a gender perspective in the training courses for border police officers. Likewise, police personnel have been trained in the prevention of domestic violence and a gender perspective has been introduced in natural disaster management after the violent flooding that hit the country in 2014 (Agency for Gender Equality, 2019) (interviews 2 and 5). Furthermore, in cooperation with the Serbian organisation SEESAC,⁶ Bosnian institutions have launched a project to monitor and prevent the use of small and light weapons that has also produced a report highlighting the link between small arms possession and gender violence (SEESAC, 2019). Finally, contact points on gender issues have been established in all the country's security structures as a base for including a gender perspective in the management of all daily security threads (OSCE, 2019). Thanks to these activities, many interviewees welcomed the last two NAPs' attention to "human security"

⁶ South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons. See: <https://www.seesac.org/Serbia-2/>

(interviews 1, 2, 5 and 16). However, one representative of foreign embassies raised the issue that decentralising these initiatives make them excessively dependent on the will of the individual in charge of implementing them (interview 8).

In the field of human security, one development that appears particularly interesting and potentially innovative is the launch of a series of Local Action Plans (LAPs) to implement the WPS Agenda at the local level, introduced since the application of the second NAP. The objective of these local plans is to improve the impact of WPS Agenda implementation on women's everyday lives, addressing a broad series of issues that contribute to women's lack of security. Other authors have already stressed the potential of these kinds of initiatives to improve the local-level impact of the WPS agenda through meaningful and sustainable results (Lynch, 2019; Luna & Whetstone, 2022). In their study on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Basini and Ryan (2016) noted that a lack of political will and bureaucratic procedures greatly hinder the potential of NAPs, whereas engagement by civil society organisations and activists in realising apparently small local initiatives might actually have a greater impact.

In the Bosnian context, the complexity of the administrative system has surely exacerbated the bureaucratisation of NAP implementation, conditioning its effective impact at the local level. This is why the LAP adoption represents an even more valuable opportunity to achieve concrete results, as also stressed by several interviewees (interviews 1, 2 and 3). The LAPs were first launched on a trial basis in six municipalities. Their most interesting aspect is probably their attention to women's economic security, as women have been particularly hard hit by impoverishment trends associated with the capitalist transition following the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Pupavac, 2005; Berry & Rana, 2019). Some examples of the activities organised under the LAPs are provided in a report released by the Agency for Gender Equality in 2016: in the municipality of Ilidža, LAP adoption led to the revision of local rules that hindered women's access to public funds. This allowed a local women's association to win a grant and invest in their handmade products business by hiring new female employees. Other issues that have been tackled by the LAPs so far include domestic violence, infrastructure, de-mining, and stray dogs (Babic-Svetlin et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, as observed by Kadribašić (2020), it is not completely clear what kind of results the LAPs have achieved and whether the initial initiatives have really been followed by others. According to the OSCE, LAP implementation has been particularly slow and has generated further conflict between the central state and local authorities (OSCE & LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security 2020, p. 67). It also seems that the processes of adopting and implementing these plans rely too much on the will of individuals: in the above-mentioned case of Ilidža, for example, the success of the initiative was mostly due to the determination and of a supportive local officer. Finally, as noted by Ždralović et al. in a recent publication on the WPS in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ždralović et al., 2020), the implementation of this agenda cannot depend exclusively on local initiatives; rather, the issue of gender equality must be made a priority in the political debate. The shortcomings in the implementation of the LAPs might not only hinder local initiatives with a concrete impact on women's everyday life but also miss an opportunity to reinforce the cooperation with local organisations.

The central issue remains that of addressing a social and political environment that, in the wake of the war in the '90s, systematically excludes women from positions of power and decision-making by fostering narratives based on nationalist and patriarchal values. As many interviewees stated, the current political system has no real interest in promoting gender equality and adheres to a different understanding of peace and security; the only use it makes of WPS initiatives is to gain international support and maintain the *status quo*.

Most of the representatives of civil society we interviewed deem that radical change is necessary to effectively deconstruct the patriarchal rhetoric and narrative that has informed female exclusion over the past thirty years in Bosnia and Herzegovina (interviews 6, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15). Accordingly, a de-masculinisation of the defence and security sectors is considered essential, and it is seen as needing to take place by granting tangible recognition to the roles played by women during the war, both as victims and as peace agents. In line with this perspective, local women's organisations have engaged in carrying out a series of initiatives aimed at promoting different narratives of the war, ones that do not present men as the only actors on stage.

One of the main initiatives of this kind, "Peace with Women's Face", was mentioned both by two interviewees as an example of initiative that can strengthen the application of the WPS Agenda in the country (interviews 9 and 10) and in an article by Džekman and Kanalstein (2020). Launched in 2013, this project involves twelve women's organisations from throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and aims at highlighting the role of women in Bosnian history both during and beyond the '90s war. Three books have been published as part of this initiative. The first, entitled "*Rat nije jednorodan*" ("War is not a one-gender affair"), tells the story of women who died during the war (Džekman et al., 2017). The second is a collection of biographies of significant women whose achievements are not recognised in history books (Šehabović, 2019). The third brings together the stories of women who "have led small (and big) fights for their rights and rights of others in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina and have rebuilt the war-torn society" (Initiative 'Peace with Women's Face', 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, to increase the visibility of the initiative, a documentary was produced on the stories of women who died during the war, entitled "*One umiru drugi put*" ("They die a second time")⁷, and a public exhibition was organised.

In addition, civil society organisations are struggling to have the 8th of December named a Day of Remembrance for female victims of war. Despite their efforts, the Bosnian government has never supported this initiative or officially recognised 8th of December celebrations, and has never provided an explanation for its stance (interview 10). In part because of this, local organisations appear resigned regarding the possibility of effectively collaborating with national institutions (interviews 7 and 16). Such collaboration would be crucial to the success of the host of initiatives aimed at deconstructing the patriarchal narrative rooted in the nationalistic rhetoric that emerged in the '90s. A number of scholars have already stressed the significance of war narratives and memory construction in the Bosnian context for fostering reconciliation in the country. Given how important it is the representation of "lived experiences" in the construction of collective identities, these studies highlight the importance of how war memory is constructed and narrated both for reproducing ethno-nationalistic narratives as it is for de-constructing them. Gender plays a primary role in this process in that the recognition of gender violence as an inter-ethnic weapon and women's agency as a transnational peace force can help dismantle the "othering" narratives that sustain ethnic divides (Jacobs, 2017; Takševa, 2018; Savić-Bojanić & Kalemaj, 2021).

Finally, collaboration between civil society and national institutions appears even more crucial nowadays in view of the challenges generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, as highlighted during this research, local organisations that already struggled to survive in the past due to a lack of funding are now threatened by economic difficulties worsened by the pandemic (interview 10). The disappearance of these organisations would deprive the country of an important contribution to the fight against nationalist rhetoric and for full

⁷ The video can be seen at the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2_2Re5Ntz0 (last accessed July 5th, 2022)

reconciliation. Moreover, it would deprive national institutions and agencies working on the WPS Agenda and gender equality of interlocutors with the ability to connect national activities with the needs and conditions of local women and those who are most vulnerable. Indeed, it has been noted that involving local actors and organisations who better understand local needs is crucial for developing policy responses with the effectiveness to impact individuals and societies (Basini & Ryan, 2016; Lynch, 2019).

Conclusions

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the first countries to implement the WPS Agenda in the regional landscape. The three NAPs adopted so far have unquestionably reinforced a discursive trend in the country in the direction of gender mainstreaming various fields connected to security and obtained tangible results in terms of women's participation in the police and armed forces. However, these results have been achieved mostly thanks to the progressive institutionalisation of the NAPs implementation process and, while such institutionalisation has improved the management of the initiatives, it has also inevitably curtailed the participation of local civil society organisations. Moreover, WPS Agenda implementation in the country has been criticised because of the approach adopted to achieve WPS goals. While national institutions aim to introduce a gender perspective and increment women's participation in the classic structures of defence and security, local activists and scholars claim that any de-masculinisation of these sectors must involve the complete deconstruction of these structures. Furthermore, doubts have been raised regarding these initiatives' capacity to bring about substantial change in a system that, after the war, has been dominated by patriarchal values and has systematically excluded women from decision-making. In this vein, the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been criticised for supporting the maintenance of the *status quo* by offering national authorities the opportunity to present national policies as progressive and in line with international standards.

Nevertheless, the last two NAPs have promoted a series of new initiatives that might reinforce the local impact of the WPS Agenda by fostering a different understanding of "security". These initiatives relate to the concept of "human security" introduced in the second and third NAPs and seek to promote a gender perspective in the struggle against everyday forms of insecurity. In this sector, the adoption of LAPs that bring in local authorities to implement measures to improve women's security in the country's rural and more marginal regions appear particularly interesting. In addition, these initiatives have the potential to reinforce cooperation with the local organisations and activists working to improve women's everyday lives and local-level involvement. However, the long-lasting effects of the war – effects such as the administrative divisions in the country and monopolisation of the public debate by nationalist and patriarchal narratives – continue to threaten the effective impact of these otherwise commendable initiatives.

It is in light of these challenges that local women's organisations' initiatives to deconstruct patriarchal and nationalistic narratives, asserting the role women have played in Bosnian history and during the war, appear particularly significant. Along with contributing significantly to the WPS Agenda objectives by fostering the recognition of women's contribution to peace and reconciliation and promoting a different understanding of peace and peace-building, these initiatives also have the potential to lead to a de-masculinisation of the Bosnian political scene by granting visibility to women's agency. Consequently, they can reinforce women's participation in decision-making and boost the impact of all the other initiatives implemented in the framework of the WPS Agenda. Nevertheless, the lack of collaboration between civil society organisations and national institutions in promoting and realising these initiatives irremediably affects their outcomes and reduces their impact.

State failure to grant visibility to the invisible peacebuilding activities enacted by women during and after conflicts is an issue that extends beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina. As anticipated in the introduction to this article, the international discourse on WPS has been shaped by a “securitarian paradigm” focusing mainly on sexual violence against women during conflicts and the notion of a “post-conflict” situation, thereby failing to recognise women’s resistance to inequitable and ill-conceived conflict resolution as a valid exercise of political power. These forms of resistance, based on solidarity networks and not always in agreement with state and international ideologies or paradigms of economic growth, strive to break the barriers between the “private” and “public” spheres and to combat structural violence through everyday forms of resistance. In so doing, they override the classic dichotomies of “conflict” vs “post-conflict” and “victimhood” vs “agency”, thereby enabling the creation of new spaces for everyday peacebuilding (Gopinath & Manchanda, 2019).

The experience and activism of Bosnian women show that the global WPS discourse needs to embrace this narrative; otherwise, the WPS Agenda may become increasingly irrelevant to women on the ground in conflict and post-conflict zones, women whose understanding of local peace and security needs might also differ from those of states and/or international actors. The “visibilisation” of women’s invisible work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in other countries (della Valle 2022) has the potential to redefine concepts such as “peace” and “security”, leading to a true de-masculinisation of the defence and security sectors. To this end, it is crucial that national institutions begin to recognise these invisible practices and that institutional actors and civil society actors engage in more effective dialogue.

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Funding

This research was supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation –Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI) – Direzione Generale per gli Affari Politici e di Sicurezza. Decree dated 11/04/2019 for the granting of financial assistance under the third National Action Plan, adopted for the implementation of the Resolution n. 1325 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council on “Women Peace and Security” (D.D.G. n. 133/2019).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Editorial Committee of Interdisciplinary Political Studies. They are immensely grateful to all the interviewees who agreed to talk and share their thoughts and experiences, notwithstanding the limits raised by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Interview 2. Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2 July 2020, remotely.

- Interview 3. Ministry of Defence, 6 July 2020, remotely.
- Interview 4. Ministry of Defence / Armed Forces, 6 July 2020, remotely.
- Interview 5. UN Women, 8 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 6. EUFOR, 27 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 7. OSCE, 6 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 8. UK Embassy, 8 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 9. Local women's CSO, 11 May 2020, remotely.
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- Interview 11. Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 14 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 12. Local CSO, 12 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 13. Local CSO, 12 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 14. Regional Youth Cooperation Office, 15 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 15. Researcher and activist, 13 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 16. Researcher and legal advisor, 13 May 2020, remotely.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The WPS Agenda in the Eastern Mediterranean:

The Cases of Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey

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Abstract

The implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, despite its global prominence, has been slow in the Eastern Mediterranean. This article is aimed at examining how three neighbouring states in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely: Greece, the Republic of Cyprus¹, and Turkey, have responded to the normative traction of the WPS agenda. It is not only their geographic proximity that have rendered a comparative analysis of the three countries important but also the ongoing tensions that Greece and Cyprus experience at different times with Turkey. An evaluation of the three countries' standing regarding the promotion of the WPS agenda will shed light on the missed opportunities that a substantive commitment to the WPS would have offered, especially in the context of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Cyprus adopted in 2020 its first WPS National Action Plan while Greece finalised its first WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2021 and awaits its official adoption. Turkey is yet to adopt a NAP despite its deteriorating women's rights record. The article evaluates the perspectives that both Greece and Cyprus have adopted in their NAPs and assesses Turkey's perspectives on gender equality. Through a content analysis with the support of respective secondary literature, the article highlights the unexplored, and thus missed, opportunities that a substantive implementation of the WPS normative settings would have offered in a region suffering from tensions, power competition and revisionism.

Keywords: Greece; Cyprus; Turkey; WPS; Conflict Prevention

Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean is a challenging area for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (hereinafter "WPS") Agenda.² This is a geographical area that comprises diverse regional actors having very different – in terms of dynamics – bilateral and multilateral relations between each other. These regional actors are often displaying very different security concerns that may ultimately transcend their national frontiers and thus threaten to jeopardize stability and security in the region. For example, some countries in the region (Greece, Italy, the Republic of Cyprus, Turkey) have been experiencing tremendous problems with the refugee and immigrant influxes, while Turkey's regional

¹ In international intergovernmental organizations like the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, the short name used for the Republic of Cyprus is "Cyprus". The authors are using both names interchangeably throughout the text.

² In the wider Mediterranean region, there are only a few states that have not adopted a 1325 NAP yet - for example, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Israel, Algeria and Turkey.

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posture is tarnished by the rise of radicalization, authoritarianism and populism as well as the foreign fighters' flow on its soil (International Crisis Group 2020). Moreover, maritime and energy security issues by certain actors compound an already tenaciously competitive regional context (Bellou 2018).

The Eastern Mediterranean region is not just home to a number of security challenges with wider regional implications, but it is also the southernmost front for many regional intergovernmental organizations. States in the region are members of various international organizations; this means that their national policies can be influenced by the policies of these international organizations, including their postures regarding the implementation of the WPS agenda. In particular, Cyprus and Greece are members of the EU; Greece and Turkey are members of NATO, and all three countries are members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [hereinafter "OSCE"]. All three inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), have embraced the WPS Agenda having developed their own commitments as regards its implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 [hereinafter "Res.1325"] and its supporting documents. In light of the above, one would have expected that the three countries would have capitalized on the UNSCR 1325 as to adopt their NAPs on WPS and thus facilitate policies on conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Lyytikäinen & Yadav 2022).

Moreover, the attention that has been paid to the WPS Agenda by other intergovernmental organizations, especially the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, including *inter alia* the Universal Periodic Review process³ (hereinafter "UN UPR"), serves as evidence that the WPS agenda is not only a peace and security issue, but also a critical part of the human rights agenda (Bulduk 2019; Chainoglou 2021). The synergies between the UN and regional human rights mechanisms and the WPS agenda, offer ample room for states to improve their modest human rights' records. Human rights violations, especially women and girls' rights, must be understood as a peace and security issue under the WPS Agenda (CEDAW 2013). Whenever such violations occur, they should ideally be understood as a root cause of conflict and early warning signs of risks for the deterioration of women and girls' rights. For this reason, the implementation of the WPS agenda through the adoption of NAPs should rather require moving beyond 'instrumentalised and securitized approaches' (O'Rourke & Swaine 2018) and 'towards furthering women's rights and gender equality' (Peroni 2020).

This article is aimed at examining how the WPS Agenda fits in the national policies of three states in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey. These three countries have been selected not only because of their geographic location, but also, and more importantly, due to the ongoing tensions between Greece and Turkey, and, Cyprus and Turkey. The island of Cyprus remains *de facto* divided since the 1974 Turkish aggression, with the Northern part being illegally occupied by Turkey and the Southern part of the island being the RoC. To this day, Turkey does not officially recognize the RoC as a state and it disputes RoC's sovereign rights over the exclusive economic zone. Greece and Turkey have been at loggerheads over Greece's right to extent of territorial waters, ownership of islands and islets by Greece, maritime delimitation boundaries and energy drilling activities in the Aegean Sea, the violation of Greece's airspace by Turkey as well as the massive influxes of illegal immigrants and refugees reaching the Greek borders (Tol 2020). Given the fact that the relations amongst these three states could have been a parameter for stability and development in the Eastern Mediterranean, the question as to how and whether the WPS can contribute to conflict resolution in the region is more important than ever.

³ The UPR process is a peer-review process conducted by the UN Human Rights Council to assess how states put human rights into practice. The UPR cycle is a four-and-a-half year period within which all states' human rights records are assessed. Greece, Cyprus and Turkey have undergone their third UPR cycle (2017-2022).

This article examines the three states' efforts to implement the WPS agenda by taking into consideration the legislative, administrative and institutional measures that have been adopted towards this end. The article reviews the women's rights records of these three countries and sheds light on the way WPS is understood in their national settings. In the cases of Greece and Cyprus, the analysis is based on examining the content of the Greek and Cypriot NAPs and the measures adopted advancing women's rights and gender equality (Fritz et al. 2011). In the case of Turkey, the authors take into consideration the reports by international organisations and civil society actors concerning women's rights and point out the factors that have hindered Turkey from finalizing a NAP. The article argues that the developments in both Greece and Cyprus are positive steps for the normative traction of the WPS Agenda in this geographical area. This progress, however, has not been integrated into the good regional stability posture that both Greece and Cyprus could cultivate in the region. In the same vein, Turkey's lack of political will to advance women's rights, let alone a NAP on WPS, appears to have contributed to a missed opportunity for the three countries to capitalize on the WPS agenda and thus generate amongst them initiatives supporting conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

We begin with an examination of the conflict prevention narrative developed through the WPS policy agenda by looking at the respective literature, including a subsequent discussion about the way in which regional IGOs fashion conflict prevention through the promotion of the WPS agenda. The article continues with an evaluation of the Greek forthcoming NAP on WPS as well as the NAP that RoC had adopted to be followed by a brief comparative analysis between the two. It will be shown that despite their European credentials, both Greece and Cyprus have not included the WPS agenda on their regional co-operational policy schemes. The article concludes with a review of Turkey's policies and stances towards gender equality in recent years reflecting its reluctance to adopt a NAP on WPS. The article shows that despite the institutional regional setting in the Eastern Mediterranean that promotes the WPS agenda, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey have missed the opportunity to cultivate low profile conflict prevention postures as promoted by the WPS agenda, especially on issues that unite women's organizations from the three countries such as protection against gender-based violence and the promotion of participatory governance, including human rights protection.

Looking at WPS's agenda on conflict prevention and the role of regional organizations

The WPS agenda commits one of its four pillars on conflict prevention. According to Res.1325, the Security Council "reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding [...] as well as the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution." (Res 1325 (2000), preamble). Supporting Resolutions, such as Res.1820 (2008) and Res. 2122 (2013) are more explicit in their call for expecting regular updates on the progress made in the area of women's participation in conflict prevention. In the view of Res. 2122, conflict prevention can be performed by women also "through consultations with civil society, including women's organizations.... (Res. 2122 (2013), para. 2 (c)). Also Res. 2242 reiterates the importance of involving women at all levels of decision making in national and international structures as well as in conflict prevention (Res. 2242 (2015), para.1). Yet, despite these calls from respective Resolutions, "the Security Council has maintained a largely ambivalent approach toward getting behind women and promoting their role in preventing conflict" (Kapur & Rees 2019, p.136). In any case, conflict prevention although rather underestimated by governments, it sustains a normative dynamic on which a number of actors still optimize (Ackermann 2003).

In recent years, a new approach is developing favouring the structural version of conflict prevention that fashions long-term practices aimed at dealing with the origins of tensions

and conflict. They focus on developmental, democratization or judicial support programmes.⁴ These policies point to the grass-roots, and “often involve national and international development agencies, non-governmental organizations and local civil society actors” (Drumond et al. 2021, p. 3). In other words, it is not rare that civil society actors, such as women groups, to participate in conflict prevention initiatives which have either been supported by international agencies or have been generated from local civil society organizations (CSOs). Despite occasional difficulties in the implementation such initiatives in patriarchic or conservative societies, the WPS agenda does promote such initiatives while the role of international organizations can prove of instrumental importance (Sengul et al. 2022).

As regional IGOs, the EU, NATO and the OSCE, have all adopted respective action plans on implementing the WPS agenda. In recent years, they have also united forces in order to accelerate their efforts (OSCE 2011). In 2018, the EU and NATO even advanced their respective cooperation by including the WPS agenda into their Joint Declaration of 2018 and thus increased the agreed areas of operational cooperation between the two organizations (Wright 2019). The EU has set out a number of initiatives to promote the implementation of Res. 1325 and is committed to mainstreaming a gender perspective in all its internal and external actions.⁵ In 2008, it adopted a Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on WPS while in 2018 it adopted the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security to be followed a year later by the EU Action Plan on WPS in 2019 (Desmidt 2021). Despite its efforts and good-willing strategies, the EU has neither achieved a perfect score for gender equality in peace and security nor has it managed to have the intended impact on the advancement of the WPS Agenda (Martinez 2015; Almqvist 2021). However, in recent years the EU ‘is building momentum to rekindle the WPS agenda not only by meeting the WPS demands in its own actions but also globally by showing others what to do. (Almqvist 2021, p. 3) Yet, this objective remains to be fully materialized.

NATO has also been attracted to the normative traction of the WPS Agenda. In 2010, NATO adopted its first regional action plan and it committed to bringing women’s perspectives to the forefront of peace and security across the alliance’s three core tasks: collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. In 2018, NATO released a revised version of its regional action plan identifying integration, inclusiveness and inclusivity as the three fundamental principles according to which NATO, the allies and the partners should implement the WPS Agenda. This effectively translates into gender-mainstreaming in all NATO’s policies and projects; promoting the inclusion of women into NATO’s and national forces; advancing women in leadership roles; protecting women’s rights in NATO’s missions and operations; creating an environment of deterrence for crimes against women in conflict zones; and engaging with the civil society to improve women’s outreach, especially from countries in conflict. NATO’s engagement with the WPS Agenda has helped NATO improve its image and has changed the way NATO projects itself as a responsible international actor (Wählen 2020). NATO’s revamped profile during the past two decades is boasting values

⁴ Conflict Prevention is mostly viewed through its operational and structural perspectives. The former perspective involves a top-down engagement of states and international institutions in formal preventive diplomacy while the latter is related to the adoption of a long-term perspective targeting more generic elements that civil society can promote aiming at building inclusive policies of common interest. (Johnstone & Walton 2021)

⁵ One could see in combination EU’s documents on gender equality with those promoting the WPS Agenda. See for example, the 2008 EU regional Action Plan, the EU Action Plan on WPS 2019-2024, the Gender Action Plan 2021-2025, the EU’s new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III).

concerning *inter alia* the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, human rights protection, elimination of gender-based violence, compliance with humanitarian law which coincidentally tick all the boxes of the WPS Agenda too (Wright & Bergman 2021). In October 2021, NATO adopted its most recent Action Plan on WPS giving emphasis on the promotion of the WPS Agenda to NATO's partnerships with third countries, international organizations and civil society. Important issues such as innovation, climate change, resilience and new technology are regarded the filters through which the WPS Agenda will be further promoted. (NATO 2021b). Despite NATO's intentions concerning the implementation of the WPS Agenda, the organization has been criticized for the lack of funding to support substantive action in order to bridge the chasm between the rhetoric and the reality of implementation of the WPS Agenda. Furthermore, there are still NATO allies (for example, Turkey) and partners who have not yet adopted a 1325 NAP. One would have expected, NATO to have projected its WPS priorities in the Eastern Mediterranean which is an area in which gender equality and participatory governance is missing.

Since 2004, the OSCE promotes gender equality policies including the WPS agenda in accordance to the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (OSCE 2004). The OSCE is committed to provide government and civil society actors with reports, analyses, practical tools, training material and expert knowledge in order to facilitate states to develop their NAPs on WPS. Moreover, its Programme for Gender Issues in collaboration with the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre develops measures as to help interested stakeholders to launch programs for the inclusion of women in "conflict prevention by fostering dialogue, negotiation and peace processes in the OSCE region" (OSCE 2022). It monitors annually and on voluntary basis, its participating states regarding the measures their security services have taken as regards the commitments on WPS agenda which are viewed as part of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (OSCE 2022). Most importantly, OSCE offers its expertise on conflict prevention and its policy tools in order to be used by its member states (OSCE 2020). In such a context, it is rather unfortunate that neither governments nor civil society groups have not optimized initiatives that could contribute to conflict prevention in the region. Greece, Cyprus and Turkey seem to retain their hesitancy in promoting these low-politics conflict prevention perspectives while civil society groups remain weak and underfunded to promote such initiatives. Furthermore, while Greece has already drafted its first NAP on WPS and Cyprus adopted one in 2021, both NAPs indicate a hesitancy to demonstrate a dynamic profile in projecting the WPS outside their borders.

Implementing the WPS Agenda in Greece: A Top-Down Approach

Greece has started to promote gender equality policies at the national level since the mid-1980s, when the Hellenic legal framework on family rights was substantially amended (Karamanou 2003; Stratigaki 2003). Despite the formation of a strong legal framework concerning the advancement of gender equality based on the ratification of many relevant international legal instruments on gender equality, including *inter alia* the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Law 1342/1983) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention), (Law 4531/2018), substantive implementation of gender equality policies lags behind (Johnson-Freese 2021). Whilst gender equality is embedded in the Hellenic Constitution including the notion of positive actions against women's discrimination, in practice, implementation efforts are impeded by a patriarchal mentality across the society and the institutional infrastructure while power structures appear to abhor transformation. The slow alignment between law and practice has made Greece to appear as underperforming in indexes related to gender equality (EIGE

2021a). At the WPS Index 2019-2020 prepared by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Greece ranked 51st on a total of 167 countries, while its performance in the grouping of the developed countries was found to be the weakest (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and PRIO 2019, p. 35).

An acceleration of efforts has only recently been observed with regard to the promotion of gender mainstreaming. This is evident, for example, in the adoption of the “Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality” (Law 4604/2019) and national strategies on gender equality and non-discrimination, such as the NAP on Gender Equality (Hellenic General Secretariat for Gender Equality 2018). In December 2020, Greece adopted a NAP against Racism and Intolerance (Hellenic Ministry of Justice 2020). In 2021, Greece opened the process of public debate for the adoption of its second NAP on Gender Equality (Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021a); Greece also authorized the drafting of a National Strategy for the Equality of LGBT People (Hellenic Committee in Charge of Drafting a National Strategy on Equality of LGBT Persons in Greece 2021) and completed the public consultation process leading to the adoption of the NAP on WPS. These efforts have been commended by many states in Greece’s third cycle UN UPR in 2022. At the same time, many states noted the need for Greece to accelerate the adoption of more measures on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment (UN Human Rights Council 2022).

The formation of a NAP was not among the strategic priorities of previous governments until 2015 when the migration crisis unveiled a grim picture concerning women’s rights, especially migrant and refugee women’s rights. Until then, an expression of interest in issues related to promoting the WPS policy agenda, let alone the formation of a prospective NAP, remained only at the level of academic interest. Even though Greece was not negatively predisposed towards the implementation of the WPS Agenda, it nonetheless seemed to perceive the existing legal framework on gender equality as broad enough to also cover the security sector (Bellou 2016). One could argue that the belated governmental interest in accelerating its efforts to promote gender equality policies and prepare a WPS NAP was the culmination of a number of factors such as the migration crisis of 2015, the presence of thousands of vulnerable female refugees and migrants to Greece, the need to improve its image in international organizations including the EU. In addition, the financial crisis of the last decade has contributed in multiple ways to the deterioration of women’s quality of life. It has only been during the last three years that Greece has been preparing the administrative process, including the mobilization of the civil society, in order to produce the Greek NAP on WPS. Even though the public consultation on the final draft of the first Greek NAP on WPS was completed in 2021, as of May 2022 the government has not officially launched the Greek NAP. In any case, the overall Greek effort on the preparation of the Greek NAP indicates Greece’s intention to adjust primarily to its international obligations concerning gender equality as they are highlighted in the context of the respective Action Plans and related Strategies of the UN and the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Although such a belated effort by the Greek government should be welcomed, one can hardly escape the assumption that the absence of a first NAP up until now on WPS has deprived Athens so far from playing an important role in promoting the Agenda at the regional level. In the future, this development could augment Greece’s diplomatic posture in contributing to regional conflict prevention by supporting initiatives that promote participatory governance.

Greece's NAP on Women, Peace and Security

As of May 2022, Greece remains only a final step away from adopting its NAP on WPS. This step regards the official announcement from the State Authorities. The NAP has been the result of a consultation process amongst a great number of ministries and governmental stakeholders as well as academia and civil society. The NAP was formulated by the respective Inter-ministerial Commission under the aegis of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NAP sets out its priorities according to the four-pillar scheme of the WPS Agenda (prevention and protection, rehabilitation and empowerment, representation/participation, and the WPS mainstreaming process). The NAP reaffirms Greece's readiness to contribute to international peace and security on the basis of gender equality. The NAP moves towards two directions. One direction concerns the commitment to endorse the entire WPS background that has already been established at the international and regional level, while the second direction moves towards mainstreaming this logic to public administration in line with *Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality* and seeking to encourage a mainstreaming approach to internal and external governmental policies. Throughout the text, there are references to the international and regional legal framework on gender equality, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian law. The NAP also mentions Greece's commitment to adjust to the external and internal practices that have been codified in the documents promoting the WPS policy agenda by the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO, at both the strategic and operational level. It is curious though that the OSCE is not mentioned in the draft NAP.

The final draft of the Greek NAP sets particular objectives consistent to the four pillars of the WPS agenda. As regards the prevention and protection objective, the NAP commits to policies that provide protection to women and girls that are victims of all forms of violence, including conflict-related violence. It also highlights the importance of addressing violence within family structures, including migrant and refugee families. It should be stressed out that the increase in gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, has been associated with the austerity measures as much as with the restrictive measures introduced to reduce the spread of COVID 19 (Council of Europe 2018; Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality 2021b). Indeed, this has been a period of time during which the phenomenon of femicide has substantially increased (Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality 2021b). As of October 2021, 13 women were reportedly killed by their partner or husband within a period of one year (Grus 2021; News247 2021). With regard to empowerment and rehabilitation of the victims of violence from conflicts or gender-based violence, the NAP stresses the immediacy of launching supportive measures optimizing the existing shelters and other support structures that have already established by the local authorities (municipalities and regions). Moreover, it urges to guarantee the balanced representation and participation of men and women in decision-making roles, especially those related to foreign policy, security and defence. Finally, gender mainstreaming in public administration especially in the social services sector is considered an additional objective. This can be achieved by empowering the public administration to be responsive to contemporary issues related to the WPS agenda, such as COVID 19 and climate change, at both national and international level.

The NAP lays out five pillars under which the WPS agenda will be implemented. The first pillar focuses on conflict prevention, as well as preventing gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Civil Protection, the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSDFGE) as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence are mandated to implement the aforementioned objectives. Training and awareness initiatives are expected to be facilitated by both the academia and the Ministry of Education.

The second pillar is related to the promotion of gender balance in decision-making, especially on policies related to foreign policy, defence and public life in general. At this point, the objective is to form policies empowering women as to become emancipated agents of democratic and peaceful change. The NAP calls the respective Ministries to empower women's participation in power structures related to politics, business, developmental fora, including mediation processes. Given the very weak position of Greece on women's participation in power structures, one could have expected a more elaborate framework of policy directions to be advanced in order to meet the goals of Res. 1325. This applies also to the entire security sector that remains at the level of policy recommendations.

The third pillar refers to policies that aim at protecting women from all forms of violence, including violence related to conflict situations or related to domestic violence. This pillar of protection from violence has attracted much attention recently as the COVID-19 led to an increase in the number of domestic violence and gender-based violence cases between 2020-2022 (Eurobarometer 2022b; Kitsantonis 2022). Policy responses are called for against abuses of humanitarian law as well as human rights law. The Greek NAP affirms Greece's obligations arising under international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international refugee law, international criminal law, the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocols thereto, as well as the relevant EU gender equality policies and Council of Europe human rights legal instruments. Under this pillar, Greece purports to fully cooperate with international judicial mechanisms and in particular the International Criminal Court. As regards national policies, the Ministry of Justice as well as the GSDFGE are considered leading actors in evaluating the formulation of policies and their impact on the ground.

Pillar four has become particularly important in recent years. It regards the policy responses to provide relief and rehabilitation of women that have been victims of domestic violence, as well have experienced sexual abuse. The increasing number of incidents concerning gender-based violence affecting not only migrant and refugee women but also Greek women has rather urged the government for the strengthening of the national efforts to provide shelter, advice and psychological support to the victims⁶. For this reason, the number of support structures financed by local authorities is due to steadily increase. Finally, pillar five stresses the importance of promoting the WPS Agenda within bilateral, regional and international settings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is considered the key national agent in forming international and regional initiatives and seeking exchange of good practices in order to further enhance substantive gender equality in all the phases of conflict resolution. An interesting closing session of the NAP focuses on monitoring the implementation of the NAP to which the Inter-ministerial Committee has the primary responsibility. This Committee is composed of gender experts, including members of the academia. One could argue that as a first NAP, the current document is balanced, legalistic and moderate. At times it looks more prescriptive rather than providing clear policy directions. In this line, one could argue that the quest for a strong public awareness campaign making the WPS policy agenda visible both at the national and regional level, especially in the Mediterranean area, could have been more visible in the document.

⁶ A Eurobarometer report reveals that nine in ten women in Greece (93%) believe that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in physical and emotional violence against women in their country. A quarter of the participating respondents in this survey say that they know of women in their circle of friends and family who have experienced domestic violence or abuse since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurobarometer 2022b).

Launching a National Action Plan on WPS in Cyprus: One step at a time

Cyprus's foreign policy is largely structured upon dealing with the consequences of the Turkish illegal invasion (the so-called "Cyprus question" in terms of the UN language) (Kouskouvelis & Chainoglou 2016). Overall, Cyprus's contemporary actorness has been defined by seeking to raise its status across the international community by employing diplomacy and using international organisations to advance its foreign policy agenda (Pedi & Chainoglou 2022). Accordingly, Cyprus has signed a great number of UN and regional human rights conventions and is cooperating with UN and regional human rights mechanisms. For example, Cyprus has been one of the handful of states across the UN system to undergo a voluntary national review on its implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development 2021). Cyprus has also accelerated the implementation of human rights obligations due to the positive impact of the EU integration process (EIGE 2021c). Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 as a de facto divided island state; this means that the whole of the territory of the island is EU territory. However, as Cyprus does not have effective control of the occupied territory, EU legislation is suspended in the occupied territory and Cyprus cannot enforce its national legislation and human rights-related policies therein. This means that Cyprus cannot guarantee the protection of the human rights of the Turkish-Cypriots who live in the occupied territory; on the contrary, Turkey bears sole responsibility for any human rights abuses occurring in the northern territory that is under its control (European Court of Human Rights, *Loizidou v. Turkey*, 1995; European Court of Human Rights, *Cyprus v. Turkey*, 2001).⁷ As a consequence, the legal obligation to implement the WPS Agenda in the occupied territory lies primarily with Turkey rather than with Cyprus.

In 2019, the national report of Cyprus was reviewed by the UN Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (third cycle) in a very positive, if not elated, tone (UN Human Rights Council 2018). During the UPR process, 82 delegations made statements and a significant number of states (about 31 UN member states representing all geographic regions) commended or congratulated Cyprus on its efforts in advancing human rights, and especially women's rights, and praised the adoption of national action plans on gender equality and on the fight against domestic violence and gender discrimination in employment. Cyprus also received 35 recommendations by UN member states to continue advancing the active participation of women in the peace process and to incorporate women in senior negotiating positions in future reunification talks (UN Human Rights Council 2019a). It should be noted that one of the interesting twists in this UPR was that the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution was understood not only as falling under the umbrella of the settlement efforts on the "Cyprus question", but also as a human rights issue. This is one of the few cases where the UPR process has openly treated the implementation of Res.1325 as a human rights law obligation (Chainoglou 2021). It is interesting to note that in the UPR review of Cyprus there are explicit references to the "WPS Agenda" and "Resolution 1325" throughout the text, something that is amiss in the UPR review of Turkey where there is not an explicit reference to "Resolution 1325". This is a point of deviation that suggests the UN member states are rather treating Cyprus as a mature human rights-law abiding state as opposed to Turkey.

Despite the improving human rights record of Cyprus, there are still women's rights issues that call for more action. For example, the participation of women in the political life is still relatively small. As of January 2021, the percentage of women in parliament was down to

⁷ Based on this caselaw, one may assume that Turkey's extraterritorial human rights obligations, including any WPS-related human rights obligations, exist in any areas that are under the effective military control of Turkey, for example areas in Syria that are under Turkey's military control at the time of the writing of this article.

21,4%, with only 12 women members of parliament and only 3 women holding ministerial positions (UN Women 2021). Within this context, the lack of participation of women in the peace process has been a thorny issue in the Cypriot society (CEDAW 2018). The political landscape within this country has been devoid of considerations such as the absence of women from the peace process, the persistent exclusion of women in high-rank peace negotiating tables or the lack of recognition of how gender-related issues could have an impact on a sustainable solution to the “Cyprus question” (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021).

For many decades, Cyprus had been seeking to resolve the “Cyprus question” through international organizations (UN, Council of Europe), but it did not embrace the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace negotiations (United Nations Security Council 2010; UN Security Council Resolution 2135 2014; UN Security Council Resolution 2168 2014; UN Human Rights Council 2015). The setting-up of the bicomunal Technical Committee on Gender Equality in 2015 signaled an official recognition on the part of both Greek and Turkish Cypriot that women must be part of the peace process. Women’s grassroots organizations and other civil society actors have been advocating for a change in the status quo- that is a change to the male dominated Cypriot political space that falls short of presenting women’s voices and perspectives on gender equality and peace (Demetriou 2019; Papastavrou & Zenon 2016). Two of the first groups that brought attention to the importance of including women in peace negotiations were the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) and the Hands across the Divide (HAD), a bi-communal women’s group (Papastavrou 2021; Hadjipavlou & Mertan 2019). The efforts of such CSOs as well as women activists in claiming their operational space within the Cypriot society has contributed to putting women, peace and security on the agenda in Cyprus (Papastavrou 2021), without necessarily aiming at a particular solution to the “Cyprus question” but rather aiming at cementing gender equality within any political and peace process.

The focus on the gender elements of the peace process has been boosted by the contribution of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNIFICYP).⁸ Since 2018, there is a steady pace at organizing intercommunal events with the purpose of empowering different elements of the civil society and creating space for women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the peace process (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021; UNIFICYP 2020; UNIFICYP 2022). As laudable the support to these CSOs can be, one needs to bear in mind that the UNIFICYP’s engagement with the WPS Agenda in the context of the peace process in Cyprus has been relatively recent, both across the mission and with external actors (UN Secretary General 2019, p.10). UNIFICYP’s mandate has been recently reinforced with Res. 2618 which calls *inter alia* for gender considerations to be taken into account as a crosscutting issue throughout its mandate, and underlines “the importance of sufficient gender expertise in all mission components and capacity strengthening in executing the mission mandate in a gender-responsive manner” (Res. 2618 (2022), para. 16(a)).

The need for the equal and meaningful participation of women’s participation in building peace in Cyprus as well as the inclusion of youth in the peace process has been repeatedly noted by the Security Council (see Res. 2561 (2021); Res. 2587 (2021); Res. 2618 (2022)). At the same time, ongoing tensions on the ground, such as the reopening of a part of the fenced-off area of Varosha that was announced by Turkey in 2021, and tensions within and outside

⁸ UNIFICYP’s mission is to prevent the recurrence of fighting and a breakdown of the 1974 Ceasefire Arrangement. The mandate of the mission is to maintain a peaceful environment between the two communities within which a just and long-lasting solution can be found. The mandate of UNIFICYP included an explicit reference to the WPS Agenda for the first time in 2018.

the buffer zone, where for example Turkish Cypriot forces challenged the presence of UNIFICYP, appear linked to a broader divisive political context (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 5). These tensions alarmed the UN Security Council which called all parties “to avoid any unilateral actions that could raise tensions on the island and undermine the prospects for a peaceful settlement” (Res. 2587 (2021), paras. 4 and 5; Res. 2618 (2022), paras. 3-4). Furthermore, following the elections in the occupied territory, Turkish Cypriot members of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality resigned (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 24).

With Resolution 2587 (2021), the Security Council called for the inclusion of at least 30 per cent women in future delegations and requested from the leaders of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, in coordination with the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, to submit an action plan by 15 December 2021 on increasing women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in peace talks. Despite both sides agreeing on a set of recommendations by the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, the UN Secretary General announced that agreement on a joint action plan was not reached with both sides submitting their own versions of the plan instead (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 44). An action plan was eventually approved by the Security Council in 2022 (Resolution 2618 (2022)). The action plan provides for the inclusion of no more than two thirds of any gender in the delegations participating in settlement processes, the soliciting of the views of CSOs with the leaders of the two communities in order to prepare for the settlement process, for example through workshops, and the allocation of adequate human and financial resources to support the activities required for the successful implementation of the action plan (Technical Committee on Gender Equality 2022). As the plan was officially launched only in April 2022, it remains to be seen how its implementation will pan out.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID 19 pandemic exacerbated power imbalances that were already experienced by women while it negatively impacted upon the confidence-building measures. For example, it slowed the pace of the implementation of the WPS Agenda as the restriction of movement hindered the physical communication and engagement of actors from all over Cyprus (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021; Eurobarometer 2022a).

RoC’s NAP on Women, Peace and Security

The first Cypriot NAP (2021-2025) was prepared by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon the participation and contribution of all relevant Ministries/Departments, political/trade unions and civil society actors. It should be mentioned that well before the adoption of its first NAP, RoC had already established the bi-communal Technical Committee on Gender Equality to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and advise the formal peace process. The official version of the first NAP was adopted by the Cypriot Ministerial Cabinet on 22 December 2020 and it coincided with the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality 2020). Following the structure of Res. 1325, the NAP is structured upon four pillars, entitled: 1) Participation and Empowerment, 2) Protection, 3) Prevention, 4) Promoting and Informing the Civil Society about Res.1325.

The first pillar aims at 1) promoting the full participation of women in all decision-making concerning conflict, peace-building, and peace negotiations, 2) supporting women in political life, and 3) empowering and granting full participation to women in all decision-making roles in the country and abroad.

The second pillar aims at the protection of women and girls in conflict from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation by 1) harmonizing the national legislation according to international human rights standards and mechanisms, including the provisions of Res. 1325, 2) offering psychological support services to women that are victims of violence due to “a constant and wrongly-induced” crisis, as in the case of RoC, 3) contributing to raising

awareness between men concerning the elimination of violence against women, human trafficking and gender-based violence.

The third pillar aims at conflict prevention, including gendered based violence and the sexual exploitation of women and girls and during armed conflicts by 1) implementing policies and legally binding regulations concerning the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the promotion of human rights law, gender equality and international humanitarian law, 2) contributing to the peace, stability and security of RoC, 3) implementing relevant provisions on the prevention and elimination of sexual violence and gender-based violence in RoC.

The fourth pillar is aimed at raising awareness on Res. 1325 across Cyprus by 1) promoting the inclusion of women in all positions of the political, social and economic life, 2) encouraging the participation of women civil society organizations in raising awareness on Res. 1325, 3) supporting skill-setting projects for the effective implementation of the NAP, and 4) carrying out education campaigns, seminars, and workshops across Cyprus, and in particular in the urban areas.

The NAP provides for the setting up of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (appointed by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) which will have an advisory role in over-viewing the implementation of the NAP. Furthermore, the NAP creates the Permanent Consultation Mechanism (appointed by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) with the participation of gender and peace-building women experts, women academics and representatives of women's civil society organisations. The mandate of this body is to make recommendations on the WPS Agenda related issues with the purpose of impacting on the foreign policy agenda of Cyprus (i.e. when drafting or sponsoring UN resolutions, organizing intergovernmental diplomatic conferences, etc). This body will be convening every four months.

The Cypriot NAP takes a conscious leap of faith to transcend the mentality of implementing a policy that has been produced by an international organization (UN), and to operationalise it by relying on the civil society actors. Apart from utilizing the existing institutional infrastructure to bring forward the goals of this NAP (i.e. ministries, law enforcement bodies), many of the funded activities, which are listed in the Cypriot NAP, concern the inclusion, education and gender-equality training of women's organizations and women's minority organizations. Also, the capacity-building potential of the NAP's list of activities offers some guarantee for sustainability and continuity, yet there is no reference to other measures usually encountered in NAPS, such as the creation of a network of gender focal points within public institutional infrastructures. In this NAP, Cyprus acknowledges that due to the ongoing occupation of its Northern territory by Turkey, it is difficult to guarantee that the Turkish-Cypriot women will be able to enjoy their rights on the territory that Cyprus does not have any effective control on. This NAP is nonetheless targeting their inclusion as much as possible. However, these are early days, and it remains to be seen whether the Cypriot NAP can set norms that will change relations on an inter-communal level and allow for more participatory processes, eventually leading Cyprus to a more sustainable peace (Dimitriou & Hadjipavlou 2018). Perhaps future plans for the development of local action plans in villages and cities would be conducive to the conditions of sustainable peace.

Comparative overview of the Greek and Cypriot NAPs

As opposed to other countries that are already in their second or their third cycle of NAPs, that the Greek and Cypriot NAPs are the first NAPs adopted in both countries. This means that their WPS implementation efforts are at best in a gestational period. The implementation efforts have also been affected by the COVID 19 pandemic emergency

measures. The two NAPs display some common features as they both: 1) set clear priorities and rely on the progress they have made concerning human rights and the advancement of the gender equality, 2) have clear timeline for actions and present the tools to effectively implement the actions, 3) utilize to the maximum the existing institutional infrastructure within the national ministries to implement the WPS Agenda, 4) incorporate the pillars of Res. 1325, for example, they address domestic and sexual gender-based violence and advance women's participation in decision-making, 5) make the effort to integrate women's experiences across their societies, for example there are references to women refugees, women who have been impacted by conflicts and gender-based violence or women's different socio-economic status, 6) include girls and youth (for example, the Cypriot NAP also refers to unaccompanied minors in its listed projects) 7) identify reporting and feedback processes and relevant overseeing institutions, 8) explain their methodology and the proposed indicators upon which their performance will be measured, 9) clearly intend on involving the civil society and have listed projects attached to the NAPs (at national and international level). Furthermore, both NAPs identify to a certain extent the actors that led to the process of the preparation of the NAPs, without though specifying the identity or the profile of the civil society organizations involved. Neither the Greek NAP nor the Cypriot NAP contains a list with the participating women (i.e. activists, academics, gender experts, etc) and women's organizations in the preparation of the action plans. This is a particular soft spot for the image of RoC as the country had repeatedly been criticized for women's underrepresentation and their non-meaningful participation in the peace efforts.

Having said that, the two NAPs also display points of deviation. Unlike the Cypriot NAP, the Greek NAP is a particularly long text, heavily referencing relevant Greek laws that can support the implementation of the plan. At a first glance, the strong connection of the Greek NAP to the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" might be considered as a disadvantage since it appears to restrict the implementation of the Res. 1325 pillars to policies targeting the national milieu. However, due to the administrative mentality within the organizational structure of the Greek state and the Greek society in general, this connection will certainly encourage the diffusion of the five pillars perspectives across the administrative, regional and municipal units of the Greek state. This is because both the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" as well as the Greek NAP are calling for specific implementation action plans at the level of local authorities, municipalities and regions. This "bottom-up meets top-down" approach is particularly important for the implementation of the WPS Agenda as it will engage the local authorities and civil society organizations in initiatives that directly affect women's everyday life. This also applies to protective measures for female refugees and migrants living in camps or other hosting structures that are the responsibility of certain municipalities and regions. On the other hand, the Cypriot NAP refrains from endorsing a "bottom-up" approach; hence it does not make any reference to implementing the plan at local or sub-local level. What the Cypriot NAP does though is that it has listed projects with the participation of particular minorities and communities, such as the Turkish-Cypriot, the Armenians, the Latins, and the Maronites.

What the Greek NAP falls short of achieving (as opposed to the Cypriot NAP) is to clearly specify the roles and the mandates of the different agents involved in the implementation process; this in practice, can negatively impact upon the communication and coordination between the various agents, especially within the many Greek ministries that are being included in the Greek NAP. On the other hand, the Cypriot NAP seems to have a much clearer lay-out of the implementation state agents, for example, ministries, law enforcement, social services, etc, and their role in the implementation process as it is explained therein how their mandate and working experience is related to the WPS Agenda.

Moreover, the Cypriot NAP clearly defines the role of civil society, including women's groups, in its implementation and monitoring: by creating the Permanent Consultation Mechanism, the Cypriot NAP effectively introduces an institutionalized process that guarantees the meaningful participation of the civil society and especially of women. This is an excellent approach to also create effective channels of communication and planning of joint initiatives for the inclusion of women's priorities. While the Greek NAP acknowledges the advisory role of the civil society in general, it falls short of setting up an informal or formal process within which the civil society actors can voice their concerns, express their opinions or effectively participate in the implementation of the WPS Agenda. Moreover, the Cypriot NAP has earmarked financial resources for the implementation of the listed targeted actions while the Greek NAP has neither clarified nor ensured that sufficient financial resources are allocated to the implementation of the WPS Agenda. This can eventually prove detrimental to the dissemination of the plan, the engagement of various actors intended to be involved because of their lack of knowledge with regard to its content, and the evaluation process of the plan.

The women's human rights situation in Turkey and the promotion of the WPS Agenda

The period from 2002 to 2011 is characterized for the political and legal progress on the advancement of gender equality and women's rights in Turkey; this is a period which is significantly influenced by the EU accession process (Güneş & Ezikoğlu 2022). However, after the 2011 elections there is a shift towards conservatism concerning women's policies (Yılmaz 2015). This shift is structured upon the advancement of women's traditional gender roles in the Turkish society and the focus on the role of women in the family (Yılmaz 2015; Güneş & Ezikoğlu 2022). Following the 2016 failed *coup d'état*, it is also observed that Turkey becomes the recipient of criticisms by civil society actors as well as international human rights mechanisms (i.e. UN human rights bodies) for either adopting policies and measures that jeopardize the protection of human rights or for not taking positive action in order to prevent the violation of human rights (Baser et al. 2017; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün 2017; UN Human Rights Council (b) 2019).

In 2020, the national report of Turkey was reviewed by the UN UPR (third cycle) (UN Human Rights Council (b), 2019; UN Human Rights Council 2020). Turkey received more than 100 recommendations by other UN member states whereby Turkey is requested to take measures that essentially fit under the four pillars of Res. 1325. For example, Turkey is called to take measures to eradicate gender inequality; to encourage women, including women from minority groups and the LGBT community, to participate in decision-making; to limit restrictions on freedom of assembly of the LGBT community; to prevent and eradicate harmful traditional practices which discriminate against women and girls and to abolish early marriages; to provide women and girls with access to public services, primarily education and healthcare; to combat human trafficking; to protect women and girl refugees; to protect women and girls from domestic violence by enabling the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators and by supporting institutions offering shelter to victims of domestic violence (UN Human Rights Council 2020). Along these lines, the slow pace of advancing the socio-political status of women (i.e. access to healthcare or education) and the limited political representation of women in Turkey is also noted (Cinar & Kose 2018; Sumbas & Koyuncu 2019; UN Women & Women Count 2021). As of January 2020, the percentage of women in of parliament was down to 17.3% with only two women holding ministerial positions and with only 102 women parliamentarians out of 589 parliamentary seats. As of 2021, there were only 104 women out of 600 parliamentarians (UN Women 2021). Women's political underrepresentation is also evident in regional and local assemblies where women hold less than 10% of seats (EIGE 2021b). The scarcity of national and

international statistical data on Turkey does not provide us with a clear picture as to whether the national measures are sufficient in guaranteeing that there is substantive equality between men and women in other sectors too, for example the military and security sector. With the most recent data coming from a 2017 NATO report, Turkey had the lowest rank between the NATO allies (1.3%) with regard to the inclusion of women into the armed forces (NATO 2021). However, as of 2021 it is not clear whether and how many women are allowed to take combat roles in Turkey.

The concern about women's rights in Turkey has also been shared by the EU and the Council of Europe. The advancement of women's rights is an issue that falls under the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession and is an integral part of the EU-Turkey relationship (EU 2021). Furthermore, in 2021 the announcement of the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention has been a severe blow on women's rights. The withdrawal became effective on 1 July 2021 and it coincided with the release of Turkey's 4th National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women which "does not at all refer to the concept of gender equality" (Kadinin Insan Haklari Yeni Cozumler 2021). Never before had a Council of Europe member state pulled out from one of the human rights conventions of this regional organization (Çali 2021). Such a posture unfortunately has not been reversed by Ankara despite the interventions and the recommendations made by the international community (EEAS 2021; White House Statement 2021) or the civil society actors across Turkey (ESIK Women's Platform for Equality 2021). What is also worrisome is the fact that by pulling away from such a regional human rights convention, Turkey may be paving the way to also disengage itself from the CEDAW (UN CEDAW 2021).

NGOs report that the government has since 2017 shut down many civil society organizations and grassroots organisations working on gender equality across Turkey, especially in areas of dense Kurdish population (Istanbul Sozlesmesi Turkiye Izleme Platformu 2017; Merdjanova 2020). Furthermore, it has sought to oppress women politicians, for example, women affiliated with the Kurdish Women's Movement, Women's Peace Initiative (BIKG) and the Women's Freedom Assembly (KÖM) (Degirmencioglu & Kahana-Dagan 2020). An effort to reinterpret gender equality according to Turkish 'traditional' customs and identity could prove to be harmful to women's rights (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Turkey has increasingly been engaged with anti-women's legislative proposals (such as the "marry your rapist bill" in 2020) and retrogressive policies which push women into a more traditional role under the pretext that the patriarchal stereotypes and the 'traditional' family structures need to be protected (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Such legislative and policy measures could not only expand gender inequality but also threaten women and girls' lives. Between 2010 and 2020 more than 2500 femicides were reported in the Turkish media (Hurriyet Daily News 2021). 409 women and 367 women were murdered in Turkey in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Women's organisations, such as the Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey, explain the alarming number of femicides down to the unfortunate combination of legal loopholes, deficiencies in women's policies and the return of women into more traditional roles (Hurriyet Daily News 2022).

The retrogressive policies that enforce negative stereotypes against women in Turkey could be one of the reasons as to why Turkey has not proceeded with the adoption of a NAP. The government has been involved with efforts to quash activities related to the promotion of the WPS agenda, including acts of suppression against women's organisations and feminist associations (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Women and LGBT peacebuilders are reported to have been subjected to intimidation, arrests and detention (Serva 2021; Yavuz & Byrne 2021). For example, Turkish and Kurdish women peace activists have been imprisoned for their advocacy efforts and their imprisonment was extended under the pretext of the pandemic emergency measures (Serva 2021). There is a persistent

lack of political will to financially support women's organisations and to include women from minorities such as Kurdish, Armenian, and other vulnerable groups, such as refugee women, in conflict resolution (Alici et al. 2021). There is an overall feeling that the civil space for women in Turkey has significantly shrunk, especially in conflict-affected areas such as the Kurdish region (Alici et al. 2021).

Yet, even if the Turkish government lacks the will to create a 1325 NAP, at the same time "Turkey is host to a strong women's movement" (Sengul et al. 2022, p. 71). The civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, in Turkey remain the main driving force behind women's empowerment and the prospect of Turkey eventually drafting a 1325 NAP. For example, local and national women's civil society organisations have been engaged with gender equality training and WPS-related workshops and projects (Merdjanova 2020; Degirmencioglu & Kahana-Dagan 2020). At the same time, this 'strong women's movement' is facing the challenge of overcoming the division between secular and Islamist women in Turkey (Sigma & Goker 2017). Without solidarity among so different women's groups in Turkey, the women's movement runs the risk of polarization and being deprived of opportunities to find a common platform to resolve women's issues (Sigma & Goker 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the importance of having finally in place the Greek and Cypriot NAPs, it is unfortunate that neither of them is directly making a connection between the WPS Agenda and the Eastern Mediterranean security priorities. One could hardly escape from noticing the absence of any reference or any substantive commitment to incorporating a gender perspective in Greece's external posture as a contributor to regional or international peace and security efforts. For example, one could have expected certain policy suggestions supporting conflict prevention or WPS awareness initiatives at the regional level. It seems that the apparent overreliance on the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" in forming the implementation parameters seems to have strained the Greek NAP from its international posture by means of contributing to regional stability and conflict prevention. Perhaps one could expect an Annex to the Greek NAP upon adoption, elaborating on the initiatives that could contribute to projecting the promotion of gender equality to both the Northern and Southern neighbourhoods of Greece; if anything at all, conflict prevention initiatives should be tailored to fit and reverse the weaknesses of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Likewise, the RoC could have made a better effort in projecting its foreign policy priorities for a stronger and more democratic Eastern Mediterranean throughout the Cypriot NAP, for example, by identifying projects that would have been useful to the promotion of women's rights with countries from the region that the RoC is already in cooperation with or even by inserting the WPS agenda into its bilateral agreements with partners from the region.

On the other hand, Turkey's drift with authoritarianism has marginalized any prospects for the advancement of the WPS Agenda. This has serious repercussions for women who live in Turkey as well as for women who live in the countries that Turkey considers under its sphere of influence (Daniels-Nemsitsveridge et al. 2020; Yüksel 2021). For example, had Turkey embraced the WPS agenda, what could have been the role of women human rights defenders and women's organizations in Turkey in supporting a gendered, peaceful resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan? What could have been the role of women peace and mediation networks and groups in exerting pressure on the Turkish government to support conflict resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean? It is not only that women are seriously affected by ongoing conflicts, but by delaying the incorporation of the WPS agenda in its official policies, Turkey is missing a great opportunity, on the one hand, to infuse the WPS agenda in the regional compact that it wishes to project herself as the

regional leader and, on the other hand, to compartmentalize common interests-based cooperation with other regional actors (some of them being EU member states) and NATO allies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Promoting the WPS policy agenda in the Eastern Mediterranean by countries with strong democratic and human rights records may prove instrumental in fostering conflict prevention policies in the region. Furthermore, the EU and NATO can also optimize the existing networks of cooperation of their member states in the region in order to further promote the WPS agenda and thus contribute to their societal resilience. This paper examined the WPS prospects of three countries in the region, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey which are either members of the EU (Greece and Cyprus) or members of NATO (Greece and Turkey) and all three members of the OSCE. It has been shown that the uncertainty rounding Turkey in recent years as regards its poor record on human rights and gender equality, let alone the WPS policy agenda, does not establish a hopeful level playfield as to "lead by example" in promoting the WPS agenda in the region. On the contrary, both Greece and Cyprus in recent years have already established a strong network of regional co-operational schemes, involving both regional governments as well as great powers (Bellou 2018). Yet, the optimization of the WPS agenda in this framework is still missing. In addition, they have already demonstrated their commitment to move their strong democratic record on human rights and gender equality to the specific policy prescriptions envisaged in the WPS policy agenda as this article has shown. It remains to be seen whether the two states will be ready to incorporate the WPS Agenda into their external relations, whether that is tacit or formal, bilateral and multilateral agreements.

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Funding

The research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the editors of this special issue, Dr. Clara della Valle and Dr. Elisa Piras, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Gramscian Reading:

The Attack on Women's Freedom and their Role in Establishing Peace and Security in Illiberal Democracies

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Abstract

The current Turkish government has failed to realize a holistic framework for gender equality. Its reluctance to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS agenda proves its essentialist and victimhood-oriented approach. This article tries to show how this approach has determined its political project - the authoritarian, patriarchal, and conservative-confessional New Turkey - by concentrating on the policies issued by the Justice and Development Party (hereafter AKP) during the last twenty years. As a result of this project's implementation, women in Turkey and their organizations have been negatively affected, especially after the 2016 crisis and the AKP's adoption of increasingly sectarian/repressive/regressive policies. To shed light on the ongoing feminist-women/government tension, this article looks at the role of AKP's 'organic intellectuals' who operate within Turkish society to support the government's project, relying on Gramscian and Marcusean insights while analysing AKP's authoritarianism according to Gramsci's Caesarist-Bonapartist model. Its organic intellectuals consolidate this traditional and religious vision of women in society. By putting women at the centre of religious discourses and making them a bearer of moral or ethical principles, the government reproduces, approves and reasserts their second-class position in society.

Keywords: AKP; Gramsci; gender; Caesarism-Bonapartism; WPS

Introduction¹

"When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive civil rights, they know that they face dogs, stones, and bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death."
Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

Violence against women or sexual and gender-based violence is not, as it has been for so long, a private issue to be kept within family and home. It has become both a political and international issue which crosses borders. In this regard, there are different international conventions and resolutions (i.e., Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), the Istanbul Convention, etc.) including National (NAP(s)) or Regional Action Plan(s) (RAP(s)) designed to protect and demand gender equality in the face of a traditional ideology of male supremacy.

¹ I would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their comments and suggestions to improve the article.
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Res. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is shaped around four pillars and places normative stress on the importance of the National Action Plan² to implement the resolution (Alemdar & Yinanc 2021, p. 1). However, of more than 80 countries which have adopted NAP(s) about WPS, Turkey—the case study of this article—has failed to implement a NAP even though it formally adopted it within Res. 1325 (Peace & Freedom, 2021). In the context of UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS, the idea is not only to protect women from violence, but to support and enable women to actively participate in politics and public issues, providing them with political and social empowerment. One of the criticisms of the four pillars—participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery— of Res. 1325 on the WPS Agenda is the need to place more emphasis on prevention of violence towards women and their protection than their subjectivity; and therefore, considers women as victims more than as agents (Shepherd 2008).

Despite its international obligations to make provisions for ensuring gender equality and to protect the human rights of women, the Turkish government remains reluctant to develop comprehensive policies for gender equality, to consider women as ‘active agents’ in politics, and to recognise their inevitable and substantial contributions to security and peace building. President R. T. Erdoğan demonstrated this reluctance in his speech during the First International Summit on Women and Justice held in Istanbul on 24 November 2014 in which he highlighted the inequality between men and women in line with the Islamic perception of creation that addresses this inequality:

‘We observe that women’s struggle for their rights got stuck in their fight for *equality* while missing the sense of *justice* (italics mine). [...] What is right is to establish equality among women. What is right is to have equality among men. You cannot put women into men’s work like the communist regimes did in the past. [...] That would go against women’s delicate bodies’ (Daloglu 2014).

Emphasis on the difference between the concepts of equality and justice is not an *occasional* usage but *intentional* and *calculated* preference, which brings with itself an essentialist approach.³ On the one hand, stressing on inequality aims to maintain the traditional and hierarchical structure, on the other hand, it once more highlights ‘the nature of women’ as being fragile. Under the current AKP (Justice and Development Party) government Turkish policies lean on an essentialist characterisation of women that portrays them as victims and ignore their role as agents. Emphasizing their role as mothers—active at home and passive in public and political life— this essentialist approach stresses their innately peaceful character. This essentialist approach makes reference to religious values and aims in order to consolidate the subordinated patriarchal position of women. This brings us to the discussion about the perception of women in social and political life, that is their role in external and internal affairs, and in decision-making processes such as decision about peace and security⁴. One of the errors of the government is to perceive

² CEDAW’s 2016 concluding observations on Turkey refers to the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and called Turkey for formally approving and implementing the plan on gender equality ‘in cooperation with representatives of women’s organizations’ (article 25c, 36c, and 38) (CEDAW 2016).

³ See E. Eldem 2018, ‘Osmanli Imparatorlugu’ndan Gunumuze Adalet, Esitlik, Hukuk ve Siyaset Uzerine,’ *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 288, pp. 24-37, for an elaboration of the usage of these concepts in the Turkish political context. Eldem refers to the idea that in Turkish political history the usage of the concept of justice became a political rhetoric of the political right, while equality is an element of the leftist political discourse (p. 24).

⁴ By security, I refer to the safety of women’s, children’s, minorities’ lives, and those who are more vulnerable and marginalized in society, that is their safety in the public and private sphere.

women only as a part of family and therefore to insist on a patriarchal-authoritarian-hierarchical perspective in order to re-create a religious-traditionalist-native conception of the role of women in society.

Despite its unwillingness to take women's demands, existences, and struggles into consideration, the paper acknowledges that the recent struggle that women have established by their own efforts against the government's violent actions and policies might *not-only* lead a counterhegemonic⁵ (alternative revolutionary (in Gramscian sense)) project or play a counterhegemonic role, but also might establish/build (alternatively lead) a hegemony based on gender-equality. It is now largely accepted that the current regime in Turkey is authoritarian⁶. This means a rejection of all kinds of plurality and attempts to centralize all power into a single-hand⁷, thanks to its populism, its exploitation of religion and national sentiments, its neoliberal policies, its anti-intellectual attitude, its relation with religious sects and its support of movements such as the Gülen movement⁸. Despite the esteemed contributions to the literature on the Turkish authoritarianism in relation to neoliberalism and hybrid types, this study tries to read the effects of Turkish authoritarianism over women's struggle in Turkey through a Gramscian analysis. In this regard, this paper seeks to evaluate the cultural and intellectual contributions and creations of women's struggle, feminist debates and the LGBTQI+ movement in Turkey as a possible construction of gender-equality based society. Since the consensual and coercive basis of governance became dominant over many societies from the north to the south and led different types of authoritarian government under the democratic promises, a Gramscian perspective and evaluation of the fascist period through his concepts and theories such as the theory of Caesarism, hegemony and intellectual, gives an analytical tool for analysing AKP's authoritarianism and its policies about gender issues and for interpreting women's movement as a counterhegemonic element.

Based on this claim, the article will be divided into two different parts: a theoretical part and the application of this theory to the case study. The theoretical part begins with an evaluation of Antonio Gramsci's theory of Caesarism and his theory of the intellectual in order to analyse AKP's authoritarianism in relation to its policies on gender equality and the agenda on women, peace and security. Gramsci claims that a Caesarist(-Bonapartist) model can be either progressive or regressive. While the progressive Caesarist model can lead to a transformation of society, the regressive Caesarist model maintains the status quo and avoids fundamental changes and transformations. Erdoğan's authoritarianism will be labelled as a regressive Caesarist authoritarianism, which plays a crucial role in re-establishing the essentialist approach of women's position in society, family and politics by a series of policies and decisions such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. In

⁵ Here the concept of counter-hegemony is used to refer to an opposition to the existing dominant power or status quo.

⁶ In the last few years, there are many valuable contributions, debates and discussion on the rise and emergence of new type of authoritarianism in Turkey; here are mentioned just some of them: Yilmaz and Turner 2019; Yilmaz, Caman, & Bashirov 2020; Esen & Gumuscu 2016; Özbudun 2015; Arat & Pamuk 2019; Çalışkan 2018; Yavuz & Öztürk 2019. Additionally, very recently, in 2022, Dimitar Bechev, in *Turkey Under Erdogan: How a Country Turned from Democracy and the West*, continues to elaborate one of these claims on the decline of democracy and the rise of competitive authoritarianism.

⁷ The State comes under the control of a man; the separation between state and party disappears. Even party becomes an instrument and strict control of a single-man. And in this sense, authoritarian means a domination of one voice over all of the State's sectors and ignoring all diversity found in civil society; against this diversity authoritarian regimes become intolerant.

⁸ The Gülen movement is accused of being responsible for the attempted coup d'état in 2016 and immediately after was labelled by the AKP as Fethullah Terrorist Organization. It was a former ally of AKP. Despite their differences, they fought against military tutelage and secularism when the AKP came to power. This alliance led the AKP to win the national electoral victories to form alone the government in 2002, 2007 and 2011.

the literature, this theoretical contribution is not studied yet in relation to the empirical studies on women's question in Turkey. While Doyle's study (2017) shows that many 'women's organizations, with the exception of Islamic organizations' prevents 'regressive change but rather advance progressive change (p. 251),' Erdoğan's regressive Caesarist authoritarianism targets to eliminate women's activism and their effectivity in promoting progressive change leading to advances not only in women's right but also in the whole of society.

Furthermore, to shed light on the ongoing feminist-women/government tension, this article looks at the role of AKP's 'organic intellectuals' who operate within the Turkish society in order to support the government's project, relying on Gramscian and Marcusean insights while analysing AKP's *regressive* authoritarianism according to Gramsci's *regressive* Caesarist(-Bonapartist) model. Its organic intellectuals consolidate this traditional and religious vision of women in society. By putting women at the centre of religious discourses and making them a bearer of moral or ethical principles, the government reproduces, approves and reasserts their second-class position within society. While under the current Turkish Caesarist authoritarianism its organic intellectuals try to undermine women's struggles in public and political life, women play an important role in creating a counter-intellectual stratum against them.

In the second part, the effects and consequences of this *regressive* Caesarist authoritarianism will be examined in relation to gender equality. This will include studies on AKP's policies and its WPS agenda, and both arguments and suggestions about a concept resulting from women's struggle: a possibility of (cultural-intellectual and political) hegemony based on gender equality (*gender-equality based-hegemony*). The questions asked under the first subtitle of this second part are: How does the AKP oppose women's struggle?; and, why is it so important for AKP to move women away from the public sphere? Regarding these questions, the article attempts to analyse why Turkey fails to realize a holistic framework for gender equality. It will do so by concentrating on the AKP's policies from 2002 onwards (the year in which it came to power), with a particular focus on the period after 2016, after the attempted *coup d'état* and the establishment of a presidential system in 2018. Therefore, the article admits that AKP's political structure and its ideological basis in authoritarianism, hierarchy and patriarchy⁹ explains its unwillingness to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)).

The questions asked under the second subtitle of the second part, are: How do women struggle for their rights?; and, how did they attempt security and peace building, despite AKP's repressive and *regressive* politics? Here I propose the concept of gender-equality based hegemony which is possible through women's struggle, that is from a counterhegemonic position towards an establishment of a *gender-equality based-hegemony*. The question is whether the cultural and intellectual activities created by women's struggle can be considered as a new type of intellectual stratum and intellectualism in terms of Gramsci's theory of the new intellectual, to construct a new gender-equality based-society or a new (cultural-intellectual and political) hegemony (Doyle 2017, p. 5). Gramsci, regarding this new intellectual, writes as follows:

⁹ Simten Cosar and Metin Yegenoglu in their article mark the AKP's period as 'the emergence of a new mode of patriarchy' by arguing it in terms of neoliberal, nationalist and religious discourses while comparing it with 'the already existing republican and liberal modes of patriarchy' which refers to the Kemalist understanding of society. Here, again there is a reference and a comparison/conflict between the secular and religious one. However, I believe that it is difficult to separate the nationalist and religious/conservative discourses from the already existing patriarchy which they define as republican and liberal modes (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011). In Turkey, patriarchy, even in its more democratic, republican, or liberal period, has always been composed of nationalist and religious discourses.

'The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains "specialized" and does not become "directive" (specialized and political).' (Gramsci 1989, p. 116)

Women have demonstrated through their long history of struggles that they are strong enough to be a 'constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator' (Gramsci 1989, p. 116).

The methodology that I have used is that firstly, the literature on the Turkish political structure and its theoretical base is reviewed through a Gramscian lens. Secondly, the literature on gender issues in Turkey in relation to the AKP's policies is reviewed and analysed according to Gramscian intellectual theory and Marcus's notion of a one-dimensional society. In this respect, the article focuses more on the representation of women in peace-building processes and decision-making mechanisms during and after the Turkish-Kurdish conflict within society for consolidating democracy.

Theoretical Basis

Under this title, the paper will concentrate on Gramsci's theory of Caesarist-Bonapartist model and theory of intellectual, which, will subsequently be discussed in a Turkish context.

Caesarist-Bonapartist Type of Authoritarianism

'Mussolini uses the state to dominate the party and he uses the party only to some extent, during difficult times, to dominate the state.' (Gramsci 1977, QC2 §75, p. 233; PN 1992, vol.1, p. 320).

Gramsci's theories have been used in different fields, including gender studies, to analyse contemporary social and political dynamics (Slaughter 2011; Ledwith 2009; Simon 2013; Paechter 2018). One can see Gramsci's sensibility towards women's discrimination and sexual harassment in his *Notebooks* where he emphasises that 'until women can attain not only a genuine independence in relation to men but also a new way of conceiving themselves and their role in sexual relations, the sexual question will remain full of unhealthy characteristics and caution must be exercised in proposals for new legislation.'¹⁰ Based on the natural equality of human beings, along with being sensitive towards women's role within society, Gramsci referred to a necessary transformation of the subaltern position of women into a new feminine identity. Women ought to be liberated from their position as slaves and from patriarchal-based cultural and intellectual domination (Ghetti 2020, p. 4). According to Gramsci, without new women, without a meaningful *emancipation* of women, there will not be new men (Ghetti 2020, p. 4).

¹⁰ Antonio G 1992, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, Q Hoar, & G Nowell-Smith (eds.), Lawrence & Wishart, London, p. 296 hereafter *SPN*. Antonio G 1977, *Quaderni dal Carcere*, Valentino Gerratana (ed.), vol. 3, p. 2149-2150, henceforth cited as *QC*, paragraph as §, number of Notebook, for example, as *QC13*; *Prison Notebooks*, hereafter *PN*.

Gramscian concepts and theories such as hegemony and the intellectual along with the Caesarist-Bonapartist model help us to understand the current Turkish government's (AKP) approach to women and their position in society. Gramsci explained Mussolini's ascent in relation to the theory of Caesarism or Bonapartism within the modern framework; in other words, he explored fascism as a form of Caesarism. For Gramsci, the most important element of Caesarist-Bonapartist model is not leadership but the transformation of state apparatus and politics, i.e., 'an integral reformulation of the criteria of legality, capable of legitimizing and institutionalizing squad violence' (Gagliardi 2016).

Gramsci redefined the concepts of Bonapartism and Caesarism¹¹ - concepts introduced by Marx and Engels¹² to explain authoritarian governments in the framework of the class struggle - in the context of the social and political crisis of Italy when fascism emerged. Not only did he aim to grasp 'the victory of fascism' and the defeat of revolutionary transformation, but he wanted to understand politically and theoretically how liberalism and liberal institutions generally had also experienced this failure (Fontana 2004, p. 176-177). Gramsci explained this failure as a problem of hegemony: the failure of dominant groups to establish their cultural influence and nurture political consensus (Fontana 2004, p. 177).

In this respect, Gramsci assesses the Italian crisis as 'catastrophic' (Gramsci 1977, QC13, §27, p. 1617) which later will be applied to the political crisis of Turkey. In the battle between forces, in which there are neither losers nor victors, the new cannot be born, and the balance between them turns out to be catastrophic, dramatic and aggressive.

In this situation 'a great personality' (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 219) as defined by Gramsci, appears to arbitrate between the opposite forces. However, Gramsci did not concentrate on the conception of the leader; as a follower of Marx, for Gramsci, the charismatic leader lacks historicisation (*storicizzazione*) (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 436; QC11, §22) meaning that this conception misses concrete historical reality or historical process. Instead of the charismatic leader, Gramsci affirms the category of Caesarism (Antonini 2021, p. 109). In a modern sense, Caesarism can emerge from parliamentary compromises and coalition governments (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 220). Both fascism and Nazism initially arose in a constitutional and legal fashion to govern within parliamentary coalitions (Fontana 2004, p. 181).¹³ The problem of hegemony is directly related to the concept of Caesarism, which Gramsci defines in terms of the exercise of coercive force, described in military terms. In the *Notebooks*, Gramsci writes that 'indeed military theory was developing in the direction of war of movement' (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 110) but war of position is essential to gaining power. Gramsci stresses that 'military leadership must always be subordinate to political leadership' (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 88) and emphasizes the importance of a war of position, associating the modern authoritarian regimes with the 'balance of forces'.

Gramsci describes the Caesarist solution in two forms: progressive and regressive (Gramsci 1992, SPN, p. 219). Progressive Caesarism means that third force intervention helps the progressive forces rise to power, while in its regressive form it serves reactionary forces to triumph. In the first case, the Caesarist regime is the consequence of an organic crisis that results in a "quantitative-qualitative" transformation —a passage from one type of state to another, in which there are substantial improvements for the subaltern class. Regressive

¹¹ In this article, I will not explain in detail the concept of Caesarism but Gramsci like Marx and Engels regards this concept as a class phenomenon as Benedetto Fontana claims in his article (Fontana 2004, p. 177).

¹² As Francesca Antonini claims in *Caesarism and Bonapartism in Gramsci: Hegemony and the Crisis of Modernity*, Caesarism and Bonapartism are different historical and philosophical concepts. Marx, particularly, tried to avoid the confusion between these two and separated them from each other (Antonini 2021, p. 1).

¹³ Gramsci evaluates the rise of fascism and national socialism in relation to economic, social and institutional crisis.

Caesarism, on the other hand, is characterized as merely quantitative, meaning there is no passage from one type of state to another and no improvements for marginalized groups - only the continuation of the oppressive status quo.

For Gramsci, having military power and exercising coercion are necessary but not sufficient factors for maintaining a durable form of Caesarism in contemporary societies. Accelerating social and economic changes, developing mass communication, and promoting mass organization require governments to rely on new forms of power (Gramsci 1992 *SPN*, p. 220). This means that hegemony needs to accentuate the importance of cultural and ideological factors. 'That form of Caesarism combines elements of the coercive and administrative organs of the state (the military, police, and security bureaucracies) with its ideological and cultural apparatus (mass media, mass communication, and mass mobilization)' (Fontana 2004, p. 194).

Gramsci's theory of the intellectual

Gramsci highlights that 'the "normal" exercise of hegemony [...] is characterised by a combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, an attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority' (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*, p. 80). Gramsci contrasts the concept of hegemony with *mere* domination - the exercise of coercion over other (subaltern) groups. However domination or coercive force is not the only character of hegemony; an intellectual and moral leadership or moral and cultural mechanism of consensus or persuasion is necessary for establishment of hegemony (Fontana 2004, p. 184).

In this sort of hegemony, intellectuals play a great role as intermediaries between the ruling class and those who are ruled by them in order to disseminate and produce knowledge, culture, values and beliefs within society. Gramsci warns us that, due to the complexity of their social and political institutions, it will be difficult to bring about revolutionary or transformative change in contemporary democratic societies through a war of movement - that is, a direct assault similar to the seizure of the Winter Palace by Bolsheviks in 1917. Therefore, social transformation is achievable only through a war of position¹⁴, that is an ideological, intellectual, cultural struggle aimed at realizing hegemony (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*, p. 243).

In the *Notebooks*, Gramsci writes that all men, in a generic sense, are intellectuals, as they all have an intellect in which they use. However, not all are intellectuals in the sense of social function (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*, p. 9). In this regard, Gramsci separates them into two groups: 'traditional' professional intellectuals - literary, scientific etc.; and the 'organic' intellectuals, 'which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development, which are for the most part "specialisations" of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence' (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*, p. 6). These intellectuals are 'the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class' (Hoare and Smith 1971, p. 3). Intellectuals guarantee the functioning and reproduction of the superstructure that Gramsci divided into two elements: civil society (including organizations); and political society, i.e., the State (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*,

¹⁴ Cihan Tugal in his book makes use of Gramsci's theory of passive revolution to explain the rise of the AKP in the context of a neoliberal reconstruction of Turkey (Tugal 2009). He states that the AKP established its hegemony through passive revolution and on "the interface between civil society and political society" (ibid., p. 8). However, in my view, the AKP could not establish a hegemony in the Gramscian sense although the party mobilized civil society, as Tugal states in his book, in the sense that the party regulated "everyday life, social space, and people's relation to the economy" and linked civil society to political society (leadership) but it could not build a cultural hegemony—or leadership—, i.e., dominate over the intellectual world (ibid., p. 8), which could convince people of its policies.

p. 12). Gramsci underlines that hegemony is established at these two levels. Giuseppe Cospite (2010, p. 75) observes that in Gramsci, hegemony is understood as direction (*direzione*) even before dominion (*dominio*). Yet he adds that it oscillates between hegemony = direction and hegemony = direction + domination (QC1, 1977b, §44, p. 41). In the same QC, Gramsci highlights that before coming into power a class can be *dirigente* (leader or director); however, upon gaining power the class becomes dominant, though it can continue to be '*dirigente*' (1977b, p. 41). Domination in an economic area however, must be parallel with the development in the areas of the ideological, juridical, religious, intellectual, philosophical etc. (QC6, 1977a, § 200, pp. 839-40). Cospite (2010, p. 89) writes that '*hegemony [...] is synonymous with political leadership (direzione politica), sometimes united with, sometimes opposed to domination (dominio), coercion (QC1, §44) or in an even more meaningful sense, an element of connection between the moment of consent and that of force (civil or political hegemony connected and not opposed to that of cultural or intellectual) (QC13, §26).*'¹⁵ In addition, Gramsci writes that '*since hegemony is political but also and above all economic, it has its material base in the decisive function exercised by the hegemonic group in the decisive core of economic activity*' (PN 1996, §38, p. 183). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Gramsci finds a dialectical relationship between structure and superstructure when talking about hegemony.

As a result of this theoretical clarification, Gramsci's aforementioned theories and concepts will be applied to the Turkish case.

Caesarism-Bonapartism authoritarianism in the Turkish context

Turkey did not witness a full democracy based on the separation of powers which control the public institutions and government, allowing people to freely decide who rules them under a multiparty system. In 2016, Turkey was exposed to radical change. Accelerated by the attempted coup d'état of that year, its so-called democracy¹⁶ was overthrown and reversed by AKP's government, especially by removing the principle of separation of powers, which can be considered the cornerstone of democracy. Within this year, Turkey witnessed serious social and political conflicts, such as the military operation¹⁷ in the East and Southeast of Turkey, ISIS attacks in different cities, the increase of violence against women and child abuse (IHD 2017; KCDP 2017; Asuma & Imdat 2018), and the failed coup d'état attempt which paved the way for a new type of neoliberal-authoritarianism.¹⁸ This section seeks to explore the AKP's authoritarianism with reference to the Caesarist-Bonapartist model and the negative impacts of AKP's authoritarian policies on gender, violence against women, and women's rights, by taking into consideration its neoliberal political structure and policies.

In its party program, AKP assumes that the State, at least in principle, should be outside of all types of economic activity, defining the function of the State in the economy as

¹⁵ Translation is mine. '*Egemonia [...] è sinonimo di direzione politica, talvolta unita, talvolta contrapposta a dominio, coercizione (Q1, 44) or in senso ancor più pregnante, elemento di raccordo tra il momento del consenso e quello della forza (egemonia civile o politica connessa e non contrapposta a quella culturale o intellettuale) (Q13, 26)*' (2010, p. 89).

¹⁶ Turkey's democracy was subjected to severe military interventions and witnessed the closure of different parties in different period.

¹⁷ The conflict between PKK and the Turkish government was ceased for 2 and half years and peace process began (2013-2015). In 2015, the conflict between two parties began again and the military operation started to the cities such as Sur in Diyarbakir, Cizre ve Silopi in Şırnak, Nusaybin in Mardin ve Yüksekova in Hakkari.

¹⁸ Neoliberal authoritarianism is a sort of 'critique of state-oriented political and economic system' (Dogan 2021, p. 174), therefore, stressing on the existence of individual freedom especially for consumption, emphasizing on flexible working arrangement/condition, making laws to pave the way for privatization and privatization of public institutions (education and health sectors etc.), usurping of human rights guaranteed by law such as freedom of expression, right to assembly and demonstration etc., dominating over communication instruments such as press by means of using the public institutions.

regulatory and supervisory. The AKP considers privatization as an important tool for the formation of a more rational economic structure and wishes to improve the competitive capacity of the country's economy, believing that foreign capital would contribute to the development of the Turkish economy. In this context, the AKP claims that the relations with the European Union, the World Bank, the IMF and other international organizations should be maintained in accordance with the needs of the economy and national interests. Through its party program, the AKP demonstrates its support for neoliberal policies by ensuring private enterprise via political, bureaucratic change (article 3.1) (AKP 2001).

Though this paper will not focus on the political economy of gender issue in relation to the neoliberal perspective¹⁹, to explain briefly, neoliberal policies dominated Turkey's²⁰ society in the early 1980s and these processes, as Gamze Çavdar and Yavuz Yaşar pointed out, were implemented by AKP through 'the further institutional reforms' in 2000s (Çavdar & Yaşar 2019, p. 2). 'The privatization of public schools, the subcontracting of many government services, the elimination of public jobs and the comprehensive healthcare reforms implemented during the 2000s have all been part of this process of institutionalizing neoliberalism' (Çavdar & Yaşar 2019, p. 2). This neoliberal process and reforms, on the one hand, demand women to be a larger part of public life as employees, yet on the other hand they deepen the gender-dimension of society. For instance, some AKP's legislative initiatives regarding women seem progressive, like promoting "flexible working conditions" that would allow them to stay home while working' (Çavdar & Yaşar 2019, p. 10). However, with these changes, gender segregation or 'traditional gender division of labor' (Çavdar & Yaşar 2019, p. 10) are reinforced. The mutual relationship between authoritarianism and neo-liberalism is largely discussed by some scholars (Bruff & Tansel 2019), demonstrating that the application of neoliberal policies resulted in growing an authoritarian governance.

The authoritarianism of AKP can be described in the context of a Caesarist and Bonapartist model. This model describes: forces in conflict; charismatic leadership; combination of coercion/domination and consent; destruction of democratic and republican elements and instead, the reconstruction of an imperial or single-man regime; a bureaucratic military-police dictatorship; and lastly, neoliberal policies. The Turkish Caesarist-Bonapartist model should be considered in relation to the confessional issue, in the sense that this authoritarianism requires a more confessional conception of state and power to strengthen its patriarchal extension.²¹ 'The bureaucracy, the military associations, the police (broadly conceived), and so on are the instruments through which the fascist regime realizes its control over the masses and more, generally, over civil society' (Antonini 2021, p. 165-6). These are also instruments of contemporary, authoritarian regimes.

In the context of Gramscian Caesarism, it can be said that the AKP emerged from a conflict between the religious and secular—*laik*²²—groups, and the leftist and rightist groups. Even

¹⁹ The author of this paper finds the analysis of the material basis of gender equality necessary (i.e., economic conditions of daily life, reproduction (household) and production (the market)) (Çavdar & Yaşar 2019, p. 18) and unavoidable but since it needs a broad discussion, it would be difficult to argue it in this short article. Çavdar and Yaşar (2019) in their work underline the combination of conservatism, Islam and neoliberal policies in order to explain the material condition of gender equality in terms of its political economy. 'Yalçın Akdoğan, one of the ideologues of the AKP and Erdogan's close confidant,' as Çavdar and Yaşar state, 'openly declared in the early 2000s that a new conservatism had recently adopted *lassie faire* economics and therefore largely overlapped with liberalism in opposing the welfare state and supporting a market economy, private property, and a limited state' (2019, p. 17).

²⁰ Here, the adjective Turkish is not used when it is used to refer to the society in which one can find different identities such as Kurdish, Turkish, Armenian etc., because of its national connotation or its ethnic connotation.

²¹ I particularly thank Fabio Frosini for his comments on my interpretation of Turkish case in terms of Gramsci's conception of Caesarism and Bonapartism, who suggested the confessional conception of state and power.

²² *Laiklik* refers to Turkish secularism which is one of the principles of Republic of Turkey involved in 1982 Constitution (2 article). It is not the scope of this article to discuss differences between the Turkish laicism/*laiklik* and secularism but to

though this conflict has always existed, in the 1990s the conflict manifested between National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*)²³—an Islamic and anti-Western movement—and a secular-Western view which tried to circulate its values both in the political and social areas (Altuntaş & Demirkanoglu 2017, p. 66-67). As a result, some Islamic parties which supported the ideas of National Outlook were banned on the grounds that they conducted religiously-based politics. By promoting Islamic fundamentalism, they were considered a threat to the secular or *laik* structure of the State. For instance, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) was banned from politics in 1998 after being accused of violating the principle of separation between religion and State. The increased tension led also to a division within National Outlook - on one hand were 'reformists', who later established the AKP under Erdoğan leadership in 2001, and on the other, were 'traditionalists', who still promoted the original ideas of National Outlook (Altuntaş & Demirkanoglu 2017, p. 67).

As Gramsci says, 'the forces in conflict balance each other in a *catastrophic manner*', which results in 'a third force C interven[ing] from outside, subjugating what is left of both A and B' (Gramsci 1992 SPN, p. 219). AKP emerged as a third force not only because of the conflict between the secular and religious outlook, but also because of the conflict that existed among the religious groups or forces (like National Outlook). According to Gramsci, the rise of Caesarism is the result of different political crises. The AKP was seen as a political solution not only by forces inside National Outlook but also external forces which regarded the AKP as a reformist-European oriented party, and therefore an example of a moderate Islam that could be a good example for the Islamic world. Italian history demonstrates something similar. 'Fascism is seen [...] as a political solution (although a limited and problematic one) to the *organic crisis*, as an effort to restore the "broken" bourgeois hegemony' (Antonini 2021, p. 165-6; italics mine). As a civilian movement, despite its shortcomings, the AKP succeeded in comprehending the needs of society and using this as a political manoeuvre towards the beginning of its tenure (i.e., between 2002-2011, in which it was *apparently* 'democratic' in terms of its social and political promises).

In a Bonapartist manner, the AKP under the Erdoğan presidency attempts to transform the republic and the (semi-)democratic structure of the State into a more authoritarian one by way of a presidential system based on a one-single man-regime. After the attempted coup in 2016, Turkey moved towards a more authoritarian model with statutory decrees (OHAL). The AKP made use of 'the coercive and administrative organs of the State (the military, police, and security bureaucracies)' (Fontana, p. 194) to control and reorganize society through the declaration of decrees which moved Turkey towards a more authoritarian structure. Through the referendum on 16 April 2017, 18 articles of the Turkish constitution were changed. The set of amendments included: the abolition of the current parliamentary system and its replacement with a presidential system; the elimination of the office of the prime minister, increasing the number of deputies in the parliament from 550 to 600; and making changes to the structure of the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). Following the inauguration of the presidential system, president Erdoğan decides practically everything. This new system can be described as a single-man regime and the command-order oriented system is 'one-dimensional'. The Turkish-type presidential system can be

explain briefly, Taha Parla and Andrew Davison's work (2008) clarifies it in a Turkish context. They write that 'secularism is not laicism's equivalent; it is something much more than laicism, since laicism does not negate the ideas of religion and God' (p. 59). In this regard, Nevzat Celik (2018) writes that 'to create a new form of the western secular model onto the framework of the new Republic of Turkey, *laiklik* has articulated as a political Kemalist doctrine to protect itself and, especially translates itself to the totalitarian context [...] Turkey's own secular model *laiklik* was not aimed at the separation of religion and state but first to control it and finally to try to minimize it from the public sphere (p. 189).'

²³ It is a religious-political movement founded by Necmettin Erbakan that emphasized the decline of the Muslim world as a result of the Western values such as secularism.

described in Gramscian terms as a government which operates as a ‘party’ which is over and beyond the interests of people and the multiparty system.

From a Gramscian perspective, I believe that AKP failed to succeed in a cultural hegemony and therefore relies only on domination and manipulation. While AKP tries to hold power, it is only concerned with the form, meaning AKP misses the consent of society and also domination of cultural and intellectual life, as Gramsci points out in his notebooks.²⁴ Although it had power through the consent of people by means of democratic election, including the referendum and general and local elections from 2002 to 2019, it fails to conquer or dominate the cultural and intellectual area. The AKP tried to achieve its ideological and cultural domination in collaboration with the Fettullah Gülen movement until the attempt coup of 2016.²⁵ However, the Gülenist attempt to establish political domination failed by the coup in 2016.

Therefore, its political movement lacks moral-intellectual leadership. However, this isn’t to say that the AKP do not have ‘organic intellectuals’. These intellectuals exist not for creating and contributing to cultural and intellectual development through ideological revolution, as Gramsci explains in the *Notebooks* (Gramsci 1992, SPN, p. 5-24) but rather for propaganda. They contribute to the government’s anti-gender equality and sexist discourses and play an important role in establishing a counterrevolutionary position.

The role of intellectuals in constructing gender and deconstructing gender

With regard to these issues, it is essential to take a long hard look at the struggle of women in order to establish a peaceful and secure society, which is against aggressive resistance towards gender equality. On the one hand, some women resist the denial of their active role in politics; on the other hand, the current government’s policies accept nothing but a domestic role for women. The latter’s policies are strengthened by government-sponsored intellectuals. At this point, Gramsci’s theory of the intellectual will serves to disclose how the current government’s political language maintains and reinforces misogyny within society by means of these intellectuals. By putting women at the centre of religious discourses and making them a bearer of moral or ethical principles, the government re-creates, approves and cements their second-class position. AKP is against women’s inclusion not only in civil society but also in politics. The dominant and authoritarian power succeeds in doing so through its organic intellectuals— judges, prosecutors, lawmakers, newspaper columnists, theologians, academics and the like – who endorse violence against women.

In this regard, Marcuse’s theory of the one-dimensional society and wo/man explains the goal of a political regime based on misogyny, patriarchy, bureaucracy, hierarchy conservatism, and Islamism. One-dimensional society means not to see these problems and forces of domination in critical and negative way. Marcuse, in *One-Dimensional Man*, underlines the importance of the critical or negative thinking because of its characteristic

²⁴ As Hasret Dikici Bilgin (2009, p. 110) in ‘Civil Society and State in Turkey: A Gramscian Perspective,’ and Ahmet Öncü (2003) ‘Dictatorship Plus Hegemony: A Gramscian Analysis of the Turkish State’ wrote that when the consent of society is weakening, the hegemony—relies on both consent and coercion—finds itself in crisis and only coercive and based on domination which is already mentioned by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* (1992, p. 210; QC 13, 1977, §23).

²⁵ Gulenist movement is a faith-based or Islamist-based movement gathering particularly around education which the movement considers a key to resolve social, cultural, religious and political conflicts and problems. The movement fought against secular values through culture. Therefore, they could overcome and challenge the Kemalist (secular movement) and leftist intellectual hegemony by concentrating on education and intellectual development. Education becomes only an instrument for manipulating people and attaining power. Thus, Gülen movement has many schools in different countries from Africa to Asia. The members of Gülen movement held important positions in the police, judiciary, military and bureaucracy. Many of them were arrested, prosecuted and dismissed from their jobs after the 2016 coup.

of being two dimensional which is capable of seeing contradictions. One dimensional way of thinking does not allow the persons to be aware of the forces of domination and therefore there would not be no demand for changes. AKP's organic intellectuals help the authoritarian regime to maintain the existence of the established society through one-dimensional thinking.

While Marcuse focuses on the way of thinking and criticizing, Gramsci highlights that intellectuals are important elements of any political system, because of the directive, organizational, and educative functions that they perform (Gramsci 1992, *SPN*, p. 16). The AKP's organic intellectuals direct and organize the AKP's policies, including manipulating and provoking people, but they seem to lack any real connection or link with ordinary people. These intellectuals behave, write, and disseminate knowledge about social, political and economic problems according to the party's policies. The main characteristic of these intellectuals is their lack of critical reasoning, while they seem to have a poor record in organizational and connective functions (Vacca 2020, p. 48). In this respect, one might note an episode in 2019 when a spokesman of the AKP, the senior state official at the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet), marginalized LGBTQI+ individuals by calling them a 'heresy contrary to creation'. In a similar way, in May 2020, the Turkish Platform of Thought advocated Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and supported the government's anti-gender policies through a report in which they underlined difference between the sexes more than problems of gender equality and violence.

Emphasizing the traditional division of labor and espousing an essentialist view of women along with the Turkish-Muslim female identity, this authoritarianism tries to marginalize those who identify themselves as Kurdish, trans, or as members of the LGBTQI+ community, as well as those who fight for gender-equality and against violence perpetrated on women. While this authoritarianism increasingly restricts the space available for civil society, in recent years, one can observe that women are the only opposition group who continue to struggle on the streets for their rights despite overwhelming attacks against them by the government.²⁶ As Gramsci underlines, civil society is not mere a reflection of the private sphere but it is a sphere where civil society participates in political debates (Ketola 2013, p. 76) and produces new thinking, culture and new intellectual projects. Using Hegel's and

²⁶ Jessica Leigh Doyle (2017), on the one hand describes how CSOs and women's organizations play an active role in progressive social change in terms of women's rights in Turkey, on the other hand she emphasizes how these organizations are restricted by the government and therefore they are not totally independent from the state (p. 24). Daniella Kuzmanovic (2012) stresses on the existential anthropological approach which can explain 'how agency becomes a matter of existential mastery before it is a matter of social or political mastery' (p. 6). Kuzmanovic considers civil society and civic activism as a reflection of 'existential issues pertaining to subjectivity' (p. 178). According to this view, the power of subjectivity and agents who have potentiality to change and transform society is the key element of civil society and its organizations (p. 6, 177). I think that while emphasizing on the subjectivity and agency of civil society organizations is important, it is also crucial to underline a Gramscian integrality which highlights the totality of civil and political society. Therefore, it is crucial to question how much they are 'autonomous, agentic subjects' in order to see the whole picture. It is true that many civil society organizations or NGOs deal with the questions regarding the cultural, social and political issues which cannot focus on structural questions because of its lack of material capacity to help people permanently on the economic level and can therefore offer only temporarily solutions. Quintan Wiktorowicz (2000) claims that 'civil society is never autonomous from the state; it has only varying degrees of independence (p. 56-7).' This is the case when AKP supports those civil society organizations that sustain itself and established the women's civil society organization for defending its essentialist-patriarchal-conservative gender approach (Keysan 2019, pp. 8-9). Markus Ketola (2013) underscores the role of NGOs as civil society initiatives in 'policymaking arena' and facilitating the reform processes (p. 1). Like Kuzmanovic, Ketola also believes that civil society can have a greater role in society (p. 77). Asuman Ozgur Keysan (2019) defines civil society 'gendered and neoliberal in character' (p. 3). Through all these readings on civil society, one can easily draw a conclusion that the general idea about civil society in Turkey is based on the view that civil society can create and lead a democratization (process) (Dikici-Bilgin 2009).

Gramsci's conception of civil society, Ketola (2013, p. 77) defines civil society in terms of women's movements and their civil society organizations as a place or a space where there is competition in a Hegelian sense and where one can find the hegemonic versus counterhegemonic struggles in a Gramscian sense. Therefore, women might lead a new way of thinking, a new type of epistemology and a new type of intellectuals through their practices, struggles and methods in order to build an equality-based democracy, and therefore peace and security in society. As Sirin Tekeli (2022) says, 'the feminist struggle is about changing mindsets and cultural values and about forcing society to recognize the dignity of women as individual human beings.'

While the AKP's organic intellectuals try to destruct what the women's movement has obtained after a long struggle, women can construct a hegemony based on peace and equality. As Gramsci states, a new historical situation creates a new ideological superstructure. The representatives (intellectuals) of this ideology must be conceived of as new intellectuals who are born from new situation different from the previous intellectuality (Gramsci 1977a, QC8, §171, p. 1044). Here, in line with what Gramsci says, one can imagine that feminist intellectuals or intellectual women might be able to create a new ideological superstructure in which they fulfil the role of the new intellectuals, or organic intellectuals within a new historical situation.

Empirical Part

The gender issue and the AKP government's approach

'We fight just to gain our rights to be a worker,
 a doctor, a parliamentarian as we are mothers.'
*Women's World*²⁷

Women can take a leading part in the democratization and development processes. This section tries to draw attention to the importance of *democratization from below*, i.e., through women's organizations and movements. The consolidation of democracy demands pluralistic and inclusive politics. Yesim Arat and Sevket Pamuk speak of three different groups who approach the woman question in a different manner and who contribute to democratic development in Turkey: 'women who called themselves feminists and have sparked and expanded the women's movement in Turkey over the years; Islamist women who have fought mostly for their gender-based religious rights; and Kurdish women and feminists who have sought recognition of their ethnic and gender identity' (Arat & Pamuk, 2019, p. 229). In this respect, they mentioned three challenges in the democratization process in Turkey: Islamists contesting the secular nature of the Turkish state²⁸; Kurds challenging the ethnic nationalism of the Turkish state; and 'women who criticized the illiberal nature of civil rights in the country and demanded the expansion of their rights as women' (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 228). Women, even coming from different cultural, ethic, and religious background, collaborated/collaborate with each other to democratize society.

These women's movements argued for the insufficiency of a 'Republican project of modernity' and highlighted 'its limits in democratizing the country' (Arat & Pamuk, 2019, p. 229). They struggle against authoritarian, secularist and nationalist patriarchy respectively. Women's movements in Turkey go back to the late Ottoman Empire where women

²⁷ A magazine, published between 1913 and 1921 during the ottoman period (Kılıçkiran, 1997, p. 103)

²⁸ According to Hamit Bozarslan, 'the Kurdish question has constituted the most important challenge to Turkish Republic since its foundation in 1923' along with the *irtica* which means 'religious reaction' (Bozarslan 2008, p. 333).

demanded a part of public life (Çakır 1994). By the 1980s, the second wave of feminist movements emerged. 'Many achievements were made thanks to the women's movement in Turkey: reforms in the Civil Code, bringing the establishment of women's shelters against domestic violence to the agenda, discussing topics such as domestic violence, rape, virginity control, sexual harassment, honour killings, etc.' (Dogan 2020). However, with the decline of democracy in the 2010s, women encountered new challenges, fighting for their rights that they had already obtained after a long history of struggle (Kılıçkiran 1997; Tekeli 2022; Bakan and Tuncel 2019).

The decline in protecting women's right demonstrates how the AKP's policy about gender is contradictory. AKP's gender policy can be split into two phases: 1) from 2002 to 2011 the party was in favour of supporting women in social and political life; 2) since 2011, the AKP's policies have become more and more 'conservative' and 'traditionalist'.²⁹ The party in government 'ignored existing egalitarian laws, and began to promote Islamically inspired models of traditional roles that could restrict women's access to and benefit from the existing legal framework which feminists had worked so hard to improve' (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 253). The AKP's policies on gender issues do not go beyond the discourse of victimhood and are against the idea of political agency. As Erensü & Alemdaroglu write: 'No matter how it is explained, the accounts of Turkey's authoritarian trajectory often assume a breaking point after which the otherwise reformist AKP had to change gears and switched into a repressive mode, resurrecting the sectarian, patriarchal, and authoritarian character of the party' (Erensü & Alemdaroglu 2018, p. 19).

During its first years in power, the AKP carried out substantial amendments in the Constitutional and the Penal Code regarding gender equality "in line with the demands of EU conditionality" (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 253). However, despite these legal and institutional changes, it seems that no significant progress has been made in terms of the position of women in Turkey during the period of AKP government (Altuntaş & Demirkanoğlu 2017, p. 88). The Global Gender Gap Report indicates that women's position in society and the idea of gender have not been comprehended and therefore there are no considerable changes in this regard. In reports compiled from 2016 to 2020, Turkey always appears towards the bottom of the list: according to the 2020 report, for instance, out of 153 countries Turkey ranks 130th (World Economic Forum 2020). Between 2002 and 2011, the AKP took concrete steps with regard to gender issues and women's human rights protection. In this period, civil organizations took a crucial role in empowering Turkish democracy (Aksoy 2018, p. 103). On the one hand, it cooperated with several NGOs under its own patronage and engaged in dialogue with women's associations in order to make women visible in public life and to disseminate the view of *gender justice* instead of *gender equality*; on the other hand, it marginalized those it found more radical towards body, gender-equality, and sexuality and who could monitor the state's gender policies.³⁰ The women who were excluded from public

²⁹ For a further explanation about the periodic development of AKP's policies on gender see A. Telsiren' article (2020), 'Changing Gender Politics in Turkey throughout the 2000s: A Feminist Analysis of Gender Policies Pursued by Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) Governments'.

³⁰ For example, the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM, Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği) is one of the NGOs that the AKP sponsored to focus on women's issue in line with the party's program and which is called as one of the government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). These GONGOs play a counterrevolutionary role in representing Turkey in international arena and keeping control over civil society. Additionally, taking anti-feminist position, these organizations call for (gender) justice instead of (gender) equality which Erdoğan differentiated in one of his speech (abovementioned). What they mean by gender justice is the elimination of the homogenous image of women created by the idea of gender equality which, according to the president of KADEM, ignored the differences among them (Yılmaz 2015). This signifies that they address the differences among men and differences among women; there is no equality between man and woman but there is justice among them.

life, whose education right were taken away because of their headscarves and who wanted to eliminate this unfairness played an important role in the rise of the AKP and the continuation of electoral support for the AKP (Arat and Sevket 2019, pp. 269-270).

After the general election of 12 June 2011, the AKP returned to a traditionalist outlook, departing from its election manifesto which regarded women as individuals and subjects. After the election, the name of the Ministry of State for Women (*Kadından Sorumlu Devlet Bakanlığı*) was changed to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies thanks to decree-law No. 633 on 29 October 2011. The implication is that women's roles are confined to family and that women's rights should be limited to this institution. Particularly after 2011, one can observe that the AKP left the 'so-called liberal' policies aside and returned to conservative values such as those which consider women as a part of family and community, as the bearer and reproducer of tradition (Altuntaş & Demirkanoglu 2017, p. 84). Erdoğan has consistently encouraged women to have at least three children in public speeches (Hurriyet 2008; NTV 2009; Bianet 2014; Euronews 2017; Evrensel 2021), serving to consolidate patriarchal notions and conservative family values.

After 2011, the AKP began to regard the family as a social policy and legitimated the idea of the 'sacred mother' and 'sacred family' through its policies which defined women through the family. The Turkish president, during various public meetings (Vatan 2010), has underlined the idea that man and woman cannot be equals. In 2014, he claimed that religion (Islam) gave a sacred position to women in society which is motherhood and which is, for him, repudiated by the feminists and feminism (Daloglu 2014). Other AKP bureaucrats besides Erdoğan have made discriminatory remarks about women, emphasizing maternity as the best possible career for women, claiming that virtuous women should not laugh in public, and that pregnant women must stay at home rather than going outside or being visible in public space. Instead of implementing egalitarian laws, they aim to impose traditional religious roles on all women (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 255).

In doing so, AKP proves that it never regarded gender issues as basic social, cultural and political problems; therefore, instead of designing emancipatory policies and contributing to the realization of the WPS Agenda, AKP politicizes the discourse about gender and turns it into an instrument for strengthening and consolidating its power and shoring up public support. Its liberal policies on gender aimed to cement the support of certain groups of women and to restore its one-dimensional project of 'New Turkey'. This New Turkey 'is organized around the supreme power of the President, erosion of checks and balances and separation of powers' (Yılmaz & Turner 2019, p. 691-698). It includes redesigning the legal and political system along with the *re- and de-*construction of academia and the reformulation of the gender issue. At the beginning of its foundation, Erdoğan defined the form of his party's politics as conservative³¹-democratic, thus differentiating itself from National Outlook and other Islamist-based parties and the political standpoint of anti-Westernism more generally. During its first period, AKP's policies could be described as a *hybrid* composed of 'conservative' and 'democrat' discourses together. In its second period, it abandoned hybrid politics and provides only a conservative, conventional and religious vision.

After the termination of the peace process in 2015, the failed coup attempt in July 2016, and the transformation of Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential one by referendum in 2017, women's human rights have suffered serious setbacks and their status is in danger of going backwards. After the failed coup attempt in July 2016, many organizations that worked for the rights of women and children, including human rights and

³¹ Although it is not clear what exactly conservative means here, it can be said that the term 'conservative' refers to being the devout and resistant to change along with being in favor of traditional values.

11 women's organizations (Barisik 2018, p. 16; KESK 2018)³², were closed by KHK³³ (decrees-laws) which were officially finalized in 2018. These were ostensibly issued to clear away traces of 'parallel structuring' (i.e. the Gulenist movement) within the State but began to extend to other opposition elements in the country. These organizations were established in different cities in Turkey in order to provide a space for women who were violated and to provide advice and support. Women become even more vulnerable with the closure of these centres because some women organizations, like VAKAD (Van Women's Association), have done women's studies for many years and following cases based on violence/murder against women; moreover, these organizations and associations supported women with the economic, legal, psychological and social consultancy; they opened literacy courses for women and provided scholarships for girls (Karatat 2017).

Given the fact that AKP shifted its policies from democratic reform to conservatism as far as the gender issue is concerned, it is important to underline that AKP's Caesarist regime is regressive. The emergence of a Caesarist government implies the continuation of the previous system and the preservation of the existing power under a different form. This does not result in a qualitative but merely quantitative Caesarism. Considering its policies about the Kurdish question, the gender issue, and the growth of restrictive and oppressive procedures and measures taken over the last years, such as imprisonment of journalists, academics, entrepreneurs, politicians, the representatives of civil society organizations, women's organizations, women human rights defenders, and other activists, the closure of non-governmental organizations including women's organizations, associations and centres, the AKP's Caesarist regime represents a regressive one, in the sense that it was not able to promote an organic change in society: a continuation of previous authoritarian regime in a different form. Without an ideological dimension and unwilling to support knowledge production and intellectual-cultural development, including knowledge produced by feminist movement, it has failed to construct progressive Caesarist-Bonapartist authoritarianism.

Women's role in peacebuilding: the possibility of hegemony-based on gender equality (gender equality based-hegemony)³⁴

'The world is gigantic and awful and complicated. Every action launched on its complexity awakens unexpected echoes'.³⁵
 A. Gramsci

Making use of women's knowledge production on topics like gender, violence, war, peace, conflict, women's economic, cultural and political status, the way to participate in peace process, etc., is of great importance for a democratic society. Their participation in the educational processes is also crucial in order to eliminate all types of violence, not because they are more sensible than men or that they bring their heart and feelings to the table, but because they are part of this society, and their experiences, knowledge, and perspectives

³² Adıyaman Kadın Yaşam Derneği, Anka Kadın Araştırmaları Derneği, Bursa Panayır Kadın Dayanışma Derneği, Ceren Kadın Derneği, Gökkuşluğu Kadın Derneği, KJA, Muş Kadın Çatısı Derneği, Muş Kadın Derneği, Selis Kadın Derneği, Van Kadın Derneği (VAKAD) (Tahaoglu 2016).

³³ Most part of associations and centers were closed by decree no. 677 on 22 November 2016. With decree 375 associations were closed (Karatat 2017).

³⁴ I would like to thank to Elisa Piras for her suggestion about hegemony based on gender equality instead of my original concept women's hegemony.

³⁵ Translation is mine. 'Il mondo è grande e terribile e complicato. Ogni azione lanciata sulla sua complessità sveglia echi inaspettati' (Frosini & Liguori, 2010).

are different from the dominant male standpoint. They have been more exposed to the existing system's deficiencies and the damage it causes. Another important thing worth mentioning is their capacity to structure a *dialectical relation* between feeling and reason, i.e., heart or spirit and mind by avoiding any reductionism.

Ignoring the role of women and children in bringing about peace and security is emblematic of the AKP's policies of gender mainstreaming and shows their lack of commitment to the implementation and realization of the WPS agenda. Gizem Bilgin Aytac stresses how it is crucial to collaborate with NGOs for the implementation of the WPS agenda in Turkey. Thus, she writes that there are a few NGOs which concentrate on the relationship between peace and women and that there is no specific organization dealing with the WPS agenda (Aytac 2021, p. 10). Burcu Özdemir Sarıgil notes that the Turkish model of Humanitarian Aid and Assistance lacks a gender perspective and commitment to equality (2021).

Given that gender equality is a necessary condition for structuring a democratic and peaceful order, women's perspectives, knowledge and experiences can contribute to solutions for war and conflict. Within the framework of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, which began and intensified in the 1990s, women became vocal about the gender-related risks of the conflict and worked towards opening a space for reconstructing peace. Since 1990, Kurdish and Turkish women have collaborated in the creation of women's peace groups. In 2009, some of these activists founded the 'Women's Initiative for Peace' to further the ongoing struggle against male domination and war (Barış için Kadın Girişimi 2014). These women believed that the Kurdish question could be resolved and peace restored if women's voice could be heard and if they could participate in the peace process (Alemder 2019). Kurdish and Turkish feminist groups worked together to build a culture of peace: for instance, in the 2000s, the feminist magazine *Amargi* created a space in which these activists could write about the damages produced by militarism and war (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 250).

Notwithstanding women's attempts at contributing to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and their proposals for the strengthening of democratic norms and institutions, they were excluded from the negotiation processes during and after the conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey regarding the Kurdish question; during the last years, their rights have been not only violated, but questioned. In the concluding observations on Turkey's seventh periodic report in 2016, CEDAW recommended that Turkey take necessary steps to begin peace negotiations and 'ensure that women and women's rights organizations are included in all peace negotiations and post-conflict efforts for rebuilding and reconstruction' (CEDAW 2016, article 37a). The implementation of international conventions such as CEDAW and Security Council resolution 1325, which protect, secure, preserve, and fulfil women's human rights, is necessary at a national and regional level in preventing the violation of human rights during and after conflict.

The headscarf ban was another challenge in the democratization process. Religious women struggled to obtain rights against secular restrictions on dress in public space. In 2013, the headscarf ban was repealed by the AKP and therefore the Islamist women's protest against the headscarf ban petered out. Their struggle, unlike the critique of the contradictory religious view on women, was supported by many feminist-secular groups considering their struggle as a human right issue. 'With the rise of the AKP to power in 2002 and the positive atmosphere generated by the EU accession process, Islamist women's CSOs began to cooperate with some feminist and Kurdish women's CSOs to improve women's rights' (Aksoy 2018, p.106). Critical Islamist CSOs and groups of Muslim feminists worked with other women's CSOs to fight against the proposed abortion ban in 2013 (Aksoy 2018, p.106). The basic criticism made by these critical Islamist CSOs was directed at the government's intervention on their body once the secular state did the same for their headscarf.

Therefore, they refuted all 'types of control over women's bodies whether in the name of modernity, secularism, the Republic, religion, tradition, custom, morality, honour or freedom' (Arat 2010, p. 880). Secular feminists and pious women collaborated together to struggle against the attempt of the AKP majority in parliament to change the Penal Code in 2016. This Code proposed a law that 'would allow men who had sex with underage children, including rape, to have their punishment deferred if they married them. The bill aimed to protect those men who contracted religious marriages with girls below the age of marriage as prescribed by the Civil Code' (Arat & Pamuk 2019, p. 260).

Since women and children are more vulnerable groups because of migration, poverty, violence, rape, discrimination resulting from male wars, it is necessary to hear women's words about the war and its results, about peace and its process, its conditions and the way to reconstruct it. The AKP has tried to destroy women's desires to establish a non-hierarchical, non-sexist, democratic country since 2011. It is necessary that Turkish, Kurdish, and religious women come together through their organizations and collaborate with each other to fight against an authoritarian regime to obtain their rights and to establish a peaceful and democratic society in which they are regarded as subjects or agents.

The establishment of *gender-equality based-hegemony* can be a solution to the damage produced by conflict and war which are the result of the existing capitalist system. By the concept of gender-equality hegemony, I am referring to the Gramscian sense of hegemony which demands a consensus and an intellectual-cultural leadership based on gender equality. More precisely, political and cultural hegemony. 'The charismatic *women of destiny*'³⁶ can bring a different perspective to the social, cultural and political problems of a world in crisis; it is the crisis of male supremacy and, as Gramsci says, this old system is bound to die, allowing a new one to be born through a gender-equality based-hegemony.

The particular demand of women is to be accepted as individuals who can control their lives and who can decide on their bodies. 'Instead, many feminist scholars argue that the increased focus on sexual violence has seen "women returned [...] to the singular destination of victimhood" [...], and the emphasis on women's agency and the role they could play in building peace recede into the background' (Thomson 2019, p. 601). This is a crucial and significant criticism which stresses on women as actors of their actions and decisions and on their power and ability to construct peace and *peaceful hegemony*.

(Feminist) Women are considered as enemies for two reasons: firstly, because they produce knowledge about the gender question by criticizing the patriarchal structure of society; secondly, because women are now more visible in public life; thirdly, they have a particular way of struggling which is different from the traditionalist style in the sense that they are more open to negotiation and they are more colourful in struggle. However, women may assume cultural-intellectual leadership and could bring about peace through an anti-militarist, anti-war stance.

Conclusion

This study focused primarily on women's role in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping process in Turkey by two ways: a) first it investigated how AKP's policies undermine the development of a gender perspective in civil and political society through the use of Gramsci's organic intellectuals and his Caesarist-Bonapartist model to explain Erdoğan's authoritarianism; b) it acknowledged that women and women's organizations might have a great potentiality of creating/leading a hegemonic alternative by taking a counterhegemonic position.

³⁶ Originally, Gramsci refers to 'charismatic "men of destiny"' (Gramsci 1992 *SPN*, p. 210).

The article tried to interpret the current regime as Caesarist-Bonapartist by using Gramscian theory and terminology which is in line with its approach to the gender issue. This study demonstrated that the AKP could not establish its own hegemony while it failed to build cultural-intellectual and ideological leadership.

This article demonstrated that the AKP tried to establish its hegemony by engaging in civil and political society. Instead of establishing this hegemony by the *spontaneous* development of civil society, i.e., by supporting *independent* civil organizations, and instead of implementing the WSP agenda which advocates female participation in the peace building process and underlines the importance of NAPs, it built up its civil organization to control civil society, to support its agenda, to circulate its ideology and views. This essentialist and victimhood-oriented approach block the AKP from implementing the WPS agenda. In a country like Turkey, where religious and ethnic conflicts always exist, the implementation of the WPS agenda becomes crucial to empower women and their organizations or associations to deal with intersecting religious, ethnic, economic, and sexist problems.

In a Gramscian sense, women's movements in civil society can create a counterhegemonic power not only against the hegemony of the state but also the hierarchical, patriarchal, nationalist, conservative, racist and colonialist structure of the state and society. Women's movements can create a new potential for a *gender equality based-hegemony*. As Gramsci analyses through his theory of intellectuals, he believes that the bourgeois intellectuals, during the fascist period, supported the state to gain the people's consent within civil society by producing and controlling the ideas. What Gramsci is suggesting is to criticize, question, and struggle against these ideas and create new counter-ideas or a new counter-ideology to gain people's consent. In this respect, women's movement and feminist ideology can respond to a Gramscian hegemonic demand.³⁷

Gramscian thinking helps us to understand how the women's movement can create 'a new organization of knowledge' (Dikici-Bilgin 2009, p. 112) by replacing and removing the old *regressive-aggressive* one.

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Funding

The research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Acknowledgements

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³⁷ For a different perspective on Gramsci's theory of civil society and women's civil society organizations and movements see Markus Kotela (2013), *Europeanization and Civil Society Turkish NGOs as instruments of change?*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, New York (p 163). The author mostly focuses on the contradictions and conflicts between counterhegemonic voices in society while they challenge 'each other's legitimacy in a public debate' (p. 163).

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Localising WPS in the Post-Soviet Space

Reconfigurations, Copy-Pasting and Conceptual Gaps

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Abstract

The localisation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has been a growing trend over the past years. Its aim is to turn the often somewhat abstract aims of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) into tangible ‘on-the-ground’ activities; to allow for broader and more diverse participation; and to expand the issues covered by NAPs, focusing on local needs. Localisation has taken different forms, ranging from more heavily ‘top-down’ to mainly ‘bottom-up’ approaches, and combinations of these. Based on an analysis of WPS processes in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine, I examine the different approaches taken, hurdles encountered, and emerging re-configurations of WPS. Using these five case examples, I examine to what degree the high hopes placed in localisation have materialised, and where potential future entry points lie. As the massive 2022 escalation of the Ukraine War occurred during the revision process, it will only be reflected upon briefly.

Keywords: Women; Peace; Security; Localisation; Post-Soviet

Introduction

In this article, I focus on efforts to localise the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans (NAPs) in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine. Although they are often not given much prominence in global debates on WPS, a number of the countries emerging out of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) have been actively working on WPS issues, especially over the past decade. Since the passing of Georgia’s first WPS NAP in 2012, numerous other countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia have followed suit, in particular those seeking a closer integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Kyrgyzstan passed its first NAP in 2013, Tajikistan in 2015, Ukraine in 2016, Moldova in 2018 and Armenia in 2019, and both Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are by now on their third NAP.

All of the NAPs in the region are “inward-looking”, meaning they are focused on achieving WPS aims within the country’s borders. This is in contrast to for example most donor-country WPS NAPs which are only “outward-looking”, focusing on what the country is doing abroad in terms of promoting WPS. All countries, as discussed further below, are also implementing their NAPs in a context of conflict or outright war. A further key feature in all of the five countries, which I focus on here, has been the pioneering of different approaches to localising their NAPs through different approaches.

In terms of the structure of this article, I will first discuss the methodology and the context of the research. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of localisation, and how it has been theorised and put into practice in the WPS policy sphere. Then, I give an overview

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of WPS NAP processes in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine with a lens on localisation. I then discuss some of the key findings and end with more general conclusions.

Methodology

This article draws on a review of key documents from the five countries as well as semi-structured research interviews conducted with key informants, both in person in 2019 and online in 2021. Some Interviews were also followed up with e-mail questions. The key documents reviewed included all of the WPS NAPs themselves, evaluations and assessments of their implementation where these were available, and relevant 'grey literature' from NGOs, think-tanks and international agencies, such as UN Women. These were available to differing degrees, with more information being available on the Georgia and Ukraine NAPs, and especially the Armenia NAP having little in the way of secondary information on its implementation. For the NAP analysis, English translations from the LSE WPS Centre NAP database (<https://www.wpsnaps.org/>) were used. The NAPs analysed were Armenia NAP I (2019), Georgia NAPs I-III (2011, 2016, 2018), Kyrgyzstan NAPs I-III (2013, 2016, 2018), Moldova NAP I (2018), and Ukraine NAP I (2016, amended in 2018), using a basic content analysis approach, with a particular focus on localization.

The qualitative research consisted of two distinct phases, an in-person field research phase in the second half of 2019, and on-line, zoom and e-mail-based, research in 2020-2021. The 2019 field research was part of a broader study on WPS NAPs in the OSCE region, which covered Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, in which localisation was one of the thematic focus areas among others (published as OSCE/LSE 2020). The interviewees for this phase, 26 in Kyrgyzstan, 20 in Moldova, 22 in Ukraine, were from national and local level government, local civil society organisations working on WPS, academia and think tanks, international organisations such as UN Women and OSCE, as well as international NGOs (see References below for a list of interviewed organisations). These interviews were semi-structured and the questions depended on the area of expertise of the interviewee, and not all of them pertained to localisation, given the broader overall remit of the research. All interviews were anonymised and verbal consent was given.¹ The interviews were either conducted in English or in the respective local language through a translator, and handwritten notes were taken. The interviewees had been selected by the respective OSCE mission as key interlocutors on WPS issues. The second, on-line, phase of the research for this article was focused solely on experiences of localisation, and consisted of seven online interviews (two with international NGOs working on WPS NAPs in the region, one each with either the national UN Women office or OSCE office)² as well as approximately a dozen e-mail exchanges with staff from civil society organisations and international organisations working on WPS NAP implementation and localisation in the five countries.

The research for this paper faced several limitations. The Covid-19 pandemic limited access to local actors for the second phase, but also led to a lack of implementation of local level activities, especially in the cases of Armenia and Moldova. In the case of Armenia, the re-escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh War and subsequent political crisis in 2020 also put a hold on many planned NAP activities. Furthermore, as became evident in the national-level interviews, national actors often lacked an overview of activities at the local level, and thus struggled to collate data and assess the effects of localisation. Gauging the impact of localisation efforts was also beyond the scope of this research, as the reporting on localisation efforts was almost exclusively focused on activities and outputs (e.g. number of

¹ As the interviews did not cover vulnerable populations, the research did not go through an IRB.

² The international actors were chosen due to ease of external access during the pandemic and as I was mostly seeking follow-up information on localisation

workshops or plans developed) rather than how these had an impact in the lives of women and girls.

The research for this article also preceded the 2022 escalation of the Ukrainian War, which has had an immense negative impact on Women, Peace and Security at all levels in the country, but I have added references to the new phase of war where relevant.

Regional context

In spite of important differences between them, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine also share several important traits which are pertinent to the implementation of their NAPs. Given their shared history as former constituent republics of the USSR, all these countries inherited similar state administrative and governance structures upon independence. All five countries have further had to build their own national security and justice sector institutions by drawing on, as well as restructuring and reforming the ones from the Soviet era. The institutional culture of Soviet-era bureaucracy in these structures was one which in many ways was diametrically opposed to the spirit of the WPS Agenda: obsessed with state security and secrecy, undemocratic and non-participatory, untransparent and hierarchical. The USSR was also highly militarised, with key areas of civilian life such as the economy and education also harnessed into maintaining a position of military strength vis-à-vis external enemies, and the internal security services geared towards rooting out internal opposition.

Notably, all five countries are conflict-affected to some degree, ranging most dramatically from the ongoing all-out war in Ukraine, over a briefer war in Armenia in 2020, to border conflicts as between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, or “frozen” conflicts such as Transnistria in Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. In the case of Georgia, the frozen conflicts re-erupted in 2008 in the 11-day Russo-Georgian War. Both Georgia and Tajikistan also experienced civil wars in the 1990s. Security concerns in the five countries are often framed in terms of geopolitics, and WPS has been seen by some of the governments as a way of increasing their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. being closer to NATO and the European Union. This has arguably been especially the case for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and there has been mutual co-operation as well as exchanges between state and civil society representatives of the three countries on WPS NAPs’ development, implementation and monitoring (UN Women Ukraine 2018). This connection between promoting gender equality and seeking Euro-Atlantic integration, one Ukrainian civil society interviewee noted, was seen by some as also leading to a geopolitical backlash:

“The resistance to gender equality, against the so-called “gender agenda” in the media and social media, that is part of Russia’s hybrid warfare against us.”³

Lastly, even if they have broken with it, all five countries share a history of having been part of the USSR with its own gendered socio-economic and political legacies which shaped local gender norms and dynamics (see for example also Handrahan 2001; Usha 2005; Bureychak 2012; Jojishvili 2021). The USSR officially promoted gender equality and launched campaigns to root out “backward” traditional patriarchal practices, such as polygamy, child marriage or the use of the veil, especially among the non-Russian ethnic minorities. Women’s participation in the economy and in academia was high, but political participation was low (Usha 2005). Soviet society, in spite of celebrating women’s empowerment, remained largely patriarchal and especially the security sector and political decision-

³ Interview, Kyiv, October 2019. It should however be noted that some of the anti-gender equality voices in the five countries are also anti-Russian. On Russian anti-gender foreign policy, see also Edenborg (2021)

making remained mostly male domains (Alexievich 2017; Usha 2005). In the post-Soviet era, political decision-making has largely remained a male-dominated space, although in particular in recent years women have gained more political prominence in the five countries covered here, to differing degrees. While gender equality is nowadays arguably embedded into society and politics more deeply than during the Soviet era, the immediate post-Soviet era saw rollbacks in several countries in terms of socio-economic gains that had been by women under Soviet rule. “Gender” as a term and concept has also become a highly politicised in the five countries, with Orthodox Christian and conservative Muslim religious actors as well as nationalist political groups arguing in all five countries that it undermines national culture and ‘the natural order of things’ (see also Wilkinson & Langlois 2014; Heinrich Boell Foundation 2015; Edenborg 2021).

These legacies and dynamics have shaped the possibilities for the implementation of and the resistances faced by the WPS Agenda, as local administrative structured and security sector institutions have often remained wedded to what several of the interviewees for this study called “the old way of thinking”.

The Promises of Localisation

The localisation of WPS NAPs has been increasingly explored in a number of countries through a variety of approaches, and is a topic that is gaining increasing attention from national and international actors. These have included the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UN Women and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the latter of whom has published a toolkit on the issue (Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos 2018). Localisation has been promoted as a key pathway for ensuring a more meaningful and participatory implementation of the WPS Agenda, for example in the UN Women (2015) Global Study on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. As I explore further below, there are many hopes that have been projected on to localisation: that it ideally makes WPS NAPs more concrete in terms of their impact, that it better responds to lived realities and human security needs, and that it increases women’s diverse and meaningful participation. It also allows, in theory at least, for a formulation of more tailored responses to the particular gendered security risks and needs faced by different parts of a country (e.g. the different needs in rural vs. urban settings or in border areas).

Localisation is often seen as a key pathway towards addressing the gap between WPS policy and lived reality, and are seen as a way of delivering tangible results based on locally articulated needs, as outlined for example by Amling & O’Reilly (2016), Babic-Svetlin et al. (2016) and Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos (2018). Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos (2018, p. 15) see localisation as a way of overcoming gaps in implementing and delivering concretely on the promises of the WPS Agenda, ideally ‘guarantee[ing] leadership, ownership and participation of local communities.’ They also see localisation of the agenda (as opposed to the localisation of a NAP) as an alternative peacebuilding and conflict prevention tool in contexts where there is no NAP.

For Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos (2018, p. 18-19) outline the key objectives of localisation are local-level awareness-raising on the WPS Agenda, identifying local WPS concerns, fostering local ownership and commitment to delivering on WPS, developing new legal and policy instruments for local-level WPS implementation and increasing accountability and co-ordination between various actors. Amling & O’Reilly (2016) further see localisation as a means to address structural barriers to diverse women’s participation in peace and security processes, as well as increasing flexibility and more thematic diversity in WPS action plans.

Respondents to the interviews tended to see localisation as a positive step in theory, and echoed many of the arguments outlined above:

“Through localisation, we can address the different WPS needs of women in different parts of the country. This here is a port town, close to the border – our needs are different from a rural area or from Kyiv.”⁴

“The local level consultations with women across the country allowed us to capture the different needs across the country and link the local level women with the national process.”⁵

“Ideally, localising the NAP will make the activities more concrete on the ground, make WPS more meaningful to women.”⁶

However, many were sceptical of its implementation and efficacy in practice, as will be discussed further below. A key concern across all countries was a lack of centrally collated data on LAPs and their implementation. This made it difficult for those working on the WPS Agenda at the national level to get an understanding of what was actually happening locally in terms of the LAPs beyond what plans had been shared with them.⁷

Pathways of Localisation

Localisation of NAPs has been understood and approached in different ways in the countries where it has been implemented.⁸ International actors also have differing approaches. GNWP for example focuses on the local formulation of WPS Action Plans developed by civil society with decentralised local authorities, even independently of a NAP (Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos, 2018). OSCE and UN Women, on the other hand, also include the local implementation of centrally designed and mandated plans. Based on the research conducted for this paper, I expand the framework we had developed in the OSCE/LSE (2020) study, identifying seven different pathways for localisation:

⁴ Civil society representative, Odesa, October 2019

⁵ Civil society representative, Bishkek, October 2019

⁶ Representative of international organization based in Tbilisi, online interview, June 2021

⁷ This was also a challenge in as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia where I also conducted research on the issue in 2019. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation on NAP activities were however not only challenges in terms of localised activities. Even solely central government-level NAPs struggle with collating relevant data across all implementing ministries and civil society, an issue that goes well beyond the countries covered here.

⁸ Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos (2018) list Armenia, Burundi, Colombia (which has no NAP), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, the Philippines, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Uganda, and Ukraine, in addition to which there is at least also Kyrgyzstan

Table 1 – Pathways of implementing localisation

Pathway
1. Developing a WPS local action plan (LAP) “from the ground up” independently of a NAP based on localised gender and security analysis
2. Local level actors develop a LAP within the parameters of a NAP but based on their own local gender and security analysis
3. Locally implementable activities by local-level actors are integrated into national level plans
4. Local actors (e.g. local government) copy activities from NAPs directly, adapt these and implementing them locally
5. Top-down implementation of a NAP through the local structures of national ministries or security sector institutions
6. WPS-relevant issues are integrated by local authorities into existing or broader local gender equality implementation plans (e.g. municipal gender equality action plans)
7. Implementing individual projects with relevance to WPS issues but which are not directly tied to a national action plan

Source: Author’s elaboration

These seven pathways are not mutually exclusive and often happen in parallel. In the five cases covered here, all NAPs integrate elements of pathway number five, for example through the local level implementation in a local police precinct of national guidelines on gender in policing or other WPS guidelines from a Ministry of the Interior. For the purposes of this article, I will not examine pathways six and seven in much detail, as gathering data on these was beyond the scope of my research. Charting pathway six would require a systematic mapping of gender equality-relevant action plans by various local administrative structures at the municipal, county and provincial/district levels. Localised activities under pathway seven, meanwhile, are almost by definition not captured by national level WPS actors unless they are specifically informed about them. Many of my respondents highlighted however that, to differing degrees in the countries, there may be a substantial number of activities by local civil society and local government structures that would fall under this category. These would for example include the local level Women’s Resource Centres in Kyrgyzstan or local NGOs’ anti-human trafficking work in Ukraine (OSCE/LSE 2020).

The geographical scope of localisation varied between the countries studied here, with Ukraine seeking to implement it across the whole of the country, and the others only in select regions, at least for the moment.

Overview of the NAPs country contexts and localisation processes

In this section, I will give an overview of the NAP processes in the five countries, listed in alphabetical order, with a particular focus on localisation processes.⁹ As mentioned above in the limitations, the available data is unevenly spread, with little secondary data available on the processes of localisation in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, and a more substantial documentation of the processes in Georgia and Ukraine.

⁹ The countries are listed in alphabetical order rather than following a historical trajectory of when the NAPs were introduced, as the latter would have required jumping between country contexts for those countries which have implemented several NAPs, or, in the case of Ukraine, undertaken an amendment at mid-term. There is however a degree of interplay between at least some of the countries, as experiences and good practices from NAP implementation in one country has influenced NAP development in other countries.

Armenia

Armenia's first WPS NAP covers the period 2019-2021 (Republic of Armenia, 2019). The localisation agenda was supported during the design phase by outside actors, including GNWP (Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos, 2018). Nonetheless, as with many of the other NAPs covered here, what I have termed the fifth pathway of localisation (i.e. local implementation WPS guidelines of a central-level ministry by subordinate entities) remains the main modus of localisation in Armenia in the plan. However, the implementation plan does include one specific objective under the participation pillar that explicitly outlines a role for local authorities as well as civil society, working together with three national level ministries.¹⁰ The scope of this is limited geographically to the border areas: "Support the social adaptation of wives to the soldiers in military units of border settlements". The relevant measure is specified as being "Collaboration with national institutions, local self-governing bodies, non-governmental organisations on the issues of social integration of wives to the soldiers" (Republic of Armenia, 2019, Objective 7). Similar to Georgia, there is a direct link between the localisation activity with a national level strategic security objective, in this case border security and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unlike the bottom-up, locally rooted approaches championed by Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos (2018), the localisation was more top-down.

Based on interviews with global and national actors, the implementation of this objective was severely hampered by three simultaneous crises during the period of implementation: the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War as well as the ensuing political crisis in Armenia. The outcomes and impacts of this limited localisation activity thus remain unclear.

Georgia

Georgia has been an early pioneer of WPS NAPs in the region and has been very active in sharing its experiences both with neighbouring countries as well as further abroad, e.g. in the West Balkans. The current WPS NAP (2018-2020) is the country's third (Republic of Georgia 2018).¹¹ While 'pathway 5' localisation through national level ministries is part of the plan, the NAP also prominently includes localisation as a way to better meet the needs of women internally displaced persons (IDPs)¹² and in communities along the administrative border lines (ABL) with the break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Localisation was already included in the previous 2016-2017 NAP, but this was viewed in an external evaluation of the plan as being one of its weak spots (Women's Information Center 2017). The review concluded that 'it was not possible to decentralize the process and involve the local self-government in development and implementation process of the NAP' (Women's Information Center, 2017, p. 13). It further recommends to embed localisation more centrally, "to provide development, approval and budgetary provision" for localisation, strengthen co-operation and co-ordination on this between central and local administrative structures, and bring in civil society actors into the process (Women's Information Center, 2017, p. 73).

The critique and recommendations with regards to localisation were picked up upon in the development and implementation of the third NAP. In particular, a coalition of three civil

¹⁰ These are the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development, and Ministry of Defence.

¹¹ At the time of writing in 2021, the development of the fourth NAP from 2020 is still on-going due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

¹² These IDPs were displaced from Abkhazia and South Ossetia during 1991-1992 (South Ossetia War), 1992-1993 (Abkhazian War) and during the 2008 war (from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia)

society organisations (CSOs), the IDP Women's Association “Consent”, Women's Information Center and Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sokhumi” launched a NAP localisation project with support from UN Women and the U.S. Department of State.¹³ The project aimed at strengthening the capacities of the regional and local administrations in the localisation and implementation of the NAP as well as to enhance the participation of IDP, conflict-affected and marginalised women in ten municipalities of Georgia.¹⁴ These are mostly, but not exclusively, municipalities bordering the ABL with either Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Within the framework of the project, the coalition of three NGOs approached localisation by working together with the municipal authorities, organising town hall meetings which led to the establishment of localisation working groups. These included representatives from the local government, civil society organizations and grass-root women, which then developed roadmaps for the localisation of the NAP together with the municipalities concerned. The NGOs’ coalition continued to give technical support to these working groups throughout, and support them in advocating for the inclusion of identified priorities into the local budgets for 2020. In the case of Zugdidi, the local action plan development was led by the municipality itself, and activities were funded from the municipality’s budget. Other municipalities allocated funds from their local budgets to fund some of the WPS issues identified during the localization process.¹⁵

In parallel to the WPS NAP implementation process, a localisation of the Gender Equality National Action Plan was also underway in 62 municipalities from 2018 onwards. These municipalities, which were spread out across the country, developed local gender equality action plans and established Gender Equality Councils. One of the concerns by national WPS actors was to ensure that these gender equality LAPs also reflect WPS concerns and commitments. The new Gender Equality Councils are also potentially mechanisms for increasing women’s diverse participation, addressing the needs of IDP and conflict-affected populations and further advocate for these needs to be included in relevant local policies, programs, and budgets.¹⁶

As a result of the WPS localisation pilot project, in eight of the ten pilot municipalities, amendments were made to the gender equality LAPs relating to the rights of IDP and conflict-affected women and girls. Zugdidi municipality went the furthest, with its own stand-alone WPS LAP with targeted awareness raising for those living adjacent to the ABLs and IDPs on the rights of women and girls, as well as available health and social services available. The municipality also ensured broader participation of CSOs working on women’s rights, as well as women community leaders in their councils and commissions, including on Gender Equality. Municipal funds were further allocated for local CSO projects supporting socially vulnerable groups and families; roads, gas, water supply, public transportation and kindergartens in the villages adjacent to the ABL were improved; and financial support and transport subsidies were provided to IDP and conflict affected families.¹⁷

The working group meetings within the municipalities and joint national conferences helped improve coordination between the authorities and civil society, but also among the central, regional and local governments. UN Women was also involved in supporting and monitoring the NAP localisation process. This is set to continue in municipalities adjacent

¹³ The full name of the project is ‘Strengthening the Capacities of the Regional and Local Administrations in the Processes of Localization of the National Action Plan (NAP) UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Enhancing the Dialogue and Participation of Women, including the most Marginalized in those Processes’

¹⁴ These are Dusheti, Gori, Kareli, Kaspi, Khashuri, Sachkhere, Stepantsminda, Tsalenjikha, Tskaltubo and Zugdidi

¹⁵ These were Tsalenjikha, Gori, and Sachkhere municipalities

¹⁶ Interview with UN Women Georgia, 2021

¹⁷ Online interviews, 2021

to the ABLs as well as in municipalities with IDP populations in the coming years under the fourth WPS NAP which is still being formulated at the time of writing (UN Women Georgia, 2021).

The localisation process of the WPS NAP in Georgia thus followed multiple pathways, in particular the second, third, fifth and sixth ones. The bulk of the localisation efforts was in border areas and focused on IDPs and conflict-affected women, and in part linked to the broader Gender Equality NAP localisation process. While, as in Armenia, the localisation process thus also served to highlight national-level security concerns, the process of designing and implementing the activities was a more participatory one, and had strong civil society and municipal input, rather than going through state institutions only.

Kyrgyzstan

At the time of writing, Kyrgyzstan is on its third WPS NAP, which was planned to be in force 2018-2020 (Government of the Kyrgyz Republic 2018). A form of localisation was already included in its design and development process through a round of consultations that was organised in the seven regions of the country. These consultations were organised with local self-government bodies and women's rights activists and organisations, who shared their views on what the priorities should be for the NAP. These were then collated and developed into an implementation roadmap by the Forum of Women Deputies. Three of the key issues raised, according to interviews, were including combatting radicalisation and violent extremism in the NAP, paying special attention to security concerns of communities in border areas as well as developing local security plans.¹⁸

Much of the input from across the country was reflected in the WPS NAP, including increasing "women's participation and support for women's initiatives, including at the local level, to reduce the risks of radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism" (Objective 1.2), as well as preventing conflicts, strengthening GBV prevention measures and addressing the gendered impacts of conflict and other crises and disasters at all levels, including locally (Objective 2). The development of local security plans is encouraged (Objective 3.2.2.), as are contingency plans for border areas (2.3.3.). Furthermore, two conflict management pilot projects were foreseen, one in the north and one in the south of the country (Objective 2.1.1.). The plan also calls for "increasing women's representation in local council and local government bodies" (Objective 1.1.). The NAP specifically names local government bodies as implementers of the plan in addition to national level ones, and encourages close engagement with civil society. As with the other NAPs covered here, it also includes "pathway five" localisation through local level entities of national ministries, such as in disaster risk reduction. The plan also calls for more coordination between different government levels.

Furthermore, several LAPs have been developed independently in Kyrgyzstan, in part by copying the NAP for use at the local level, and the NGO Women's Support Centre has also been working with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on a pilot project on strengthening the capacity of women's committees and Public Prevention Centres in ten "newly built neighbourhoods" (*novostroyki*) surrounding Bishkek. The focus of this project has been on increasing women's participation, prevention of gender-based violence, and crime prevention more broadly (OSCE 2020).

The implementation capacity of local administrations was seen as being one of the bottlenecks of the localisation process in Kyrgyzstan, though similar sentiments were also echoed in Moldova and Ukraine:

¹⁸ Interviews with state and civil society representatives, Bishkek and Osh, 2019

‘The local and municipal administrations are really struggling – they keep on getting more and more action plans from the national level to implement, and to report on, but they do not have the capacity or resources to do so, and do not necessarily understand the aim of the policies.’¹⁹

Civil society interviewees also highlighted wider resistance to gender equality among some male members of local administrations, hindering effective localisation efforts (OSCE/LSE 2020).

Moldova

Moldova is at the time of writing in its final year of its first WPS NAP, which runs from 2018 to 2021 (Republic of Moldova, 2018). The central actors for the implementation of the NAP are national level ministries and agencies, as well as their subsidiaries. Thus, by far the main pathway of localisation has been the fifth one, namely the local-level implementation of activities through entities under the control of national ministries. The one concrete local level activity that is articulated in the plan is on raising public awareness on increasing women’s participation in the security sector, on reducing harmful stereotypes and on WPS more broadly (Republic of Moldova, 2018). Nonetheless, there have been initial attempts at WPS localisation, in part with the support of the Austrian Development Agency. These have included workshops on promoting WPS and women’s participation, including in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (OSCE 2020). Further implementation of the localisation plans was however put on hold due to Covid-19. However, what was noticeable in the interviews with national-level actors in Chisinau and subsequent follow-up attempts to find out more about these localisation efforts was a lack of centralised data on them among national actors, beyond those activities which were implemented along the fifth pathway, i.e. through national institutions (cf. OSCE/LSE 2020).

Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine as covered here pertains largely to the situation prior to the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, which, in addition to the immense suffering caused, has up-ended the situation with respect to WPS.

Ukraine published its first WPS NAP in 2016, and it remained in force until 2020 (Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine, 2016). The NAP is the most ambitious of the five countries covered here in terms of localisation. Localisation of the NAP has been written into the national plan and all *oblast* (regional) governments have been tasked with developing WPS action plans by the Ministry of Social Policy. Furthermore, municipality/settlement (*hromada*) level governments have also been encouraged to develop their own LAPs (UN Women Ukraine, 2018b; see also Dudko and Langenhuizen, 2022 for an in-depth discussion). At least 18 oblast governments have developed their own LAPs and others have integrated them into broader gender equality and/or social development action plans, such as in Dnipro. The plans have been of a mixed scope and quality, with some developing their plans based on a localised gender and security analysis, often with substantial CSO input (e.g. Luhansk region); others integrating elements of WPS into other plans (e.g. Kherson and Zhytomyr); some focusing on the local implementation of national activities outlined in the NAP (e.g. Odesa) and others reportedly taking shortcuts (OSCE/LSE 2020):

“The quality of the LAPs really varied, depending on the level of interest and knowledge among local administration, and among local women’s organisations.

¹⁹ Kyrgyz national staff of an international organization, Bishkek, October 2019

Some were really outstanding, but other just took the NAP, copy-pasted the activities into their LAP, and didn't even adjust them to the local level.”²⁰

While the development of a context-specific, gender analysis based action plans was seen by respondents as the ideal case, with Luhansk region getting a special mention as a good case, the other options – short of simply copy-pasting the NAP – were seen as resource-effective ways of addressing WPS (cf. Dudko & Langenhuizen 2022). Nevertheless, they had the drawback of not necessarily having much analysis of local needs going into them. Most of the regional plans do not have an earmarked budget, and a mid-term review highlights that many struggled to find additional resources (UN Women Ukraine 2018b; Dudko & Langenhuizen 2022). The mid-term review also raises the issue of a lack of understanding of WPS issues at the oblast and hromada levels (UN Women Ukraine 2018). A further issue which came up in interviews was the lack of commitment to gender equality and to engaging with civil society among some local-level administrators. Situating the action plans at the oblast level thus does bring WPS closer to the local level, but it does not necessarily translate into effective local implementation unless the next-lower level of administration, i.e. the municipalities, are properly engaged, and have the political will, capacity and resources to implement them (OSCE/LSE 2020).

The development of oblast action plans has been supported by external partners, including the OSCE, UN Women and GNWP. UN Women Ukraine for example has conducted localisation workshops in at least Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, and has developed detailed localisation guidelines for local government (UN Women Ukraine 2021). The Ukrainian Women's Fund has also been holding trainings for local government and civil society actors in oblast centres to raise awareness about UNSCR 1325 at the local level.

The Russian invasion in February 2022 has, in the starkest of ways, underscored the importance of the WPS Agenda at all levels. At the Ukrainian-level much of the work has had to be suspended or radically reconfigured. For example, with respect to conflict-related sexual violence, the Ukrainian government and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict have drawn up a framework co-operation agreement, explicitly referencing the NAP (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and OSRSG-SVC 2022). The Russian invasion has also however been accompanied by a curious WPS-related silence by key outside actors, such as by NATO, raising concerns about how seriously the Agenda is taken by these actors (Wright 2022).

Discussion

This brief analysis of the localisation efforts in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine has highlighted some initial positive outcomes of localisation efforts as well as a number of the challenges. While from a global level vantage point (e.g. UN Women 2015), localisation is seen as something of a verstaile, multi-purpose tool to address the shortcomings in implementing the WPS Agenda, things look much more challenging at the working level of municipalities and regional administrative units. That is not to say that localisation has failed, but rather that it is very much work in progress. As mentioned in the introduction, assessing the impact of the localisation efforts was and is hampered by a lack of available data as well as by the fact that implementation often is still at the very early stages, and has been put on hold by Covid-19 as well as other factors, such as conflict in Armenia and between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Ukraine, most dramatically, the previously-achieved results have been at a minimum put in question by the Russian invasion. Nonetheless, I will attempt to draw out some preliminary findings here.

²⁰ Interview, national-level state representative, Kyiv, October 2019

The five countries covered here have implemented localisation through a variety of approaches. Pathway one, in which LAPs are formulated independently and pro-actively at the local level independent of a NAP, has been pioneered to some extent in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos 2018), but more data on these efforts was not available beyond them having taken place. Pathway two, in which local level civil society and administrative structures develop a LAP within the parameters of a NAP led arguably to the most concrete localisation outputs, in particular when there was strong engagement by local civil society and a high level of buy-in from key figures in local administration, such as in the case of Zugdidi municipality in Georgia and Luhansk oblast in Ukraine. The third pathway, in which locally articulated needs and activities are integrated into a NAP was followed to an extent in Georgia and also in the development and design process of the third WPS NAP in Kyrgyzstan. In Ukraine, there were also instances in which local government structures, rather than formulating their own activities, chose to copy these from the NAP, which according to interviewees did not always correspond to local needs and implementation capacities. In all countries, local level organs of national ministries were tasked with implementing activities of national level ministries, in what I have termed pathway five. Pathway six of integrating WPS objectives into other local action plans was followed by some municipalities in Georgia, who integrated these into the gender equality action plans which were being developed at the time of the third WPS NAP. Lastly, according to respondents, activities falling under the seventh pathway have been implemented but these have not been mapped or recorded systematically.

Three of the areas where localisation has been successful in the five countries has been in diversifying the participation of women, addressing different needs in different parts of the country as well as in widening the scope of issues and needs covered by WPS. In terms of broadening the spectrum of women's voices, this has been notably so for women and girls affected by conflict either as IDPs, as ones living in conflict-affected areas and families of soldiers, in the cases of Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and to an extent Kyrgyzstan, if one takes the border clashes with Tajikistan into account. In the Moldovan case, the localisation efforts opened new possibilities for Gagauz women to participate, while in the Kyrgyz case the UNODC-supported *Novostroyki* project created avenues for socio-economically more marginalised women's engagement. Geographically, localisation brought the WPS process to women and communities outside of the capital where such avenues for engagement have mostly been absent, especially rural municipalities. In some cases, this was done broadly across the country (e.g. Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine), and in the others in a more selective way. What is notable in the Armenian and Georgian cases is the direct link to border areas and the so-called 'frozen' conflicts of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia. In terms of more thematic breadth, similar to other localisation processes elsewhere (cf. Babic-Svetlin et al. 2016; Cabrera-Balleza & Fal Dutra Santos 2018), the LAPs included more everyday 'bread-and-butter' issues than the respective NAPs. An interesting exception perhaps was the strong push in Kyrgyzstan by local civil society to include countering radicalisation in the new NAP, an issue which usually tends to be raised at the national level.

In addition to the successes, the localisation processes also had to deal with a range of challenges. According to interviewees, many local level administrations were overwhelmed by the localisation demands, in particular in Ukraine where it was rolled out across the country but also in Kyrgyzstan. Technical and thematic knowledge was missing in many cases, both in terms of how to develop an action plan and in terms of the WPS Agenda. The copy-pasting of activities from the NAP by oblast governments in Ukraine was seen by respondents as one of the outcomes of this lack of capacity. A further challenge has been budgeting and having to address multiple new implementation plans simultaneously, with many local governments struggling even with their regular budgets. The WPS Agenda can

thus come to be seen as an additional burden, administratively and financially. Combining WPS and broader gender equality LAPs, as was done in Georgia and in some oblasts in Ukraine, can at least reduce some of the additional administrative burden.

Respondents also reported at least passive resistance in some administrative structures to the aims of the WPS Agenda. Transparency, participation, openness to debate with and critique from citizens, and a dedication to gender equality and diversity were definitely not hallmarks of the Soviet era administrative structures, and institutional cultures have in part been slow to change in the post-Soviet period. Further challenges have been the linking of different levels of NAP implementation, be it from the local to the national and vice-versa, or horizontally between local level implementers. This has been reflected in the difficulties of national level WPS actors in collecting and collating data on local-level activities, of assessing their impact and linking them to the NAP. Administrative siloes can also get in the way of local-level linking of NAP activities, as local level administrations may not have jurisdiction over the local branches of national ministries, and co-operation at the local level may need to be cleared through the central ministry first.

Conclusion

The five countries covered here tend not to be at the centre of global discussions of WPS NAPs, but they have been at the forefront of experimenting with different pathways to localisation. Localisation has been lauded, in part rightly, as a way to give the WPS Agenda more substance, meaning and real impact at the local level. The experiences of the five countries highlight the many challenges of doing so, and of assessing the impact. It is too early to say for certain how successful the efforts have been, especially given the involuntary pause on implementation caused by Covid-19 and a lack of data. Nonetheless, the initial findings do highlight that localisation has indeed taken the WPS Agenda from the spheres of capital city think tanks and NGOs and security sector institutions to encompass, sometimes albeit reluctantly, a whole new set of actors – oblast and municipal administrators, rural and minority women, IDPs, soldiers' wives – and opened at least new opportunities for participation.

The dominance of the fifth pathway of localisation, i.e. through state institutions, speaks to the centralised nature of state-led WPS NAPs processes. While the post-Soviet legacy may be still a factor in this, for example in terms of an institutional culture in state security institutions or local administrations that is reluctant to engage openly with civil society, this is not necessarily all that different from WPS processes in Western Europe or North America. The opening up of WPS NAPs to local actors and diverse women's voices is arguably, from personal experience, further advanced in the five countries covered here than in countries with 'outward-looking' NAPs.

What is, however, also of concern, is that NAPs are largely seen as technical and administrative tools to address relatively minor issues affecting particular groups of women, rather than delivering full-scale on the four pillars of participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery. The massive escalation of the war in Ukraine, with its dramatic, in part horrendous, gendered impacts, the attendant humanitarian crisis, the subsequent increased tensions in Moldova, the on-going frozen conflicts in Georgia, the renewed violent outburst of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the border conflicts in Kyrgyzstan have all highlighted the crucial importance of the themes of the WPS Agenda. The side-lining of processes set up under WPS NAPs in all of these crises however raises questions of how seriously the Agenda is taken by both national and international actors.

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Funding

The original research for the OSCE study upon which the additional localisation-focused research built was funded by the OSCE, whereas the additional research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agencies.

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Institutions and organisations interviewed

Civil society organisations, parliamentarians, local administration officials and officials of ministries, state agencies and security sector institutions in Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine

Global Network of Women Peacebuilders

Inclusive Security
OSCE Gender Section
OSCE Mission to Moldova
OSCE Programme office in Bishkek
OSCE Project Co-Ordinator in Ukraine
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine
UN Women Country Office Georgia
UN Women Country Office Moldova
UN Women Country Office Ukraine
UN Women Regional Office Europe and Central Asia



RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Which women? What agenda?”

Situating WPS in North Africa: the case of Tunisia

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Abstract

The debate on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has taken root in Tunisia after the 2010-11 revolution, in the context of women’s push for democratic reforms and increasing non-state political violence. Although Tunisia adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) in 2018, the WPS dossier has aroused little interest among civil society (CS) so far. This article aims to investigate the relationship between the international agenda and local change. On the one hand, it analyses the extent to which the WPS debate and practice is representative of Tunisian women’s needs, perspectives and expectations, trying to unpack the issue of *which women* and *what agenda* they advance and represent. On the other, it examines the main achievements and challenges in terms of implementing the 2018 NAP in an effort to discern whether this Plan is reframing the concept of security in Tunisia.

Keywords: Res. 1325; 2010-2011 revolution; Participation; Securitarian paradigm; Women’s agency

Introduction

One of the subjects that has animated scholarship on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) in 2000¹ is the question of space and location or, to use Laura Shepherd’s (2020, p. 456) phrasing, “Where do we find WPS?”

Situating the WPS Agenda at the UN headquarters or ‘on the ground’ ‘locally’ generates different political, and research, possibilities. In recent years, embracing the so-called “local turn” in International Relations (IR) and endeavouring to “globalise” the discipline (Hoffman, 1997; Cox, 1984; Holsti, 1985; Ashley, 1987), an increasing number of scholars have called for “centring the local as a site of knowledge production in the WPS Agenda” (Shepherd 2020, p. 456). One significant contribution to this debate is Soumita Basu’s (2016) post-colonial critique to the tendency in WPS debate and practice to suppress voices, knowledge and interests from the ‘Global South’.

Amid the “cracks” or “points of fracture” (Kirby & Shepherd, 2020)² that have emerged in the WPS architecture, there is indeed a widely shared treatment of the “‘Global North’ as the conceptual, material and (not least) institutional home of the (WPS) resolutions” (Basu 2016, p. 362). This has reduced the ‘Global South’ to “the site of innumerable ‘case studies’

¹ For more details about this Resolution and the others constituting the WPS Agenda, as well as the instruments for implementing it nationally and regionally, see the Introduction to this Special Issue.

² For a discussion of the other theoretical and empirical “cracks,” see the Introduction to this Special Issue.

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where people and societies are framed in a perpetual state of conflict and violence” (Parashar, 2019, p. 833) without *agency* or knowledge of peace and security matters.

Post-colonial feminists have debunked this widely shared assumption, showing that countries in the ‘Global South’ are not merely recipients of policies formulated in the ‘Global North’; they can also claim ‘ownership’ of Res. 1325 given their contribution to the Resolution’s content before its adoption.³

Nevertheless, the marginalization of the ‘Global South’ in WPS discourse and practice has resulted in a lack of knowledge about the aim and scope of Res. 1325 and subsequent Resolutions in several countries of this area. As stressed by previous research on WPS implementation (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Jansson & Eduards, 2016; Meger, 2019), this trend is common to many countries in the world. However, it is particularly evident in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, where the WPS Agenda debate has not taken root until more recently and still struggles to ‘appeal’ to women on the ground (Fellin, 2018; Naamani, 2020; Borrillo, 2022). In North Africa, for example, many countries do not consider themselves directly affected by the WPS Agenda, “an Agenda that is believed to apply only to countries in conflict or post-conflict” (Interview 4). While in Morocco – which did not adopt its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Res. 1325 until March 2022⁴ – a large part of the population is unaware of the WPS Agenda or has misconceptions about it, in Tunisia many actors continue to ignore the fact that the country adopted a NAP in 2018.

This article aims to recentralise ‘Global South’ discourses and perspectives on WPS. It focuses on Tunisia by investigating how the WPS Agenda has been publicly discussed, promoted and adapted there. Over the last decade, Tunisia has experienced political turmoil and transition and, notwithstanding various contradictions, it has diverged from other “Arab Spring” countries in terms of its democratic consolidation perspective and human rights (HRs) performance, thereby attracting substantial financial aid from international actors (the UN and EU, *in primis*). It thus represents an interesting site to unpack the relationship between local change and the international agenda. Since 2011, several studies have examined the reception/adaptation/contestation of external norms in Tunisia by focusing on implementation dynamics through “bottom-up” and “decentred” approaches looking in particular at the interaction between international actors/agenda and local civil society (CS) (Fontana, 2015; Huber & Paciello, 2016; della Valle & Giusti, 2021; Weilandt, 2022).

Following this strand of research, this article aims to answer the following research questions: “*To what extent has the WPS Agenda incorporated Tunisian women’s agency?*” and “*To what extent has it informed change at the local level?*”

To answer these questions, the study pursues a twofold objective. First, it looks at how much the WPS Agenda represents and includes local⁵ women’s needs, perspectives and expectations by investigating how much interest it has kindled among CS actors, and the

³ For example, African activists and institutions have been engaging with the Agenda for quite some time: Res. 1325 adoption coincided with the establishment of the African Union itself in 2000, granting the new institution a unique opportunity to include this new global perspective in its unfolding process by launching the African Peace and Security Architecture (Haastrup, 2019).

⁴ As shown by the article of Sara Borrillo in this Special Issue, Morocco adopted its first NAP on Res. 1325 very recently, on 23 March 2022, for the period 2021-2024.

⁵ The term “local” is used alternatively with “Tunisian” out of stylistic considerations, simply to avoid excessive repetition.

extent to which CS organisations (CSOs)⁶ have participated in the process of adopting and implementing the 2018 Tunisian NAP. In so doing, the article tries to unpack the issue of *which women* and *what agenda* (Davies & Trues, 2019) are advanced by the WPS debate and practice. Second, the study looks at the main achievements and challenges of implementing the 2018 NAP in an effort to understand whether this Plan has focused on women's participation, and how this might foster the shift from a "hard security" to a "human security"⁷ paradigm in Tunisia.

Empirically, the research thus investigates participation from two points of view: as a *modality* and a *focus* of the local WPS debate and practice. Of the four pillars of Res. 1325, participation is the one that has been most neglected in WPS practice so far, due mainly to the "securitarian paradigm" (Shepherd, 2020; Pearson, 2020) shaping international discourse on WPS. Multiple scholars have underlined the Agenda's "essentialism" that depicts women as "victims to protect" rather than "agents of change" or autonomous actors with the capacity to shape peace and security processes (Cohn, 2017; Davis & Stern, 2019; Ní Aoláin & Vahli, 2019). Although women's participation has gained a central role in the emerging discourse on "sustaining peace,"⁸ on-the-ground reality contrasts with the UN headquarters' rosy picture of a commitment to gender equality and states' rhetoric supporting women's participation (De Jonge Oudrat, 2019).

The article is based on research conducted in 2020⁹ (and updated in 2021-2022) through literature review, document analysis and nineteen semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders based in Tunisia – national institutions, CSOs, female activists, international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and experts

⁶ This article focuses on the variegated panorama of Tunisian women's associations, activists and experts (as described in section two); the terms "civil society (CS)" and "civil society organisations (CSOs)" thus refer to them and do not include international NGOs or activists.

⁷ Introduced in 1995 by the UNDP, the concept of "human security" designates the protection of different aspects of human dignity, including gender violence, violent extremism, the forms of vulnerability affecting migrants and refugees (also with respect to human trafficking), economic inequalities, health protection, and the damage caused by natural disasters and pandemics (Kaldor, 2006). Although for some scholars (see Christie, 2010) this concept has since long lost its "critical edge", in my view it is still possible to use it to re-write the international discourse on WPS. A greater emphasis on "human security" (if concretely implemented through NAPs on Res. 1325) has the potential to enhance the participation pillar, which better fits the reality of Tunisian (and most North African) women, by moving away from the Agenda's "securitarian paradigm". I thus combine a post-colonial approach with a "human security" one, as will be clearer in the conclusions of this article.

⁸ This is the paradigm for conflict prevention, resolution and resilience introduced by the UN 2015 peacebuilding architecture review and further consolidated in 2016 via UNSCR 2282 and UNGAR 70/262. This paradigm introduced the concepts of women's "full and meaningful participation" and "comprehensive transitional justice," concepts that can be used to transform gender inequality as a root cause of conflict and insecurity, thereby advancing a notion of justice focused as much on redressing conflict-related gender-based violence as addressing structural gender inequality (Coomaraswamy and Kenney, 2019).

⁹ Research was carried out as part of the 2020 project "Enhancing Women's Participation in Peace and Security – WEPPS", implemented by a team of researcher based at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa (Italy) under the scientific coordination of Prof. Francesco Strazzari, in partnership with Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) in Bologna (Italy). Funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the WEPPS project developed around three main axes: a) research on WPS implementation in Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo through qualitative methods (literature review, desk analysis and interviews); b) a dialogue and training program, called "The Women Peace and Security Agenda in the pandemic", involving professionals in the field of WPS (women activists, representatives of local institutions and CSOs, international agencies and NGOs) in the four target-countries, aimed at facilitating the exchange of expertise and creation of transnational networks; and c) collecting and publishing articles to foster critical analysis of the challenges in WPS implementation.

in the field of WPS.¹⁰ Potential interviewees were identified primarily by consulting the lists of stakeholders who participated in the process of 2018 NAP adoption and implementation,¹¹ by utilising resources provided by national institutions and CSOs, and by identifying key actors through existing research and snowballing. The sample sought to represent the diversity of Tunisian CS by including different generations, forms and levels of organization, and geographic origins. All of the interviews, conducted in French via Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic,¹² lasted from 45 minutes to 1 and a half hours. All interviewees provided informed consent to be recorded and quoted anonymously. Following a semi-structured format, the interviews began with a set of questions on the debate surrounding the WPS Agenda in Tunisia, the process of adopting and implementing the 2018 NAP (looking in particular at CS involvement), the main results obtained, lessons learnt and challenges (also taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic), but they were also open to other considerations raised by the interviewees.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it contextualises the emergence of the WPS debate in Tunisia, especially following the 2011 uprising. Second, it details the 2018 NAP adoption and implementation process. Third, it focuses on the main issues and challenges in WPS implementation in Tunisia, considering both global obstacles and context specificities. Finally, it presents some conclusions regarding participation as a *modality* and *focus* of the Tunisian debate and practice on WPS.

Contextualising WPS in Tunisia: between women's activism and security crisis

The WPS Agenda debate in Tunisia is to be positioned, on one hand, in the framework of women's activism and the relationship between women's rights and state practices, and, on the other hand, in the context of increasing non-state political violence that has destabilised state institutions and hampered the process of democratic transition begun in February 2011.

As far the first issue is concerned, an excursus into women's activism in Tunisia calls for "unpacking" the concepts of CS and CSOs. One of the problems with EU/western literature is that it tends to conceptualise CS in a liberal framework, as an "homogenous block" without differences in views, beliefs, strategies, gender composition, class, alliances and relations with political entities, thereby overlooking forms of mobilization such as trade unions, labour-related movements, Islamic groups, and horizontal movements (Huber et al., 2017). As rightly underlined by Weilandt (2019, p. 1), rather than being a "monolithic political force, Tunisian CS comprises a diverse range of different types of actors with different backgrounds, interests, views and approaches towards activism", and this is particularly true for women's associations.

¹⁰ See the full list of interviews at the end of this article. Security sector representatives (from the Ministry of Defence, Armed Forces, Police, Coast Guard etc.) were not interviewed as they did not reply to multiple invitations to participate. This constitutes a limitation of the study, which could be addressed by future research.

¹¹ In particular, the actors involved in the Steering and Technical Committees described in section three of this article.

¹² Such "digital fieldwork" presented a number of challenges, since stakeholders were much harder to reach (they did not always answer e-mail etc.) and, even when it proved possible to reach them, it was sometimes difficult to virtually create that "safe and empathic space" between the interviewer and interviewee that is so important when talking about sensitive issues. Moreover, not all of the interviewees had good Internet connections or adequate "digital literacy". However, I made the most of the network built during my PhD field research in Tunisia in 2017 and contacts cultivated during the dialogue and training program organised in the framework of the WEPPS project. Both of these networks helped me to build that virtual "safe and empathic space" during the interviews as well.

Women's activism in Tunisia has a long history dating back to 1936 with the *Union Musulmane de Femmes en Tunisie* (UMFT). However, it was only after independence from France (1956) that women's demands became instrumental to the state modernization process initiated by Tunisia's first President, Habib Bourguiba, and his *Neo-Dustur* party (1957-1987). Bourguiba placed reforms relating to women and family law at the top of his political agenda even though local feminist associations did not yet play an autonomous role. It was at this time that the expression "state feminism" (Bessis, 1999) emerged: the President disbanded pre-existing feminist associations to create a single association, the *Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne* (UNFT), which would serve his party's plans.

In 1956, a Personal Status Code (PSC) was approved that was among the least discriminatory of its kind in the region.¹³ While it granted women many freedoms, the PSC had also the instrumental function of legitimising to Western countries what was *de facto* an authoritarian Government (Cassarino, 2012). It was only towards the end of the last century, in 1980, that an autonomous feminist movement reappeared with the creation of the *Tahar Haddad Club* (1978), later giving rise to two of the main secular feminist associations: the *Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* (ATFD) founded in 1982, and the *Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement* (AFTURD) created in 1986.

However, under Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011) the women's issue once again became instrumental to the construction of a democratic and secular Tunisia, despite the regime's intense repression of HRs. Veiled women were persecuted and often forbidden to exercise their profession because of their clothing, while secular associations such as the ATFD and AFTURD were subjected to restrictions in terms of access to funds and freedom of assembly (della Valle, 2019).

Tunisian women, among the protagonists of 2010-2011 protests, actively contributed to the democratic transition process and achieved important objectives in terms of political participation and the recognition of rights. In fact, women's associations were only able to freely operate in the country after 2011. The women's activism panorama in post-2011 Tunisia thus became much more rich, fluid and variegated but also characterised by several intersecting generational, geographical, class, religious and social divides (Daniele, 2014; Debuysere, 2015; Della Porta, 2015; Queirolo & Palmas, 2017; Del Pistoia, 2017; Grami, 2018; Pepicelli, 2018; Wolff, 2021). On one side, the secular organisations ATFD and AFTURD have done and continue to do much for gender equality, but remain 'elite' (bourgeois, 'white', from the capital) entities not representative of many local women. On the other side is the UNFT, which gained relative independence from the Government after the 2011 uprising and can be considered a more 'national-popular' association. In addition to these historical secular associations, Islamist women's associations (such as *Nisa Tounsiyat* and *Tounissiet*), allowed to freely operate since 2011, have been experiencing ideological, geographical and class tensions with the secular ones. In fact, their activists generally come from the lower-middle class and their discourse reaches not only working-class neighbourhoods but also rural areas, inland and southern regions. Moreover, 'younger' associations have sprung up both in the capital Tunis (e.g. the *Chouf* association that supports causes such as LGBT+ rights and organises the international *Chouftounna* festival) and on the 'margins' of the country, in its regions. Starting from the asymmetries between centre/periphery, urban/rural, and individual/collective identities, public/private sphere, these 'new' associations carry on the fight for individual rights through shared spaces and new forms, including local community radio stations (e.g.

¹³ It abolished polygamy, suppressed the practice of repudiation, set the marriage minimum age at eighteen, and introduced free consent between the parties (Code du Statut Personnel Tunisien 1956).

Radio Mines in Gafsa; *Radio Rayhana* in Jendouba). They employ logics different than historical ones, often taking a critical stance on past logics, and are characterised by much more fluid and less polarised stances in the fierce ideological debate between ‘modernist-secular’ and ‘conservative-Islamic’ visions (della Valle, 2019).

Nevertheless, albeit with varying ideals and perspectives, all these women’s organisations have been extremely active in the *Haute Instance pour la Réalisation des Objectifs de la Révolution*¹⁴ from the very beginning, when they were called on to guarantee female participation in the post-2011 electoral process (ATFD, 2015). During the *Ennhada* Government (2011-2014), they committed to eliminating all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and including women’s rights in the 2014 Constitution.¹⁵ Under the *Nidaa Tounes* Government (2014-2019), they instead succeeded in ensuring the passage of the *Loi Intégrale sur la Lutte contre la Violence faite aux Femmes* (Law n. 58/2017)¹⁶ and abolished the discriminatory 1973 administrative circular preventing Tunisian women (but not men) from marrying non-Muslim partners.

Despite these significant improvements, Tunisia still ranked 126th out of 156 countries in the latest report on the Gender Gap published by the World Economic Forum (2021). Indeed, the country’s laws (e.g. Penal Code, Labour Code, PSC etc.) have not yet been completely harmonised with the norms of the new Constitution, especially in the domestic-private sphere where the family remains a place of contradictions at the intersection between culture, religion, economy and politics (Bréssillon, 2018). For example, women’s associations are currently mobilizing around the issue of gender equality in inheritance rights under the PSC.¹⁷

Moreover, norms and laws have not been translated into practice sufficiently. Despite Law n. 58/2017, the incidence of violence against women in Tunisia is still very high: according to the UN Women office based in Tunisia, in 2020 47.6% of women suffered at least one form of violence. In the same year, women reported 1,425 cases of physical violence, perpetrated in 77% of the cases by their husbands (UN Women, 2020). In terms of political participation, women make up 26.3% of parliamentarians and 29.2% of ministers (World Economic Forum 2021, p. 375). However, the number of women in office at municipal, regional and national levels has increased since 2011: the capital Tunis elected a female mayor, Souad Abderrahim, in 2018, and on 11 October 2021, a woman, Nejla

¹⁴ A Commission of experts appointed following the 2011 uprising to monitor the steps of the Tunisian transition, included the constitutional process.

¹⁵ Art. 21 covers “equality” rather than “complementarity” (as supported by Islamist parties) between men and women (Constitution de la République Tunisienne 2014).

¹⁶ Passed in 2017, this law adopts a broad definition of violence, recognising not only physical violence but also forms of economic, sexual, political and psychological violence. Moreover, it establishes new mechanisms to assist victims of violence and eliminates impunity for perpetrators (Loi organique n° 2017-58), amending article 227 bis of the Penal Code according to which perpetrators of non-consensual sexual acts against minors were not punished if they married their victims (Code Penal de la République Tunisienne 1913).

¹⁷ Islamic law stipulates that women – in the event of equal inheritance – always inherit half that of men. This provision has long been considered the untouchable core of the *Shari’a*, which is why in 1956 Bourguiba did not want to amend the part of the PSC relating to inheritance. Women’s associations have been mobilising on this issue since 1999, but only in 2017 did President Essebsi announce a reform of the PSC to introduce male-female inheritance equality following the proposal of the *Commission des Libertés Individuelles et de l’Égalité*, and presented a draft law to the Parliament on 28 November 2018. However, he proposed the future law allow an exception to the principle of equality by opting for the previous regime in wills, so as not to offend the religious sentiments of a large part of the population. To date, the draft law presented almost three years ago is still blocked in Parliament.

Bouden Romdhane, was elected as Prime Minister for the first time in Tunisian history.¹⁸ The literacy rate for women is 72.2% (of which only 41.2% hold a university degree), while for men it is 86.1%. Women make up only 28.1% of Tunisia's workforce (*Ibid.*) and a large number of them are employed in informal sectors under extremely vulnerable conditions – such as in the agricultural sector, where they face harsh conditions and are paid half as much as men for the same number of hours.

Regarding WPS specifically, Tunisia is in 117st place out of 170 countries in the ranking developed for 2021-2022 by the Georgetown Institute for WPS in collaboration with the Oslo Peace Research Institute (PRIO) and based on the “WPS Index”.¹⁹

Concerning increasing non-state political violence, Salafist jihadist groups have threatened Tunisian institutions since 2012, jeopardising the already problematic economic situation, attacking tourist infrastructures and exacerbating the polarisation between Islamists and liberals in the country. Armed groups operating in internal and neighbouring regions have also negatively impacted the security of the inhabitants of the affected territories, complicating the already delicate situation in these historically marginalised areas. The manifestation of non-state political violence has also been intensely influenced by the unstable situation in neighbouring Libya and the rise of the “Islamic State” (around 6,000 foreign fighters are known to be Tunisian nationals).

In light of these factors, since 2014 Tunisia has been revising the structure and strategy of its security services. The Government strengthened the role of the military in the fight against terrorism in 2015 by creating the Defence Intelligence and Security Agency and National Commission on Counter-Terrorism, which joined the UNSC in developing the 2016 New Comprehensive Strategy to Combat Terrorism and Extremism. In 2017, the Government also established the National Intelligence Centre for intelligence services to coordinate and share information about the country's anti-terrorist activities (Simoncini, 2020).

However, the state's strategies for countering violent extremism (CVE) have not included gender issues, thus reinforcing stereotypes in the areas of prevention and participation (Oxfam & UN Women, 2018). Based on the premise that women are inherently peaceful and non-violent “beautiful souls” (Elshtain, 1987), the role ascribed to them is usually that of “mothers” who can help with de-radicalising programs in the service of militarised agendas. Nevertheless, empirical research on contemporary conflicts has underlined the different roles played by women (violent, survivors, suicidal, negotiators, agents of change, peacemakers). As Parashar (2019, p. 385) notes:

“This complex understanding of gender roles at the local level make it difficult for state authorities and communities to come to an agreement about developing counter narratives to extremism from a gender lens”.

¹⁸ Despite this significant development, the appointment of Nejla Bouden Romdhan (lacking in previous political experience) has been interpreted as a wink at Tunisia's upper middle class and, according to some observers, is reminiscent of “state feminism” practices (FIDH, 2021). The new Prime Minister will indeed enjoy considerably reduced prerogatives as compared to previous Governments as due to the provisions of Presidential Decree n. 117 issued by Kais Saied on 22 September 2021, which moves towards a presidential regime by concentrating power in the hands of the President of the Republic (Décret Présidentiel n° 2021-117). This Decree has *de facto* suspended the 2014 Constitution, establishing temporary exceptions in anticipation of a real constitutional amendment, thereby attracting many criticisms from various political forces, CS exponents and intellectuals.

¹⁹ Tunisia's Index is .659, calculated on a maximum of .922 in Norway and a minimum of .278 in Afghanistan, on a scale from 0 to 1 where 1 is the best possible and 0 the worst (Georgetown Institute for WPS 2021, p. 2).

The debate on WPS and the 2018 Tunisian NAP

Tunisia adopted its first NAP in 2018 for the period 2018-2020. Although the country ratified Res. 1325 in 2006, the Government did not include NAP adoption in its agenda until 2011, in the wake of the Arab revolts and a large number of female refugees from Libya. In fact, before that moment there was very little familiarity with the WPS Agenda among Tunisians. As one official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recounts:

“During the first trainings I attended on Res. 1325²⁰ the recurring question was: ‘Why should Tunisia adopt a NAP if it is not a country at war?’. Multiple answers were given to this question: “a) It is not necessary for a country to be at war for it to adopt a NAP – all the most advanced countries have adopted one; b) Although Tunisia is quite stable internally, the regional situation and its neighbours (Libya, in particular) are not and this makes the country more vulnerable; c) There is a need to increase women’s participation everywhere in key political positions and in decision-making processes for peacebuilding and peacekeeping purposes” (Interview 9).

The NAP adoption process did indeed remained quite dormant until 2015, when some CSOs such as *Free Sight* began to push for it. However, it was only in September 2017, with Néziha Labidi – then Minister of Women, Family and Childhood (hereafter “Ministry of Women”) – that work on the NAP actually started. This is why many interviewees consider the NAP elaboration process in Tunisia a “top-down” process (Interviews 6, 7, 10, and 14). It was led by the Ministry of Women and implemented by a Steering Committee (including thirteen Ministries)²¹ and Technical Committee (the members of the Steering Committee plus thirteen CSO and IO representatives)²² with financial support from the Finnish Embassy and technical support from UN Women (UN Women & Tunisian Ministry of Women, 2018).

Opinions regarding its relative success in including different stakeholders and local actors are especially diverse. Some CS representatives believe that the Ministry of Women adopted an inclusive and participatory approach, involving them in the Technical Committee and launching a wider consultation with CS after the Committee had produced a first draft of the NAP (Interviews 7, 8, 12, and 18). Others, however, feel that the Ministry has largely centralised the process without taking CSOs’ contributions sufficiently into account.²³ Regarding the inclusion of local-level actors, several interviewees stated that

²⁰ In 2015, ESCWA organised a regional training on Res. 1325 in which Tunisia took part, presenting the main NAPs adopted in the MENA region so far with particular reference to the Jordanian one.

²¹ The Ministries of Women, the Interior, National Defence, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Religious Affairs, Finance, Information Technology and Digital Economy, Education, Social Affairs, Health, and Culture and the National Commission for Combating Terrorism.

²² *Association pour la Promotion du Droit à la Différence: Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR); Centre International des Etudes Stratégiques Sécuritaires et Militaires (CIESSM); Ligue Tunisienne des femmes policières; Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS); UNFT; Association Tunisienne d’Action Culturelle (ATAC); Aswat Nissa; Ligue des électrices tunisiennes (LET); OXFAM; AFTURD; Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance (DCAF); Organisation Tunisienne pour l’Education et la Famille (OTEF).*

²³ In particular, the associations that had formulated the first draft of the NAP in 2016 (such as *Free Sight*) wanted that version to be adopted, while the Ministry preferred to develop a new one, involving CS in its work within the Technical Committee (Interview 12). These associations were selected following a call for proposals launched by the Ministry which, according to some observers, was not well publicised, thus generating criticism about the choice of associations and the transparency of the process (Interviews 1, 3, 6,

the NAP elaboration process was very centralised at the national level: all of the workshops took place in the capital Tunis, there were no focus groups in the regions, and even the call for consultations with CSOs did not circulate much at the regional level (Interviews 14, 15, and 16). Finally, another weakness of the process as identified through interviewing was the scarce inclusion of parliamentarians, as they did not take part in defining the objectives contained in the NAP but were obliged to oversee its implementation afterwards (Interview 17).

The NAP adopted in 2018 is largely considered a good framework document, however. The UN itself assessed the Plan very positively, praising the rapid drafting process and fact that it takes into account other countries' experiences (Jordan and Palestine in particular). In terms of content, the NAP considers not only conflicts but also, for example, the refugee crisis and the problems related to the democratic transition (Interview 18). It takes into account the findings and recommendations of two studies conducted by the Technical Committee: the *État de Lieux sur la Mise en Oeuvre de la Résolution 1325 en Tunisie* and *Cartographie des Organisation de la Société Civile Tunisienne dans le domaine Femmes, Paix et Sécurité*.²⁴

The overall objective of the NAP is:

“To ensure the empowerment of women and girls, promote their participation in achieving lasting peace and stability, eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination and ensure the protection of society against the risks of conflict, extremism and terrorism” (Republic of Tunisia 2018, p. 11, author's translation).

This general objective is translated into five specific objectives:

1. “Protecting women and girls from all forms of violence before, during and after conflicts, crises and natural disasters and under the threat of terrorism;
2. Ensuring the protection of women and girls from all forms and types of gender-based violence and discrimination in conflict and terrorism situations, ensuring their physical, mental and psychological safety and health, the enjoyment of their HRs, facilitating the exercise of these rights and ensuring access to justice;

11, and 14). In fact, the Ministry then launched another call for proposals for the NAP implementation phase, and the Technical Committee was enlarged to include twenty-two CSOs. Even some of the associations that took part in the Technical Committee did not really feel involved in the NAP drafting process, however, as they were called in for workshops “at the last minute” without really knowing how to participate (Interview 6).

²⁴ The first study aimed at understanding 1) where Tunisia stood with respect to the inclusion of the gender dimension in security initiatives, laws, policies and plans, strategic documents for poverty reduction and violence, development plans, national security/defence and foreign policy strategies; 2) where women were in terms of political and economic decision-making positions, in designing action plans for security in all its dimensions (CREDIF, UN Women Tunisia, Republic of Finland, 2017a). The second study mapped the NGOs operating in Tunisia in the WPS sector. The results of the research (in which 86 associations working on women's issues presented their projects related to the four pillars of Res. 1325) showed that: 50% of the associations worked on women's protection, 26% on prevention, 25% on participation and 7% on relief and recovery (CREDIF, UN Women Tunisia, Republic of Finland, 2017b).

3. Promoting the participation of women and girls in political life, public affairs management and decision-making processes to maintain peace, resolve conflicts and address terrorism;
4. Achieving greater participation of women and girls in public and political life, management of public affairs and decision-making processes;
5. Strengthening the role of women and girls in peacebuilding and its sustainability, reconstruction efforts and counter-terrorism” (*Ibid.*)

Based on the general and specific objectives, the Plan is structured around five axes: 1) prevention; 2) protection; 3) participation; 4) relief, peacebuilding and reconstruction; 5) information and advocacy (*Ibid.*, p. 12), with a considerable emphasis on participation. Nevertheless, according to one interviewee:

“This is because Tunisia has seen quite a bit of improvement in this area since 2011 and has therefore chosen to focus on what seemed easiest to achieve in order to meet its international obligations” (Interview 4).

Beyond aligning with the UN 2030 Agenda objectives, the 2018 NAP intersects with several other plans and strategies at the national level. First, its objectives contribute to the Five-Year Strategic Development Plan 2016-2020, which emphasises “the participation of women in the development of the desired social vision, which rejects all forms of extremism, aimed at establishing security and peace according to the rules of moderation, dialogue and tolerance” (Republic of Tunisia, 2015, p. 24). Second, the NAP is the sole indicator of objective n. 4: “to support women’s effective participation in the fight against terrorism and their contribution to the spread of peace and security at the national, regional and local levels” of impact n. 2 of the National Plan for the Integration and Institutionalisation of the Gender Approach for 2016-2020. Third, its objectives fit with the Counter-terrorism Plan for the Women, Family and Children Sector, within the framework of the 2015 National Counter-Terrorism Plan. Finally, the NAP objectives cut across the National Strategy for the Economic and Social Empowerment of Women and Girls in Rural Areas 2017-2020 whose guidelines include fostering the economic and social empowerment of girls and women in rural areas, promoting their participation in public life and improving their quality of life in rural areas (Republic of Tunisia, 2018, p. 7).

The main problems lie in the implementation of the 2018 NAP. According to the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), as of 2020 only thirteen Ministries (of the nineteen included in the implementation-phase Steering Committee) had adopted sectorial plans specifying strategies and actions to implement the NAP objectives. In the view of many interviewees, the so-called “Master Plan” – the framework document including all these sectorial plans – has so far not produced great results, for multiple reasons.

In primis, the 2018 NAP did not have its own cost plan or monetary evaluation plan, and was not even adequately communicated to international NGOs/embassy potential funders (Interview 18). Thus, each Ministry had to rely on its own (often scarce) internal resources when drawing up its sectorial plan (Interviews 4, 7, 8, and 10). Moreover, the numerous changes of Government from February 2020²⁵ onwards and explosion of the Covid-19

²⁵ On 27 February 2020, Elyes Fakhfakh (*Ettakatol*) succeeded Youssef Chahed (*Nidaa Tounes*, later *Tahya Tounes*) as Prime Minister. Following Fakhfakh’s resignation in July 2020 (at the request of President Kais

pandemic in March of the same year blocked the fundraising activities launched in December 2019 to implement the “Master Plan” (Interview 2). In July 2020, the Ministry of Women organised a monitoring workshop on the Ministries’ sectorial plans development that served to re-launch activity on the WPS *dossier* after previous months of deadlock (Interview 12). In October of the same year, the UN Women office in Tunis organised another workshop aimed at supporting the advancement of the WPS Agenda by identifying potential actors and stakeholders to implement the 2018 NAP and reflecting on the formulation of the new NAP to be adopted in 2021 (Interview 13).

Throughout 2021, however, no steps were taken to advance the Ministries’ implementation of the sectorial plans: the original problem of the lack of a dedicated budget has been aggravated by the worsening of the pandemic crisis (including the difficulties in obtaining vaccines) and subsequent economic crisis as well as the political instability in Tunisia. According to one of the interviewees, there have been very few actions or projects funded to achieve the objectives set in the sectorial plans. Some Ministries (such as that of Women) have tried to include projects in line with the 2018 NAP objectives in their own agenda, but without having a dedicated budget for their sectorial plans. CSOs have instead relied on other sources of funding to carry out projects contributing to the objectives of Res. 1325 (Interview 11).²⁶

The study evaluating NAP results conducted between December 2021 and April 2022²⁷ has indeed shown several issues, as will be detailed in the next section of this article. Moreover, it reports that the greatest results have been achieved in axis 1 (prevention) and 2 (protection), but less in terms of women’s participation in peace processes.

The debate on adopting a new NAP has likewise been stalled by the pandemic, economic and political crises. Indeed, national institutions, UN Women officials and CSOs involved in the evaluation study initially considered extending the 2018 NAP with some of its provisions revised instead of adopting a new NAP, given the poor results achieved with the first one. Only very recently has the Ministry of Women announced the beginning of work to draft the second NAP, as yet without beginning to consult CSOs (Interview 11).

Saied due to the motion by 105 MPs accusing him of a conflict of interest), since 2 September 2020 Tunisia’s Prime Minister has been Hichem Mechichi (Independent). On 25 July 2021, in a climate of heated popular anger against the executive and its handling of the economic and health crisis, President Saied removed the Prime Minister Mechichi and blocked the work of the Parliament (headed by Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of *Ennhada*), assuming *de facto* full power and triggering an institutional crisis. This *coup d’état*, which made Tunisian democracy even more fragile, came after a six-month tug-of-war between Ghannouchi and Saied, who decided to dismantle the national institutions at a time when the country was facing a steady increase in contagion. While many have supported Kais’ choice, others (including, beyond *Ennhada*, the coalition parties *Qalb Tounes*, Islamist nationalist movement *Karama*, and opposition social-democratic party *Courant démocratique*) have harshly criticised the President’s decisions as an attack on the Constitution. Since 11 October, Tunisia has had a new Government with a woman, Nejla Bouden Romdhane (Independent), as Prime Minister for the first time in local history. However, during 2022 Saied has continued to attack Tunisia’s democratic rules in the context of increasing economic crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. In February, he dissolved the Supreme Council of the Magistracy; in March, he announced the dissolution of the Parliament without committing to holding early legislative elections within three months; in April, he assumed the right to appoint the head and three of the seven members of the Independent Superior Electoral Authority; and in June, he dismissed nearly sixty magistrates after strengthening his control over the judicial system.

²⁶ Some of the associations involved in the “National Alliance of Tunisian Women for Peace and Security”, such as *Free Sight*, have carried out projects and programs connected to the four pillars of Res. 1325, included awareness-building campaign using artistic tools and community dialogue, but without funding from the 2018 NAP (Jebali, 2022).

²⁷ The results of this study were disseminated in April 2022 by Mme Dr. Cosette Maiky, International Consultant, in her presentation: *Evaluation de la mise en oeuvre du PAN 1325, Plans Sectoriels et Master Plan en Tunisie*. The presentation was received by one of the interviewees during the revision of this article following anonymous peer-review.

Issues and challenges in WPS implementation in Tunisia: global obstacles and context specificities

The implementation of the WPS Agenda in Tunisia presents a number of issues and challenges, some common to other countries and regions and others specific to the Tunisian and, more broadly, North African context. After discussing these issues and challenges in light of previous empirical research in the field, this section concludes by exploring interest in the WPS Agenda among local CSOs and activists, an area that seems particularly relevant to analysing the extent to which the WPS debate and practices are representative of Tunisian women's needs, perspectives and expectations. In so doing, the conclusions of this article will attempt to unpack the issue of *which women* and *what agenda* are usually advanced by the WPS debate and practices.

One of the main challenges to WPS implementation worldwide is insufficient collaboration between national institutions and CSOs. In particular, CSOs struggle to engage with institutionalised processes in inclusive and meaningful ways, both in countries that have yet to adopt NAPs and those that are revising existing NAPs (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2019). Empirical research has shown that WPS implementation is generally perceived at the local level as a “top-down” process (WILPF, 2019). This observation also applies to Tunisia, as collaboration between national institutions and CSOs there seems to be quite rocky for multiple reasons. First, according to many CS actors interviewed, there has been little CSO involvement in NAP adoption and implementation processes (Interviews 1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 14). On the other side, some institutional actors stress that not all CSOs are professionalised enough, making it difficult to include them in implementation phases (Interviews 9, 10, and 12). Second, as also found in other studies on WPS implementation (Cittadini & della Valle, 2022), national institutions and CSOs have different priorities: while the former look to increase the number of women in classical defence and security structures, CSOs prioritise enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding. Moreover, the WPS implementation process in Tunisia remains highly centralised: according to several interviewees, local actors have not been sufficiently involved in defining NAP objectives and implementing those objectives through specific actions and programmes. What is needed, they stress, is to invest in capacity building for regional administrations and CS actors (Interviews 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16).

Another significant limit of the 2018 Tunisian NAP, like the majority of NAPs adopted so far in other countries (WILPF, 2019), is the lack of budget allocation. The Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated this situation, significantly decreasing funds dedicated to WPS as resources are reallocated to sectors such as health or humanitarian aid. According to all the interviewees, therefore, the next NAP must include a cost plan and monetary evaluation and/or the various ministries must earmark expenditure lines for implementing the objectives in their sectorial plans when drafting their annual budgets.

Relatedly, it is important to reinforce follow-up and monitoring mechanisms as well as introducing impact indicators and measurement tools, as stressed by the study *Evaluation de la mise en oeuvre du PAN 1325, Plans Sectoriels, et Master Plans en Tunisie* (Maiky, 2022). The study also points out the need to better integrate the NAP with other national plans and strategies related to women's rights, in order to avoid redundancy, duplicate actions and ambiguities in the attribution of results (*Ibid.*).

The scarce political will surrounding the WPS *dossier* is another significant challenge to Res. 1325 implementation worldwide (WILPF, 2019). There are still too few women in key Ministries, and the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to de-prioritising the WPS *dossier* nationally since gender issues are considered a sort of “luxury” in times of crisis (Naraghi-

Anderlini, 2020a). In Tunisia, this situation has been compounded by continual changes in Government and Ministries leadership as well as the staffing of the local UN Women office, thus undermining the continuity of work on and commitment to the WPS Agenda. According to one interviewee:

“This should be avoided by having fixed focal points on the 1325 *dossier* within the various Ministries and ensuring that there is always an ‘orchestra director’ on the work surrounding the WPS Agenda. This figure should be chosen carefully, not only at the level of the Ministry (assessing whether a Ministry such as that of Women or a more technical one would be more productive), but also at the level of the person within that Ministry (a person who has a historical knowledge of the 1325 *dossier* in Tunisia and who is ‘devoted to the cause’)” (Interview 13).

The lack of institutional and structural frameworks and governance processes fully dedicated to implementing the 2018 NAP does indeed constitute one of the biggest challenges to WPS implementation in Tunisia (Maiky, 2022).

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected women’s security from a “human security” standpoint (Swaine, 2020; UN Women, 2021). First of all, it has increased socio-economic insecurity (especially for women in informal work). Secondly, confinement measures have dramatically affected domestic violence dynamics, drastically increasing the incidence of such violence over the last two years. In Tunisia as in other countries of the region such as Morocco (Borrillo, 2022), these effects are much more visible for ethnic minority women and *mères célibataires*. The centres currently operating in the country (in seven of Tunisia’s twenty-four regions) proved insufficient to take in all the victims of gender-based violence. According to one interviewee, “If the 2018 NAP had really been operational and with a dedicated budget, maybe this situation could have been avoided” (Interview 11). In this context, neither governmental institutions nor IOs have effectively recognized women’s role in managing the emergency and responding to it from a gender perspective. The evaluation study on NAP’s implementation in Tunisia has stressed that the next NAP should better integrate (natural and man-made) disasters with possible scenarios, mitigation measures and procedures to mobilise resources and respond quickly (Maiky, 2022).

As mentioned in the introduction, another significant challenge to WPS implementation is the lack of awareness about the content and scope of the Agenda among security-sector practitioners in many countries of the world (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Jansson & Eduards, 2016; Meger, 2019). This is particularly the case for MENA countries, where the debate on the WPS Agenda has not taken root until recently. First of all, although in reality Res. 1325 addresses factors destabilising “human security” that are common to all societies (e.g. HRs violations, terrorism, forced displacement, migration and natural disasters), it is generally considered applicable to countries in conflict and/or post conflict. Advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns on Res. 1325 and the 2018 NAP revealed that most Tunisian stakeholders were not sufficiently aware of the content and conceptual and practical nuances of these terms. Moreover, these campaigns have not been successful enough in generating additional support for the action (Maiky, 2022).

Second, there is a tendency to think of the “security issue” as a purely “male” and purely “state” issue, and thus one that does not concern the female world. In fact, in countries that have implemented a greater number of NAPs than Tunisia, increases in the number of

women in the armed forces and police has not been matched by increasing numbers of women in key defence and security sector positions (Cittadini & della Valle, 2022). At the same time, there are still too few women involved as mediators in peace processes (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2020b). In Tunisia and the MENA region more broadly, women have long been excluded from the “security issue;” women and security became an object of interest only recently, when the phenomenon of radicalisation took hold and women began to be considered fundamental agents for preventing and combating it.

Finally, the Agenda is often perceived as a “women’s issue” and not a “security issue,” thereby neglecting the importance of security concerns related to gender equality for the political-military, economic, environmental, and human spheres (Fellin, 2018). Indeed, the prevailing concept of security observed in professional practices remains anchored in a traditional definition of “hard security” that does not fully integrate “human security.” Tunisia included this latter concept in its 2018 NAP; however, the implementation obstacles detailed in the previous section are undermining its effectiveness at the local level.

In light of these considerations, one of the top priorities in Tunisia is increasing the visibility of the WPS Agenda, the 2018 NAP and the Ministries’ sectorial plans (Maiky, 2022). This would require investing in circulating accurate information and communication regarding the scope and objectives of Res. 1325 and the 2018 NAP, through the media (Interviews 3, 12, and 19), primary and secondary education, and research activities (Interview 12) as well as awareness-raising campaigns.

To conclude, the WPS Agenda has kindled little interest among CS actors in North African countries so far, especially those involved in the 2011 revolutions. It is no coincidence that, in Tunisia, historical associations such as the ATFD did not take part in the process of drafting the 2018 NAP. According to a representative of an inter-regional African NGO, this lack of interest by CSOs and activists in the WPS *dossier* is due in part to the above-described and still very deeply rooted idea of “security” as a “male and state issue” and in part to the phase of democratic transition that Tunisia is undergoing (Interview 19). In this phase, local CS actors are more interested in transitional justice and working to pass laws central to feminist struggles such as the one against violence or to ensure inheritance equality. The majority of local women’s associations prefer working on issues deemed “more urgent” (such as managing centres for victims of violence) that are not perceived as connected to the WPS Agenda and 2018 NAP (Interview 11). As a matter of fact, many CSOs are extremely active on issues related to the four pillars of Res. 1325, but only a few of them work on the WPS *dossier* as such. In the words of one interviewee:

“What is missing in Tunisia is strong pressure from CS on the 1325 *dossier*. In other countries there is a workshop a week on the WPS Agenda. However, I believe it is a matter of time and awareness, which will happen soon, and is indeed already happening with the new generations of women” (Interview 19).

Moreover, there are some associations that have deliberately chosen not to engage in the WPS *dossier*. As stated by another interviewee:

“They refuse to work on the WPS *dossier* because of ideological reasons: they are against the “militarization” of the Agenda and the ‘blue helmets’” (Interview 11).

The varying level of WPS *dossier* engagement by Tunisian women's CSOs and activists thus also depends on the differences in background, perspective, generation, class, religious and political orientation described in the second section of this article.

According to the majority of the interviewees, however, the role of CS is fundamental. In the absence of strong political leadership on the WPS Agenda, CS is called on to act as a "watchdog" monitoring Government action to ensure that the objectives set in the NAP are actually achieved. Moreover, since CS is the most deeply rooted on the ground (especially in the regions), its other key role is to test pilot projects on a local scale so as to verify their feasibility on a national scale (Interview 13).

Conclusions

Albeit quite late compared to other countries, the WPS debate is currently taking root in Tunisia; however, as this article has shown, there are still many challenges to consider.

To return to the first lens through which this study has investigated participation (i.e. as a *modality* of the WPS debate and practice in Tunisia), the empirical research has demonstrated that a large segment of Tunisian women's associations has shown quite little interest in the WPS *dossier* so far. Moreover, most of those CSOs and activists that have engaged with this *dossier* consider themselves to have been included to a very limited extent in the 2018 NAP formulation and implementation processes. There is still doubt, therefore, as to *which women* and *what agenda* the WPS debate and practice advance and represent. In fact, as detailed in the first section of this article, the pathways that Tunisian women have taken to gain power and resist oppression, especially after the 2011 revolution, have proven highly diverse in terms of the actors involved, their objectives, and the strategies they adopt. It thus remains quite unclear, therefore, how the Agenda has been used to motivate and inform the strategies of female leaders, women's groups and women-led movements for change.

Beyond the reasons given in the previous section for the relative lack of CSO inclusion in institutionalised processes and the scarcity of knowledge about and adequate communication of the content of the WPS Agenda, there is one aspect that deserves particular attention in these conclusions: the problematic intersection between the "securitarian paradigm" and colonial framing of the Agenda, on the one side, and Tunisian female CSO and activists' interests, actions and forms of *agency*, especially after the 2011 uprising, on the other side.

As mentioned in the introduction, international discourse on WPS has focused mainly on sexual violence committed against women during conflicts and the notion of a "post-conflict" situation (Shepherd, 2020; Pearson, 2020), thereby casting women more as "victims" than "agents" and failing to recognise their everyday resistance as a valid exercise of political power (Gopinath & Manchanda, 2019). In contrast, women's struggles in Tunisia have focused on a plethora of issues relevant to the post-2011 transition that privilege the concept of "participation" over "protection" or "prevention", in keeping with a "human security" paradigm. Their actions have been transversal and variegated in form, aimed at breaking down the barriers between the "private" and the "public" and combatting structural violence, not always in accordance with state and international ideologies or paradigms of economic growth and stabilization. As rightly pointed out by Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin and Nahla Valji (2019), these forms of resistance have not been considered a relevant part of the WPS Agenda so far, thereby making it not particularly 'attractive' to Tunisian women.

Moreover, according to the 2015 UN Global Study on WPS, the inclusion of the WPS Agenda in CVE strategies and policies has made gender equality a "militarised tool" that disregards the experiences and viewpoints of women on the ground and produces further

forms of insecurity in their lives (UN, 2015b). Feminist research has, on the contrary, shown how women negotiate everyday life and resistance within spaces regulated by multiple patriarchies, and, especially in the 'Global South', within disparate social and cultural locations. Therefore, the intersection between WPS and CVE strategies and policies has carried the WPS Agenda even further away from Tunisian women's interests and forms of resistance.

As for the second lens through which this study has investigated participation (i.e. as a *focus* of the WPS debate and practice), the empirical research has revealed that, although on paper the 2018 NAP focuses on this pillar, in practice it has not been effective in increasing women's participation, *agency* and empowerment in a way that would favour the shift from a "hard security" to a "human security" paradigm in Tunisia. As stressed by the evaluation study on the NAP's implementation, the greatest results have been achieved in axis 1 (prevention) and 2 (protection), while much remains to be done to strengthen Tunisian women's access and contribution to peace processes in a structured and systemic way (Maiky, 2022).

To conclude, by re-centralising Tunisian discourses and perspectives on WPS, this article has contributed to that strand of research aimed at diversifying the discipline (and the practice) of IR. In particular, it has enriched the critical literature on the WPS Agenda and especially studies focusing on its problematic relationship with its "securitarian paradigm" (Shepherd, 2020; Pearson, 2020) and colonial frame (Basu, 2016; Parashar, 2019).

The Tunisian case sheds light on the relationship between international agenda and local change, underlining the cracks and tensions that arise on the ground when implementing the WPS Agenda in a country that has recently experienced political turmoil and transitions. The findings regarding the limits of the Agenda in terms of incorporating Tunisian women's *agency* can be useful for further research on WPS implementation in the MENA region, especially in other countries that are likewise undergoing political transitions. For example, Lebanon adopted its first NAP on Res. 1325 in 2019, but the extent of inclusion of grassroots women groups, in particular those established by the "October 17" protest movement, is still far from clear (Naamani, 2020). Algerian women were a significant component of the "Hirak movement" in 2019-2020, and they continue to campaign for improved gender equality while also taking active part in the field of mediation (especially in the peace and reconciliation process in Mali) (Fellin, 2018). However, the WPS debate still struggles to take hold in the country.²⁸ Furthermore, the results of this study regarding the limits of the 2018 Tunisian NAP in terms of enhancing women's participation can be useful for investigating the implementation of other NAPs recently adopted in the region, such as the Moroccan one.

The current (post-)pandemic scenario and its serious impact on women's lives may, indeed, offer an opportunity to accelerate the process of implementing the WPS normative framework worldwide. In Tunisia, this can help in achieving the objectives set in the 2018 NAP and reflecting on the content of the new NAP and how it might be implemented.

However, such acceleration would require a turnaround on the WPS Agenda on two fronts: at the level of institutions and political will, and at the level of CS and collective awareness of the importance of the women-peace-security nexus. In order to reach this awareness and the greater involvement by Tunisian CS in the WPS *dossier*, however, global WPS discourse should be realigned to resound with the contextual specificities of the 'Global South' by granting visibility to women's everyday resistance. Unless this narrative

²⁸ Algeria has not yet adopted a NAP on Res. 1325. The country initiated the process of drafting it in collaboration with CSOs in 2016, but this activity was not continued the following year (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

is able to influence global WPS discourse, the Agenda may indeed become increasingly irrelevant to women on the ground in Tunisia and, potentially, in other MENA region countries as well.

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Funding

This research was supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI) – Direzione Generale per gli Affari Politici e di Sicurezza. Decree dated 11/04/2019 for the granting of financial assistance under the third National Action Plan, adopted for the implementation of the Resolution n. 1325 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council on “Women Peace and Security” (D.D.G. n. 133/2019).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Editorial Committee of Interdisciplinary Political Studies, Prof. Sonia Lucarelli, Dr. Ervjola Selenica as well as two anonymous reviewers for commenting on previous drafts of this manuscript. She is immensely grateful to all the interviewees who agreed to talk and share their thoughts and experiences, notwithstanding the limits raised by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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List of Interviews

- Interview 1. UNDP, local official, 24 April 2020, remotely.
- Interview 2. Embassy of Finland to Tunisia, local official, 22 May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 3. Local Association (Tunis), representative, 24 June 2020, remotely.
- Interview 4. ESCWA, local official, 26 June 2020, remotely.
- Interview 5. UN Women, local official 1, 3 July 2020, remotely.
- Interview 6. Oxfam Novib, local official, 6 July 2020, remotely.
- Interview 7. Gender expert and advisor, 6 July 2020, remotely; 26 October 2021, remotely.
- Interview 8. Ministry of Agriculture, member of the Technical Committee, 30 July 2020, remotely.
- Interview 9. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, member of the Steering Committee, 24 August 2020, remotely.
- Interview 10. Ministry of Public Health, member of the Technical Committee, 26 August 2020, remotely.
- Interview 11. Local Association (Tunis), member of the Technical Committee, 26 August 2020, remotely; 28 October 2021, remotely; 19 May 2022, in presence.
- Interview 12. Ministry of Women, Family and Children, member of the Steering Committee, 26 August 2020, remotely.
- Interview 13. UN Women, local official 2, 27 August 2020, remotely.
- Interview 14. Local Association (Zarzis), member of the Technical Committee, 29 August 2020, remotely.
- Interview 15. Local Association (Jendouba), member of the Technical Committee, 3 September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 16. Local Association (Medenine), member of the Technical Committee, 8 September 2020, remotely.

Interview 17. Assembly of People's Representatives, parliamentarian, 9 September 2020, remotely.

Interview 18. CAWTAR, member of the Technical Committee, 9 September 2020, remotely.

Interview 19. African Women's Forum, regional representative, 15 September 2020, remotely.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“After COVID, Inshallah”

Investigating lags, challenges and opportunities of the WPS Agenda implementation in Morocco

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Abstract

This article aims at describing the main causes which contribute to explaining to what extent the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda does not represent a national priority for Moroccan decision makers and why the adoption of a National Action Plan (NAP) in 2022 has proceeded very slowly in the North African Kingdom. Constructed from a gender-based analysis of the Moroccan political context and drawn from 15 semi-structured interviews targeting Moroccan institutional actors, academics and civil society representatives, the study explores lags, challenges and opportunities for the WPS Agenda implementation in Morocco. Following up on new and critical approaches to the WPS agenda that expands its understanding, beyond the dichotomy of peace and security, the article brings out relevant strategic axes that the implementation of the WPS agenda could potentially imply in the country. In conclusion, the article explores the urgent need, expressed by several Moroccan scholars and activists, to reconsider the concepts of peace and security, by emancipating it from purely military issues and redirecting it to a more social and human oriented dimension. This is mainly relevant now since the COVID pandemic has made inequalities more visible and corrective measures to eliminate them more necessary, especially from a gender point of view.

Keywords: WPS agenda; Morocco; Civil society; Transformative agency; Human security

Introduction

Particularly since the 2011 uprisings, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries have experienced many political crisis, armed conflicts and extremism which have provoked displacement and humanitarian crises resulting in the worsening of women's, and the most vulnerable people's condition (UN Women, undated). Compared to other regions, MENA has the highest prevalence rates for different types of Gender based Violence (GbV): women of these countries, in fact, suffer some of the worst forms of GbV, from intimate partner violence, femicides and so-called “honour crimes”, to child and early marriages, female genital mutilations, as well as sexual harassment or enslavement of young girls under the so called Islamic state (The World Bank, 2021). The recent combination of political instability, the Covid pandemic and climate change have exacerbated gender discriminations and the violation of women's rights by worsening economic marginalization and violence and by limiting women's access to education, property, wealth and to adequate healthcare services (Fellin, 2018). Moreover, legal and policy gaps, weak institutional capacity, inadequate protection services, and access to justice represent major obstacles, especially when combined with discriminatory social norms and practices (The World Bank, 2021).

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In Morocco, despite some recent political and legal improvements, women are affected in a range of gender-specific ways by multiple discriminations (Belarbi 2012; Sadiqi et al., 2016). Moreover, although Moroccan women actively participated in the 2011 uprisings, by claiming justice, freedom, dignity and equality (Borrillo, 2016), since that mobilisation they have suffered a conservative setback, with increasing levels of socio-economic marginalization and GbV in the private-public continuum (OECD, 2017). Despite the backdrop of regional “chronic insecurity” (Kamrava, 2019), the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, which was originally “intended to mainstream gender in peace and security policy making” (Davies, True, 2019: 8), is not at the political core of all of the MENA countries, where the understanding of the Agenda varies and the importance of its principles are not considered to be a priority by society, including women themselves (Rayman, Izen, Parker, 2016). As an example, only in 2014, was Iraq the first country to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP), the instrument that UN member states are called upon to adopt in order to fulfil their commitments and detail their strategies to implement the UNSCR1325 (WILPF, undated).

Neither in Morocco, does the WPS Agenda seem to be a national priority. This article aims at exploring the lags, challenges and opportunities of the WPS Agenda’s implementation in Morocco by investigating the rationale of its political de-prioritization. The main goal of the study is to understand whether the slow development of the NAP occurred because of the general security situation, the lack of political will, the scarcity of financial resources, or the lack of a sufficient awareness about the WPS Agenda within society as a whole (Fellin, 2018). Based on the WPS literature analysis in the MENA region and in Morocco, combined with qualitative interviews realised with ethnographic methodologies, this study observes that the combination of all these four possibilities occur in Morocco, by producing what we can define as a WPS Agenda’s “delayed” momentum in the North African Kingdom. This article aims at demonstrating why, and through which dynamics, the WPS Agenda’s implementation could be understood to be a “delayed reaction” to UNSCR1325. This delayed reaction seems connected to both practical and conceptual factors, which are inherent to two main misperceptions - widespread among the participants interviewed for this study - about, firstly, the apparent stable security situation of the country and, secondly, the importance of the WPS Agenda mainly for war-torn or unstable contexts.

Firstly, the general idea of Morocco’s apparent political stability does not place the WPS Agenda among the national political priorities and also has a significant impact on the magnitude of assistance from international organizations in the realm of security, which generally prioritise other countries with large-scale conflicts and most urgent needs, according to a “conservative” interpretation of the WPS Agenda (Maphalala, Maphalala, 2021). Secondly, the widespread idea that the WPS agenda focuses more on war-torn or unstable contexts and pays less attention to more stable countries neglects other dimensions of insecurity which particularly affect women, such as GbV in the domestic sphere which however have a relevant impact on the social equilibrium. In addition to contributing to the deconstruction of these false ideas and in shedding light on the existing gaps that prevented a full implementation of the WPS Agenda in the country, the article aims at showing, firstly, how, in contrast to its internal political de-prioritization, Moroccan diplomacy is active on the regional level - both Mediterranean and African - in harmony with specific geopolitical interests.

Based on these premises, the article, secondly, aims at exploring how civil society organizations contribute to the implementation of the WPS Agenda in the country by investigating the efforts made by some local NGOs in order to raise WPS awareness in a population largely unaware or uninterested in the topic and to push institutions towards the fulfilment of the WPS Agenda. This study also demonstrates how Morocco, as many other contexts, reveals itself to be characterised by what Rajagopalan (2016) has defined as a

disconnection between institutions and civil society and how such disconnection, combined with a lack of awareness about the WPS Agenda within society, limits what Meger calls the “potential” of the WPS Agenda itself, which may concern the whole of society - and not just women - and which can be applied not only in contexts characterised by armed conflicts (Meger, 2019). Thirdly, following up on new approaches that expand the understanding of the “conflict” category and the application of the WPS Agenda (Newby, O’Malley, 2021; Maphalala, Maphalala 2021; Shepherd, 2020) beyond the mere dichotomy of peace and security, the analysis of the interviews for this study reveals six relevant strategic axes and opportunities that a full implementation of the WPS Agenda in accordance with the concept of “human security” could potentially imply with reference to some of the “conflict lines” existing in the country (Strachan, 2014).

In this perspective, this study aims at demonstrating that the implementation of the WPS Agenda can be understood as being at the core of a complex political framework where women’s empowerment and women’s protection intertwine with relevant complex internal, regional and international political issues.

In terms of internal politics, the article empirically demonstrates that the implementation of the WPS Agenda could entail important advancements for the fight against GbV, in preventing social conflicts and radicalization, and in the enactment of the national transitional justice process. In terms of regional and international relations, this study sheds light on the entanglements of crucial geo-political issues which are related to the peace process between Morocco and Western Sahara as well as with Algeria, while at the same time it reveals Moroccan political interests in the Mediterranean and pan-African context, which are also characterised by the fight against jihadi terrorism in the Sahel.

To address these issues, the article explores the need for a rethinking, expressed by several scholars (Newby, O’Malley, 2021; Shepherd, 2020) and also by Moroccan fieldwork participants, of the concept of “security”, by expanding its sense and application perimeters, by emancipating it from purely military issues and by redirecting it towards a more social and human oriented dimension in harmony with the local context. “Human security” concept is especially relevant since the COVID pandemic has made inequalities more visible and corrective measures to eliminate them more necessary, particularly from a gender point of view. In this regard, the article converges in considering the WPS Agenda as a “common language” (Rayman, Izen, Parker, 2016), which can be useful to include areas outside traditional conceptions of security, and to embrace the full remit of evolving security threats and structural obstacles which prevent women’s empowerment in all sectors (Newby, O’Malley, 2021). Moreover, this study illustrates that far from only being “victims”, women could be considered in a participative way as active social actors, who are capable of driving, achieving and sustaining security and peace by playing multiple roles (UN Women, undated).

The structure of the article and its methodology

The article is articulated in three parts: the first part details a general overview of gender politics, and of women’s condition in Morocco, by focusing on the articulation of the patriarchal social contract according to the three main dimensions of the WPS Index, which are inclusion, justice and security. The second part focuses on the causes of the slow process of adoption of a NAP (National Action Plan) and of the scarce national debate on WPS, while shedding light on the Moroccan diplomatic strategy of peace and security at multi-regional levels. The third part explores the main potentialities, opportunities and challenges of an expanded understanding of the WPS Agenda in Morocco. In conclusion, the qualitative analysis of the interviews offers recommendations that place special emphasis on the connections between advancing gender mainstreaming in the entire political infrastructure and building a sustainable peace in Morocco. In this latter part, empirically, the article goes

as far as to underline to what extent certain specific policies are pivotal in making the four pillars of the UNSCR 1325 (participation, conflict prevention, protection, recovery and relief) operational, in order to reframe the concept of security through the incorporation of the “human security dimension”. Moreover, the article attempts to shed light on the several policies which, particularly after the 2011 uprisings and the pandemic, seem to be crucial in encouraging women to have a greater role within the process of building a society based on peace, equality and social justice.

The article is based on the analysis of documents regarding WPS in Morocco, within the context of WPS implementation in the MENA region and in Mediterranean and African context.¹ To understand the specific challenges facing the WPS Agenda implementation in Morocco, a series of interviews was conducted as a key part of the research: 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2020 and 2022 with different stakeholders such as Moroccan and international male and female institutional actors, Moroccan academics and experts in WPS, female activists of local NGOs and international organisations’ representatives. The research interlocutors represent a good portion of the WPS community in Morocco, i.e., those who take an interest – because of their work or activism - in the issue. The WPS community in Morocco, as it will be demonstrated in this paper, is not large and it has been difficult to find experts in the topic. The interviews were conducted remotely in French and English, then recorded and transcribed. Each one lasted a minimum of one hour, and some interviews were conducted more than once, to delve into certain aspects. The analysis of the interviews basically followed an inductive process to highlight the level of social awareness about the national debate on WPS Agenda, the causes of the delay in the adoption of National Action Plan (NAP), possible fields of application of WPS Agenda in local governance and on the regional and international level.²

Inclusion, Justice and Security: how the WPS Index unveils the patriarchal social contract in Morocco

Morocco is placed 138th for 2021/2022 in the *WPS Index* ranking elaborated by the *Georgetown Institute for WPS (GIWPS)* in collaboration with the *Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO)* (GIWPS, 2019; 2021).³ The North African kingdom was placed 133rd for the

¹ During the peer-review process, Morocco adopted a NAP in March 2022. The article, which initially included an analysis of the causes of the failure to adopt a NAP in Morocco, was then rewritten after the NAP’s adoption. As we will see in the last paragraph (devoted to the analysis of the NAP and added after the reviewers’ first reading), the adoption of the NAP, although representing a significant step forward towards the full implementation of the WPS Agenda, does not substantially change the core of the results of this study.

² Research was carried out as part of the 2020 project “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Peace and Security – WEPPS”, implemented by a team of researcher based at the Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa (Italy) under the scientific coordination of Professor Francesco Strazzari, in partnership with Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) in Bologna (Italy). Funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the WEPPS project developed around three main axes: a) research on WPS implementation in Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo through qualitative methods (literature review, desk analysis and interviews); b) a dialogue and training program, called “The Women Peace and Security Agenda in the pandemic”, involving professionals in the field of WPS (women activists, representatives of local institutions and CSOs, international agencies and NGOs) in the four target-countries, aimed at facilitating the exchange of expertise and creation of transnational networks; and c) collecting and publishing articles to foster critical analysis of the challenges in WPS implementation.

³ The *WPS Index* aims at assessing the performance of 170 countries in terms of WPS and in order to identify challenges and opportunities offered to the international community by the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, also in relation to the global priorities of the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 and with particular reference to its Objective 5, dedicated to female empowerment. The index results from 11 indicators aggregated on the performance of each state in terms of WPS.

2019/2020 and 138th for the 2020/2021. Morocco is at “0.624”, below the world average, which is calculated on a maximum of 0.922 for Norway and a minimum of 0.278 for Afghanistan, on a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 represents the worst possible and 1 the best. Although slight, we observe a decline in such ranking from 133rd to 138th in the last three years. The WPS index helps in understanding women’s living conditions in Morocco, according to three interrelated dimensions: “inclusion” which comprises political participation and representation, economic and financial inclusion, employment and education rates, the use of mobile phones and social inclusion; “justice” refers to legal and informal discrimination; and “security” (at a family, community and society levels) includes: violence by the partner, community security, and structural violence.

In terms of inclusion, Morocco is among the countries most affected by a decline in public participation by women after the 2011 uprisings. After the political elections following the protests, for example, only one single woman was appointed as Minister in the new government led by the Islamist Party for Justice and Development and she was at the head of the Ministry of Women, Solidarity and Family. Although women ministers rose to 7 in 2021, and despite the pre-existing electoral quota which was launched in the 2002 electoral reform, female political participation is still low and women are rarely perceived as leaders in the public sphere (IDEA, 2020; Sobhani, 2021). In terms of financial inclusion, despite some efforts in the financial sector - such as the adoption of a financial law, which since 2006 has a government report drawn up according to gender indicators (The World Bank, 2008) -, women have scarce access to credit, to land and property ownership and the feminization of poverty is persistent. In terms of female employment, Morocco is among the 10 countries (including 8 in the MENA region) with the worst performance (GIWPS, 2019: 15) with a rate of 19.9%, compared with the 70.4% of male employment (HCPM, 2021). Despite that, in 2005, the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender was included in the Labour Code, the gender gap still concerns salary, career prospects, trade union’s protection and working conditions (Bourayet, 2010), while in the family organization, women traditionally suffer the double burden of work (ILO, 2017). There is also a persistent gender gap in the field of education, as women are more affected than men by illiteracy: in 2020 more than half of all adult women (52,9%) were illiterate (HCP, 2021). The GIWPS Report notes that in recent years the schooling rate and the participation of women in economic and financial activity have decreased, while the female perception of living in an unsafe society has increased (GIWPS, 2019, 2022). In this regard, although Morocco adopted a “National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women” in 2005 and an important law against violence in 2018, GbV remains a deeply rooted phenomenon in the country: in 2019, 57.1% of women suffered at least one act of violence (HCP, 2021). According to UNFPA, the prevalence of GbV is 62,8% and child marriages are still very widespread: the percentage of women married under 18 years of age is 11,47% (UNFPA, 2017).

On the legal front, according to the *Georgetown Institute for WPS* (GIWPS) Report, the Middle East and North Africa is the worst performing region and although Morocco adopted many reforms for the advancement of women’s rights, however discrimination against women is still grave. Starting from the 1990s, Morocco adopted a wider set of policies for women’s empowerment. The 1993 first reform of the *Mudawwana*, the Family Code which was approved after independence (1956), represented a crucial step towards the “liberalization” of gender relations in the post-colonial phase (Prusan-Jørgensen, 2011). The Family Code has been - and still is - functional for maintaining the stability of both the patriarchy and political power (Charrad, 2001) through the Islamic ‘sanctification of family’ (Joseph 2000), which creates ‘imperfect’ women’s citizenship (Kandiyoti, 1997). In the 90’s, the promotion of women’s rights became a symbol of the opening up of the country to development policies, in the whole framework of the opening of the regime to the universal

narrative of human rights and to a multi-party system. Hence, from the beginning of the 2000s, after King Muhammad VI ascended the throne in 1999, gender mainstreaming began to permeate public policies in an even more systematic way (Belarbi, 2012; Mchichi, 2010). From then on, gender issues have gradually been incorporated into national policies, and have become a pivotal issue in all international cooperation projects. In this process, the regime aimed at incorporating some of the local secular feminist movements' claims in the wake of the so-called "democratic transition" - a process that is anyway incomplete according to Moroccan feminist scholars (Belarbi, 2012) - and at presenting a gender friendly attitude according to the neoliberal narrative promoted by its Western partners (mainly US and EU). As an example, in 2004, the second Family Code reform abolished the obedience of the wife to her husband, placing the family under the responsibility of both spouses, it recognized the right of women to initiate a divorce and raised the legal minimum age for marriage to 18 years (even though judges can still authorize child marriages with the both families' consent). Moreover, since 2005 the Ministry of Justice is equipped with a section dedicated to gender issues aimed at eliminating gender discriminations in legal texts. In 2007, the new Nationality Code recognized the mother's right to transfer her nationality to a child born from a marriage with a foreigner (Perrine, 2007). In 2011, following the protests animated by the February 20 Movement, the new Constitution provides the principle of gender equality (article 19) in the fields of civil, political, social, economic and environmental rights (Borrillo, 2019). Moreover, the Constitution, declares the commitment to 'creating the conditions that would generalise the effectiveness of freedom and equality between citizens, their participation in political, economic and social life' (Article 6); to mobilizing all available instruments to facilitate equal access of women and men to elective offices (Article 30), to offices of the Superior Judiciary Council (Article 115), or the territorial Councils (regions and communities) (Article 146). In order to reinforce the concept of the effectiveness of rights, the Constitution also introduces the principle of parity (*munassafa*), based on the principle of equity (*insāf*), as an operational mechanism (Borrillo, 2019).

Despite this normative infrastructure, women are under-represented in all sectors, and the patriarchal social contract (Moghadam, 1998; Pateman, 1988) persists in the country due to the combination of a hegemonic misogynist culture and the political use of Islam as a dispositive of power (Darif, 2010).

Against this backdrop, this article aims at analysing the lags, challenges and opportunities of the WPS Agenda implementation in Morocco in order to broaden the horizons of what needs to be done in terms of women's empowerment and women's protection in a broader framework of domestic, regional and international politics, where women can play a strategic role in enhancing the security of their own society and in building a sustainable peace in key fields, from the fight against GbV to promoting equity, social inclusion and political participation, and from conflict prevention to mediation.

A multilevel WPS Agenda implementation in Morocco: national level, civil society, diplomacy

The slow institutional process towards NAP adoption

Although Morocco signed up to UNSCR 1325, only in 2022 has it adopted a NAP, the National Action Plan is envisaged as a strategic document needed to implement the four pillars of the resolution (participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery). From the combination of the analysis of documents with the interviews carried out in autumn 2020 and 2022 involving players from civil society, institutions and WPS experts, this part reconstructs the reasons for this lag and explores to what extent the WPS Agenda does not appear to be a national priority, from a legal and political standpoint.

On the legislative level, the 2011 Constitution establishes some principles which allow a rapid adaptation of domestic laws to international conventions, including the recognition of their higher rank, as well as the commitment to harmonize national legislation with their provisions. Moreover, the Constitution includes other axes that can contribute to the implementation of UNSCR 1325, such as: the fight against all forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin or religious affiliation; the commitment to provide for legal provisions to encourage the equal participation of women and men in the elected functions, as well as in the judiciary and in the higher council of the judiciary, where the presence of women is traditionally scarce (WILPF-UAF, 2012). But - also in this regard - constitutional provisions seem insufficient to produce concrete implications and, in terms of the implementation of the WPS Agenda, this study demonstrates that in the last decade there have been more official statements than a concrete efficacy.⁴

Several examples help in demonstrating such political tendency. In 2010, the representative of the Moroccan permanent mission to the UN, Lotfi Bouchaara, declared the full commitment of Morocco in supporting the implementation of UNRSC 1325, indicating among the main factors of this process: "the central role played by civil society in raising awareness on the contents of the resolution and in putting in place adequate efforts to achieve its objectives". To this end, Morocco committed itself to "a better representation of women in regional, national and international institutions and in particular in conflict prevention, [...]to a better coordination between national and international actors, and to a greater support from the UN in terms of cooperation and technical assistance" (Security Council Open Debate on WPS, 2010). Moreover, in 2019, during the debate on the adoption of UNSCR 2493 - aimed at inviting states to make greater efforts to apply UNRSC 1325 in view of its 20th anniversary in 2020 - the Moroccan ambassador Omar Hilale recalled the importance of "integrating the gender approach in peace processes, promoting equality between men and women and ensuring the rights for women defined as 'essential' for international peace and security" (UN PRESS, 2019). Hence, he evoked the importance of fighting impunity and of strengthening the access to justice for the victims of sexual violence; he also stated that the Moroccan government "has launched many initiatives and participates in many of them, such as the *Réseau des points focaux* on WPS" and that "Morocco was preparing its NAP 2020-2022 throughout an inclusive process that includes all the ministerial departments, representatives of civil society and UN agencies, including UN Women" (UN PRESS, 2019).

This study notes the absence of a concrete efficacy of these statements, in particular with regard to the participatory approach in the NAP's adoption, as we will see in the last paragraph. In addition to this, the analysis of several interviews with officials from UN agencies (such as UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA) and with representatives of various Moroccan ministries, shows that the NAP adoption process suffered a further setback in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic: the meetings scheduled for 2020 were postponed to 2021, while the whole process has been secondary to what the interviewees have defined as "other political priorities".⁵

However, the WPS Agenda implementation process was de-prioritized from the political agenda even before the pandemic, despite the fact that a bureaucratic infrastructure had been put in place for its implementation. In fact, at the institutional level, in order to adopt

⁴ Interviews by the author with a female Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), and with a female Moroccan former ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6).

⁵ Interviews by the author with a female Moroccan former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6), the Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l'Homme*, CNDH) (9), an Official of UN Women - Morocco (12), two Officials of the Ministry of Woman, Family, Solidarity and Social Development (14, 15).

a NAP, an inter-ministerial task force was created, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But, only on June 26, 2019 did this Ministry launch an inter-ministerial Steering Committee also composed of the Ministry of the Interior, Justice, Defence, Health, Islamic Affairs, Economy and Women, Family, Solidarity and Social Development (Kingdom of Morocco, NAP 2021-2024, p. 27). With the support of UN Women, this Committee was supposed to elaborate a NAP to be presented during the UN General Assembly 2020.⁶ In addition, in order to include civil society, UN Women and the Ministry of Women, Family, Solidarity and Social Development were supposed to identify the associations to be involved in the process, but this process - according to a representative of a feminist NGO, interviewed for this study - was not completed.⁷

In this scenario, among the rare official diplomatic actions organized at the national level, the international conference entitled *Women, Peace, Security and Development* was organized under the aegis of UN Women in Rabat on 7 September 2016, with the co-presidency of Sweden. This conference relaunched the role of UN Women to foster the application of the WPS agenda especially for the necessary economic support in three fields of intervention: post-conflict planning, economic reconstruction and governance. But, on that occasion, the call of the UN Women representative for Morocco, Leila Rihwi, to Moroccan institutions in order to allocate increased national investment in the implementation of the WPS agenda demonstrated the economic limitations to relaunching it at the national level (UN Women, 2016b). Moreover, on that occasion, government representatives announced the creation in Rabat of an independent study centre dedicated to the enhancement of women's roles in peacekeeping and security operations (Le 360, 2017), which, however, has not yet been created.⁸ Not even the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH), the advisory Council for Parliament which among other issues works on the adaptation of Moroccan laws to the constitutional principle of gender equality (CNDH, 2015) and which, together with the Ministry for Human Rights, works on the National Plan for Democracy and Human Rights (*Plan national pour la démocratie et les droits de l'homme*) - which includes women's rights and the adaptation of national laws to international standards - has still to be activated on the WPS agenda.⁹

Such institutional inaction legitimises exploring the rationale of this political de-prioritization of the WPS agenda. Does it occur because of the general security situation, the scarcity of financial resources, the lack of political will or the lack of awareness about the agenda within the whole of society? The literature analysis and the interviews demonstrate that the combination of these four reasons could explain the WPS Agenda "delayed process" situation in Morocco.

In terms of the general security situation, the absence of a large-scale armed conflict in Morocco and its - apparent - political stability seem to be the main reasons which explain, according to all the interviewees, the de-prioritization of the WPS Agenda. This also seems to be the main reason why the WPS agenda is almost completely unknown in Morocco and almost totally absent from the public debate. Such widespread ideas coincide with a "conservative understanding of conflict and of WPS" (Maphalala, Maphalala, 2021), which focuses more on war-torn or unstable contexts, therefore neglecting more stable countries,

⁶ Interviews by the author with a female Moroccan former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6) and with an Official of UN Women – Morocco (12).

⁷ Interview by the author with a female Moroccan former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6).

⁸ Interviews by the author with an Expert and Founder, Africa Women's Forum (4), and with a female Moroccan former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6).

⁹ Interview by the author with the Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l'Homme*, CNDH) (9).

which are however characterised by several “conflict lines”, as is the case of Morocco (Strachan, 2014).

A civil society “non cibl  ” debate.

In such a context, in continuity with the definition of WPS as a “discrete object of analysis” (Basu, Kirby, Shepherd, 2020:2), the debate on WPS in Morocco seems to be an issue for a few experts and social actors interested in it.

One of the rare academic initiatives in the WPS field to date appears to be the conference organized on 19 October 2016 at the University of Fes by the Gender and Development Research Group, aimed at examining the gap between political decision-makers and civil society in the WPS field. This conference explored some topics of interest to the WPS agenda behind the mere “peace and conflict” dichotomy, such as GbV and the role of women in maintaining peace and security, in peace-keeping missions, in diplomacy, as well as in the religious professions considered crucial to the containment of violent extremism.¹⁰

On the civil society side, in Morocco there are no associations specialized in conflict mediation with a gender focus, although the creation of a *Fem-Wise Africa* national focal point is planned.¹¹ Moreover, the Moroccan WPS focal point has not yet been created, and the web page of this initiative, when selecting Morocco, says “information coming soon”.¹²

A research participant for this study, an academic in Gender studies, has defined the debate on WPS in Morocco as “an unfocused debate” for the civil society: a “d  bat non-cibl  ” (in French).¹³

According to the Founder of Africa Women’s Forum, Moroccan women’s rights associations only began to be interested in the WPS agenda after the 2011 outbreak of chaos in Syria and Libya (UAF-WILPF: 16) and when violent radicalism became a regional and national problem.¹⁴ The association that deals most with WPS is the *Union de l’Action F  minine* (UAF), founded in the 1980s among the main associations of Moroccan secular feminism (Daoud, 1993), although *Joussur* and the feminist coalition *Parity now* (in Moroccan Arabic: *Munassafa Daba*) - aimed at claiming an equal participation for women in the electoral lists - are attentive to the issue, as well.¹⁵ In 2012, UAF organized the national consultations “Abolishing discrimination and strengthening peace and security for women in the Middle East and North Africa” (*Abolir les discriminations et renforcer la paix et la s  curit   des femmes au Moyen Orient et en Afrique du Nord*) in collaboration with Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and with the support of Norway and of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. There, 37 members of associations for human rights, women’s rights and of a trade union discussed WPS with the aim of bridging the gap between the large participation of women in the Arab uprising and their scarce presence in decision-making processes in the post-2011 political phase (UAF-WILPF, 2012). The result was a set of recommendations in a policy document addressed to the government in order to integrate the gender dimension in security governance, allocating a significant budget to promote women’s role in conflict prevention, mediation and management, as well as to encourage the role of women in decision making in all sectors (*Recommendations UAF, 2012, non-published document*). Since then, according to some of its members interviewed for this study, UAF has been

¹⁰ Interview by the author with an Expert in Gender and Development, Professor, Fes University (7).

¹¹ Interview by the author with an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5).

¹² <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/morocco/> (last access 2nd June 2022).

¹³ Interview by the author with an Expert in Gender issues and Professor, Director of Gender, Education, Literature and Media Centre, Casablanca University (8).

¹⁴ Interviews by the author with an Expert and Founder of Africa Women’s Forum (4, 4a).

¹⁵ Interview by the author with Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l’Homme, CNDH*) (9).

involved in raising awareness and training about UNRSC 1325 and has requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to participate in the process for the elaboration of the NAP. In 2020 UAF also proposed working with UN Women to put coordination mechanisms in place between international organizations and civil society associations; it also proposed to implement mechanisms of monitoring and impact evaluations, but this did not receive significant feedback.¹⁶ While other MENA region countries already take the WPS agenda into account (della Valle, 2022), for Morocco in 2020 it was still too early to talk about the NAP, as one of the main Founders of the *Union de l'Action Féminine* declared.¹⁷

Among the reasons for the absence of the WPS Agenda from both national politics and social debate, both in terms of knowledge production and in terms of civil society advocacy for WPS, once again the most widespread notion among the social actors interviewed for this study refers to (apparent) political stability and the absence of conflict in the country.¹⁸

This hegemonic idea reflects the quietly widespread belief in the country that the WPS Agenda is oriented to be adapted to security policy-making in armed conflict or war contexts, while - according to feminist scholarship in International Relations - peace has to be conceptualised and framed not only in terms of militarized security but, also, it is necessary to shed light on the WPS potential for reviving all of the elements of permanent peace based on the respect of human rights and dignity (Otto, 2016). Moreover, the lack of coordination between institutions and civil society organisations such as UAF, demonstrates what Rajagopalan (2016) has defined as a disconnection between policy makers and civil society, which represents a significant obstacle to the implementation of the WPS Agenda. However, in contrast to the political inaction at a national level and in contrast to the lack of a participatory collaboration with those associations more engaged in the debate, this study finds a dynamic diplomatic activity at a regional level, which suggests other political interests to be investigated.

Diplomatic regional activity

Notwithstanding that in terms of national politics, progress has been slow, at the regional level Morocco is involved in three main initiatives.

The first one is the *Med-Med Mediation initiative in the Mediterranean* promoted in 2012 by Morocco and Spain, with a memorandum in 2013 that promoted a generation of women mediators to be trained in peace and conflicts. The initiative, which for Morocco involves the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mbarka Bouaida, has produced several multilateral workshops with various Mediterranean countries. The *Centre marocain des études et recherches en sciences sociales* (CERSS) and the *Centro internacional de Toledo para la paz* (Citpax) have been commissioned to carry out training for the role of women in mediation in the Mediterranean (CERSS, 2019). According to a Moroccan WPS expert interviewed for this study, it would seem to be an important step in the direction of the

¹⁶ Interviews by the author with one of the main Founders of the *Union de l'Action Féminine* (1), and with an activist, founder and former president, *Union de l'Action Féminine* (2).

¹⁷ Interview by the author with the Founder of the *Union de l'Action Féminine* (1).

¹⁸ Interviews by the author with the Founder of the *Union de l'Action Féminine* (1), an activist, founder and former president, *Union de l'Action Féminine* (2), the Former president and coordinator, *Réseau Anaruz-Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (3), an Expert and Founder of Africa Women's Forum (4), an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), a female Moroccan former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6), an Expert in Gender and Development, Professor, Fes University (7), Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l'Homme*, CNDH) (9), a Former coordinator, Amnesty International MENA regional Office (11).

implementation of the WPS Agenda, but these mediators will only have a formal role and the initiative risks to fail in the short, medium and long term without a concrete NAP.¹⁹

The second regional initiative is the *Enhancing the civic and social engagement of women and youth in preventing violence and extremism* project, launched by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) for Morocco and Tunisia (2018-2021), aimed at increasing the participation of women and of young people in the prevention of violence and extremism. Presenting itself as a strategic actor in the fight against gender discriminations and in the inclusion of women in the human and economic development of the region, the UfM also launched twenty indicators to assess the progress made in the field of gender equality in the Euro-med region. These indicators cover four main axes: women's access to leadership and decision making, female participation in economic life, the fight against violence towards women and any other gender discrimination.

The third initiative is the regional conference *Women4Mediterranean* (16th-20th November 2020) organized by UfM in Barcelona with the focus *Accelerating equality between women and men in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic*.

Similar initiatives highlight the importance of the WPS Agenda for Morocco's foreign policy, especially since the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) and the recognition of the country's advanced status in the EU (2008). Beyond the Moroccan interest in the Euro-med area and the UfM, what seems even more significant, however, is the strategic diplomatic use of the WPS Agenda in the framework of Morocco's recent pan-African politics, which has been activated with the reintegration of the kingdom into the African Union (AU) and with the request for membership, which has not yet been processed in a positive sense, in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Thanks to the reintegration into the AU (January 31, 2017), Morocco has activated a political roadmap characterised by huge investments in economic, financial and religious cooperation (Echkhundi - Hafid, 2019). Although geostrategic interests prevail, Morocco's new foreign policy in Africa is characterised by a pervasive religious diplomacy which is combined with economic and security interests and which is achieved through the promotion of a tolerant and moderate Islam by training imams and ulamas, characterised by an anti-jihadist discourse (Borrillo, 2017; Bruce, 2019).

It's also within this framework that the Moroccan diplomatic promotion of women's roles in peace processes should be understood. In July 2017, on the occasion of an audit of women's and youth associations during a mission to the Central African Republic, the Moroccan Ambassador Omar Hilale at the UN and president of the Configuration of the Central African Republic of the UN peace-building mission, stated the importance of strengthening women's participation in peace processes (Minusca, 2017). Moreover, he repeatedly stressed Morocco's commitment to economically supporting socio-economic development processes for African countries, underlining the kingdom's commitment to preserving the cultural and religious tradition of the continent, through coordination activities by ulama trained in the field of moderate Islam (Hespress, 2020).

This clear geopolitical interest, however, seems scarcely related to any support for the concrete promotion of the WPS Agenda and for the involvement of women in all the necessary steps for its full implementation. Indeed, if we look at the regional *Réseaux of women mediators* - the Nordic Réseau (2015), the Arab Réseau (supported by the Arab League), the Mediterranean Réseau, coordinated by Italy (2017), the Réseau FemWise-Africa (2017) and the Réseaux Global Alliance created in 2019, in New York (Jaidi, 2019) aimed at encouraging the role of women in mediation and facilitating training, expertise and

¹⁹ Interview by the author with an Expert in Gender issues and Professor, Director of Gender, Education, Literature and Media Centre, Casablanca University (8).

awareness on peace and conflict (Women mediators, 2017) - only two Moroccan women are involved: the former ambassador Farida Jaidi, in the Mediterranean Réseau, and Khadija Elmadad, professor of law and expert in WPS, in the Réseau FemWise. Also in this case, the impact of these actions only seems to reach the diplomatic levels, without any relevant involvement of civil society.²⁰

Reframing “peace” and “security” towards a locally-oriented “human security”.

“Almost 20 years since the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325, we don’t just need to be at the peace table. It’s time to redesign the table”.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Pacific women’s rights activist and Chair of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (UN, 2020).

The WPS agenda has been mainly understood to be articulated in the fields of women's participation in peace and security governance, gendered violence in times of war and conflict and women's roles in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes (Shepherd 2020). Newby and O’Malley note that in recent years the field of investigation of women as “security actors” has grown considerably, and the WPS agenda is also articulated today in topics such as the responsibility to protect, protection of civilians, countering violent extremism and counterterrorism, transitional justice, climate change, disaster risk reduction and recovery, internally displaced persons and indigenous rights (Newby, O’Malley 2021). These approaches - as the words by Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls at the beginning of this paragraph - are very useful in order to analyse the Moroccan case through a new lens which is capable of expanding the perimeters of sense and applications of peace and security in order to make the application of the WPS agenda more inclusive and participatory. This study underlines how the key-concept of “human security” could help in expanding the borders of WPS (Shepherd 2021).

For an inclusive and participative implementation of the WPS agenda in Morocco, the qualitative research highlights the importance of critical rethinking the concepts of peace and security and in particular of rethinking the very diffuse idea that peace and security is only of concern in contexts of armed conflict from which Morocco would be unscathed. This latter assumption, which has been declared by almost all the interviewees of this study, can be deconstructed by the evident lines of geopolitical fractures such as the problematic relationship with Algeria and the contested issue of Western Sahara, which also includes the harsh living conditions of women in the refugee camps (Boulay, Correale, 2018). As these issues represent a taboo for many interviewees, it seems that they have “externalized” the internal conflict resolution problem, by referring to other urgent needs, such as the Sahel, and Mali in particular, with its illicit trafficking of migrants, weapons and drugs, as well as to the Libyan chaos and the international threat represented by jihadists.²¹

Nonetheless, the interviews show different axes for reconceptualising peace and security according to a multilevel integrated approach which includes social, economic and psychological aspects beyond the “sectarian paradigm”, demonstrating “the importance of centring the ‘local’ as a site of knowledge production in the WPS agenda” (Shepherd, 2000).

²⁰ Interviews by the author with an Expert and Founder of Africa Women’s Forum (4), an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), and with a Moroccan female former ambassador (6).

²¹ Interviews by the author with two activists from the *Union de l’Action Féminine* (1, 2), an Expert and Founder of Africa Women’s Forum (4), an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), a former Moroccan woman ambassador (6), and with an Expert in Gender and Development, Fes University (7).

Firstly, as in the International Relations studies, international peace and security studies are perceived as profoundly masculinist (Basu, Kirby, Shepherd, 2020), on the grounds that security, international humanitarian law, and conflict mediation are topics connected with violence and therefore considered to be stereotypically valid as exclusively male, dangerous and anti-family prerogatives.²²

While fulfilment of the WPS Agenda is surely concerned with encouraging the role of women in peacekeeping or military measures, it is also concerned with preventing conflicts, fighting gender-based violence and discrimination, promoting female participation in decision-making processes, in the access to education, employment, natural and economic resources in peacetime (UAF, 2012).

All these axes have to be conceived according to the “human security” approach, aimed at protecting human dignity as a whole and at considering women not only as victims to be paternalistically protected (Sjoberg, Peet, 2011), but also as subjects with transformative agency, capable of contributing to social change (WILPF-UAF, 2012).

The human security approach - which includes seven main dimensions, namely economic, health, personal, political, food, environmental, and community - was introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994) in order to call upon member States to identify and address “widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity for their people” (UNTFHS), and to target reductions in military spending as an opportunity to move from investments in arms to investments in sustainable development, by making the link between reduced military spending and increased social investment explicit (GNWP, 2020).

What appears relevant for the case of Morocco is that the notion of human security acknowledges the need for coordinated efforts to prevent conflicts and crises and to promote sustainable peace and also requires accounting for the different ways in which diverse groups of people are impacted not only by militarization but also by the intersecting effects of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of discrimination. This includes using intersectional, gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive analyses to inform crisis response and ensure equitable and inclusive outcomes for all (GNWP, 2020). It is exactly within this perspective that some actors of Moroccan civil society, who were interviewed for this study, are committed to for adapting the priorities of the WPS Agenda to locally oriented needs. At the same time, according to them, it is crucial to apply gender equality to all aspects of political, economic, civil and religious life to favour local peacekeeping as well as a more democratic regime, where the participative, transparent and democratic involvement of the civil society - including women - in all the steps of WPS implementation. On the contrary, reality demonstrates that the opposite occurred: the period that followed the 2011 uprisings can be assimilated to a post-conflict reconstruction between civil society and the state. Women participated in the protests in Morocco but they were then mostly excluded from the subsequent negotiations, while their role should be strengthened for a more inclusive society.

In this scenario, the study sheds light on six concrete dimensions which, according to the majority of the interviewees, could help in expanding the understanding and the inclusive application of the WPS Agenda in Morocco, in accordance with the transversal concept of human security: 1) the construction of a true peace culture, based on social justice and equality; 2) the fight against GbV at the national level and 3) within the framework of the migration policy; 4) the strengthening of women's roles in the transitional justice process and 5) in the democratization of the defence sector; 6) the enhancement of women's roles in security and mediation forces, as well as for the prevention of violent extremism.

²² Ibidem.

1) The Construction of a Peace Culture, based on social justice and equality should be promoted by a “community of practices” (Davies, True, 2019), a constructive partnership composed of civil society, experts, academics, politicians, the education system and the media.²³ Campaigns to vulgarize laws, to raise awareness of the WPS Agenda and combat gender stereotypes should be encouraged for the purpose of implementing the whole WPS Agenda, which should also be disseminated thanks to the efforts of the education system in order to encourage the interest of young people and new generations in the matter.

2) According to all the interviewees, the fight against gender-based violence is crucial for building a peaceful society, whereas in Morocco 57% of women suffer multiple forms of violence (HCPM, 2019). Most of this violence takes place within the home and is exercised by male members of the family (HRW, 2018). The strict gender division of labour implies the male imposition of domestic work obligations and also the obedience of the wife to her husband is still widespread, although the Family Code of 2004 abolished it. Although this Code raised the minimum age for marriage to 18, forced and early marriages are still possible, with the agreement of a judge and the families. Social normativity exerts considerable pressure on women, who are still considered the pivot of family honour - especially in more marginalised contexts. The 103.13 law against GbV of 2018 is the first legal text dedicated to criminalizing political, economic, verbal, sexual and psychological violence and represents an important advance, even though it does not consider abuses committed within marriage, which are still widespread. Another obstacle is the lack of awareness and training on gender equality among officials and police forces (Noury, 2015).²⁴ Despite the 2008 and 2011 government efforts to remove the reservations to CEDAW, civil society associations need more support in order to implement their campaigns, such as “Zero tolerance to Violence against Women and Girls”, launched in 2019 by UAF within the Euro-med Feminist initiative, which aims to visibilize GbV in order to accelerate legal steps and spread training for officials (in juridical, health, and social sectors) (UAF, 2019).

Following a global trend, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated GbV in Morocco, as did the scarcity of listening and care services for the victims and the difficulty of reaching the toll-free numbers in this period which were clogged due to reduced human resources. Despite that there are no official statistics, domestic violence against women increased during the pandemic (EuroMed Rights, 2020). The pandemic has also exacerbated poverty and social marginalization, with particularly negative effects on the most fragile sectors of the population, where once again a high percentage of unemployed, informal and / or underemployed workers are women. Military responses, which were implemented according to a “crisis securitization” approach - with the declaration of the state of emergency and by imposing strict curfews - were not successful in staving off the deadly pandemic (Laaroussi, 2020). Therefore, building a peaceful society means more than the absence of war, it means promoting equal access to social services, economic dignity, protective equipment, quality healthcare, including mental health services, and a safe place to turn to if one faces violence (GNWP, 2020a). According to the interviewees from civil society organizations, policy-making regarding the issue of human security should include measures to prevent violence which should be capable of protecting the most vulnerable women, even including forms of economic support, but also to involve society as a whole in the construction of a true peace culture, based on social justice and equality.

²³ Interviews by the author with an Expert and Founder of Africa Women’s Forum (4), a former Moroccan woman ambassador (6), and a former coordinator of Amnesty International MENA regional Office (11).

²⁴ Interviews by the author with an Expert in Gender issues and Professor, Casablanca University (8) and with the Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l’Homme*, CNDH) (9).

3) According to the interviewees, the Fight against GbV within the Migration Policy, could also be pivotal for the WPS Agenda implementation, since the mobility of migrants and refugees is crucial in Morocco due to its geopolitical role as a bridge between Africa and Europe. Morocco's new migration policy regularized around 50,000 migrants in 2014, within the framework of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (*Stratégie Nationale Immigration et Asile*, SNIA), while a second phase was launched in December 2016. In August 2016, the Law 27-14 was also adopted against the trafficking of humans, for the protection of human security and dignity for migrants and especially for women.²⁵ A concrete implementation of this law could improve the WPS Agenda in discontinuity with the traditional role of Morocco as “gendarme” of Europe.²⁶ Moreover, migration could represent a WPS pillar in terms of economy, human rights and education, as well as in the promotion of a culture of peace which needs to be based on acceptance, tolerance, cohabitation and respect.²⁷

4) Another crucial axis for the implementation of the WPS Agenda is the relaunch of the gender approach and the strengthening of women's roles in the context of *Transitional justice*, a process initiated to repair the massive violations of human rights committed by Moroccan authorities against political opponents in the period of the so-called “years of lead”, which lasted from independence until the death of King Hassan II (1956-1999) (ICTJ, 2011). The combination of human rights and women's rights within such domestic security policy had already been included by the government in 2005, in accordance with the recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (*Instance Équité et Réconciliation*, IER), the Committee aimed at restoring truth, moral reparations and material compensation for the victims of state abuses and human rights violations. The IER called upon the state to provide a security policy that respected human rights and fundamental freedoms and to put measures in place to control the disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances (FILDH-OMDH, 2011:9). In order to realize a full strategy to fight against impunity in the implementation of transitional justice, gender approach appears as a crucial dimension to promote mechanisms of individual and collective reparation, as well as to denounce the political violence suffered especially by women during the “years of lead”.

5) A significant obstacle to the implementation of the WPS Agenda concerns the fact that the security field remains under the King's direct authority and this centralization actually seems to slow down many procedures in this field. The new Constitution (2011), in addition to preserving the powers of the King for the promulgation of royal decrees (Article 42), in addressing messages to the nation and parliament "which cannot be the subject of any debate" (art.52) and to dissolve parliament (art.51), also recognizes his control over diplomatic representation abroad, and of defence and security. The Sovereign is in fact the "supreme head of the armed forces", has the exclusive monopoly on the appointment of military officials (Art. 53) and ambassadors (Art. 55), and chairs the new Highest Security Council (Art. 54), in addition to numerous other councils, such as that of the judiciary (Art. 56), and of the Higher Islamic Knowledge (Echkoundi, Hafid, 2019: 89). According to a WPS expert, a certain "lack of freedom of expression combined with the fear of taking responsibility in ruling on sensitive dossiers"²⁸ would probably also be linked to this articulated set of powers, which would partly explain the low response rate by institutional

²⁵ Interview by the author with an Activist, *Fédération de la Ligue Démocratiques des droits des femmes* (13).

²⁶ Interview by the author with the National coordinator Oxfam Morocco (10).

²⁷ Interview by the author with the Head of Human Rights Department (*Conseil National pour les Droits de l'Homme*, CNDH) (9).

²⁸ Interview by the author with an Expert and Founder, Africa Women's Forum (4).

actors with respect to the invitations to participate in the interviews for this study. The management of the budget for the WPS agenda is problematic as well, because some of the national budget funds, such as those for defence, are not the object of public transparency and therefore are still taboo.²⁹ Although gender approach is applied in these funds according to gender mainstreaming [i.e., the gender sensitive funding allocated for training and capacity building at the *Institut de la Gendarmerie Royale*], these measures risk to remain cosmetic operations until women reach executive posts in the security forces (UAF:24). Therefore, strengthening female roles in the security field could contribute to its democratization.

6) The scarce presence of women in executive roles in the armed and security forces represents a further obstacle to be removed for the implementation of the WPS agenda.³⁰ Women are present in the diplomatic corps and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (about 30%), although only 13% of the ambassadors are women (UAF-WILPF, 2012). They are in the judiciary (about 20%), in the armed forces, in the *Gendarmerie Royale* and in peacekeeping missions in which Morocco is involved - i.e. the *UN Mission in Sud Sudan* (UNMISS), in the *UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in The Central African Republic* (MINUSCA) and in the *UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (MONUSCO) (UN Peace-keeping, 2019) - but always with secondary functions and no power.³¹ Among the troops of the latest mission in 2019, out of 1300 members, there were 25 women (Kasraoui, 2019). This picture confirms the existence of a gender gap in Morocco among peace mediators and peacekeepers (Anderlini 2007) as well as within global diplomacy as a whole which reveals its gendered nature (Aggestam, Svensson, 2018). In terms of mediation, some interviewees³² suggest that, similarly to Tunisia - where some women have been involved in the reconstruction of social peace after jihadists attacks through specific training for peace mediators, especially in marginalized neighbourhoods where there is greater temptation for radicalization (Un Women, 2016) - in Morocco this role could be played by the official female preachers of Islam, established by the reform of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in 2004 (Borrillo, 2019 a). Equipped with religious authority combined with "pedagogy of persuasion" (Mahmood, 2005), they could reach a female audience that is difficult to reach by male imams and ulama and, in a context in which Islam has crucial social and political roles, they represent a strategic "peaceful" resource for a regime that bases its stability on internal religious homogeneity. But, in addition to promoting the role of women in the prevention of violence and jihadist radicalism, which the country experienced with the terrorist attacks in 2003 (Casablanca) and 2011 (Marrakech), some of these study participants underline that WPS Agenda implementation would benefit from awareness campaigns on gender equality, on the importance of women in maintaining peace and security, and from enhancing the role of women negotiators and mediators in peace agreement negotiations, in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions as well as in all the security forces. And for this to happen, political will and budget are needed.³³

²⁹ Interview by the author with an Expert in Gender and Development, Professor, Fes University (7).

³⁰ Interviews by the author with an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), a former Moroccan woman ambassador (6).

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Interview by the author with an Expert and Founder of Africa Women's Forum (4).

³³ Interviews by the author with one of the main Founders of the *Union de l'Action Féminine* (1), an Expert and Founder of Africa Women's Forum (4), an Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University (5), a woman former ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (6), Expert in Gender issues and Professor, Director of Gender, Education, Literature and Media Centre, Casablanca University (8).

The Adoption of a NAP: “After Covid, Inshallah”³⁴

As most of Moroccan officials declared in the interviews realised for this study during 2020, a NAP would have been adopted in Morocco “after Covid, *Inshallah* [If God wants, n.d.t]”. And so it was: on 23 March 2022 Morocco launched a NAP for the 2021-2024 period.

The document has been presented by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs “not as an exercise in formalism, but as an implementation of the Resolution 1325” and it is aimed at testifying “the country's commitment to promoting gender equality and in particular the WPS agenda, conceived as an essential instrument for maintaining international peace and security”.³⁵ It seems a good premise that the Moroccan NAP proposes, what the Minister has called, a “paradigm shift” in order to conceive “women as agents of change and equal partners in the decision making processes”.³⁶ Moreover, the recognition of the “transformational potential of the WPS Agenda” seems a relevant step in order to achieve peace, which is defined not only as “a mere absence of conflict” and which includes the resolution of the most important global crises, namely – according to the Minister’s discourse – “terrorism, climate change and health emergencies”.³⁷ Three major principles are conveyed in the NAP for WPS Agenda implementation: inclusion, innovation and a holistic approach. In this line, the NAP is defined as a roadmap which paves the way to practical steps, aimed at strengthening regional and international efforts to train women as peacekeepers and mediators, to combat international terrorism, and to create synergy between the WPS Agenda, the Human Rights Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, among which the economic empowerment of women is crucial for conflict prevention.³⁸

Despite these official premises, the NAP text appears to be a framework document, which, after a long introduction on the international context and on the national juridical architecture, comes into its own when, in the fifth paragraph, entitled “Priority axes of the Moroccan National Action Plan 1325”, it addresses three main strategic pillars: “preventive diplomacy, mediation, and peacekeeping”; “promotion of a culture of peace and equality”; and “economic participation of women” (Moroccan NAP, 2022: 28-31). These axes actually correspond to some of the dimensions that also emerged from this study. The first corresponds to the need to prevent conflict escalation, especially with regard to the Sahara issue, where it is crucial to maintain good relations with neighbouring Algeria and Spain, as well as in the African context, where Morocco aims at being a political leader. For the second axis, the NAP also states that it has carried out and intends to carry out several actions aimed at involving women in the WPS implementation process: a central role, as also emerged from this study, seems to be for the official women preachers of Islam (*murshidat*) for the prevention of violent extremism (Moroccan NAP:20-21; Borrillo, 2019a), together with the strengthening of women's participation in political leadership and education. For the third axis, the NAP proposes to increase the results already achieved by some policies in the field of the economic empowerment of women. In terms of practical realization and financing, the NAP indicates budgetary allocation of the general state budget, co-financing, donor contributions, donor loans, and an unspecified “others” (Moroccan NAP:31). In terms of the subjects of NAP drafting and action, the NAP mentions that a consultation between ministries and civil society was carried out in June 2021, with the technical support of UN Women (New York and Rabat). But when looking at the entities involved in the implementation of the activities of each pillar (Moroccan NAP:34-41) there are no ONGs –

³⁴ This paragraph was added during the peer-review process, after the first reading by the reviewers.

³⁵ Diplomacy of Morocco, “Launch of Morocco’s First Action Plan of Women, Peace and Security”, 23th March 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y9OjSpdrLw> (last access 2nd June 2022).

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Diplomacy of Morocco, “Launch of Morocco’s First Action Plan of Women, Peace and Security”.

civil society is mentioned only once in a very general way in the third pillar - but only Ministers or the Royal Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Royales*, FAR) or other institutions. In particular, the responsible entities for Pillar 1 are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans living abroad; the responsible entities for Pillar 2 are the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the prevention of violent extremism (Outcome 1), while The Ministry of Justice, The Ministry of the Interior and The Ministry of Solidarity, Social development, Equality and Family are involved in the protection of women and girls from all forms of discrimination and violence (Outcome 2). For Pillar 3, the responsible entities are the Ministry of Solidarity, Social development, Equality and Family and other departments of the Ministry of Economics and others.

The adoption of the NAP is undoubtedly a decisive step towards the implementation of the WPS, but some observations can be made at both the methodological and content levels.

In terms of methodology, centralisation of the NAP adoption process seems to have been favoured to the detriment of the inclusive approach. The participatory approach and the involvement of civil society, both as a focus of the debate in the drafting process and in the implementation of NAP's activities, seems to have been neglected. Indeed, "civil society" appears only 5 times in the whole document. The category of "human security" is never mentioned either.

In terms of contents, according to one of the representatives of a civil society organization, the NAP does not appear to be inclusive or representative of local women's perspectives and expectations; an intersectional point of view is lacking, which would also take into account and be inclusive of different gender identities in a progressive gender perspective; the use of language aimed at protecting women seems to victimise them rather than contribute to their empowerment.³⁹

Moreover, NAP focuses on the three pillars of the WPS agenda (participation, conflict prevention and protection) but does not mention "recovery and relief". Instead, we argue that this fourth pillar could be dedicated to economic, social and educational support for the country's most vulnerable women. In the NAP, there is no mention of the centre-periphery divide concerning the existing disparities between urban and rural areas of the country. Probably a focus on strengthening women's rights and equal access to livelihoods to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas could be an additional effort useful to fully meet the implementation of the WPS agenda.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the WPS Agenda in Morocco is not recognized by a large part of civil society and has been deprioritized by political decision makers until 2022, as the slow process of the NAP's adoption demonstrates. The pandemic has certainly slowed down the implementation of the WPS Agenda at the institutional level, but it has also triggered negative effects on socio-economic security for women in terms of unemployment, especially for those employed in informal work, and in terms of domestic violence, which has significantly increased with containment measures and worsening economic conditions and which should be resolved, also under the WPS Agenda umbrella.

The article has noted a widespread tendency among institutional and civil society actors to "externalize" the perception of existing conflict lines, according to the very diffuse idea that peace and security only concern contexts of armed conflict from which Morocco would be unscathed, while - as this article demonstrates - conflict concerns Morocco in many fields. The top-down nature of the regime's political power setting, and the fact that security is the King's prerogative, makes the subject particularly sensitive to public debate, when not

³⁹ Conversation with an activist and founder of *Union de l'Action Féminine*, 2nd June 2022.

secondary to other politics considered more urgent. This aspect contributes in sharpening the disconnection between state and civil society on WPS issues.

Nevertheless, this article demonstrated that the implementation of the WPS Agenda is at the core of a complex political framework where women's empowerment, women's protection and the fight against GbV intertwine with relevant regional and international political issues, such as the contested issue of Western Sahara, the complex relationship with Algeria, the fight against jihadism and the emerging crucial role of Morocco in the pan-African context. Moreover, the 2011 uprisings phase evidenced the importance of enhancing women's roles in all sectors in order to build a peaceful and more equal society. The post 2011 uprisings period can be assimilated to a post-conflict reconstruction between civil society and the state. Women participated in all the phases of the protests animated by the 20th February Movement in 2011 and they also participated in the second cycle of protest - harshly repressed by the state - in the Rif region in 2016 (Borrillo, 2017a). However, they were then mostly excluded from the subsequent negotiations, while their role should be strengthened for a more equal society.

Thanks to the reconstruction of what has been done in recent years, both on the civil society side and on the institutional side, the article empirically sheds light on several potentialities offered by the historical conjuncture of post 2011 which implies the relevance of six strategical axes for the WPS agenda implementation, both in domestic and in foreign Moroccan politics. These six axes, which emerged from the analysis of the interviews, are: 1) the construction of a true culture of peace, based on social justice and equality; 2) the fight against GbV at the national level and 3) within the framework of the migration policy; 4) the strengthening of women's roles in transitional justice process; 5) in the democratization of the defence sector; 6) the enhancement of women's roles in security and mediation forces, as well as for the prevention of violent extremism.

It is exactly in this scenario that this article argues that reframing "security" beyond a static application of the WPS Agenda according to a locally oriented "human security" approach seems necessary to politically relaunch a fully participative implementation of the WPS Agenda in Morocco.

Despite the encouraging premises of the Moroccan NAP, the topic remains to be investigated further in the future in order to observe its empirical implications. However, beyond its statements of principle regarding inclusion, innovation and holistic approach, to fully implement the WPS agenda, both the design and implementation of the policies envisaged by the NAP should include a fully participatory approach for a greater involvement of civil society. In this perspective, a constant action of monitoring by civil society, international organizations such as the United Nations and the main donors, on the state of progress of work on the WPS agenda countries, could help. If WPS could be understood as a "common language" (Rayman, Izen, Parker, 2016) it would be useful to strengthen women's empowerment in all sectors, women have to be considered not as victims, but as transformative social actors within a whole "community of practices" where civil society and the state work together for the implementation of the WPS Agenda through a transparent, participative and transformative process aimed to promote gender equality and social justice.

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Funding

This research was supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI) – Direzione Generale per gli Affari Politici e di Sicurezza. Decree dated 11/04/2019 for the granting of financial assistance under the third National Action Plan, adopted for the implementation of the Resolution n. 1325 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council on “Women Peace and Security” (D.D.G. n. 133/2019).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the research participants who put their trust in me and agreed to share their opinions for this study.

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List of Interviews

- Interview 1. Founder, *Union de l'Action Féminine*, 14th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 2. Activist, founder and former president, *Union de l'Action Féminine*, 24th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 3. Former president and coordinator, *Reseau Anaruz-Association Démocratique des femmes du Maroc*, 19th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 4. Expert and Founder, Africa Women's Forum, 22th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 4 a. Expert and Founder, Africa Women's Forum, 18th May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 5. Expert in Gender, Law and WPS, Casablanca University, 29th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 6. Former ambassador, Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26th September 2020, remotely.

- Interview 7. Expert in Gender and Development, Professor, Fes University Sidi Abdellah, 20th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 8. Expert in Gender issues and Professor, Director of Gender, Education, Literature and Media Centre, Casablanca University, 22th September, remotely.
- Interview 9. Head of Human Rights Department, *Conseil National pour les Droits de l'Homme* (CNDH), 21th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 10. National coordinator Oxfam Morocco, 17th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 11. Former coordinator, Amnesty International MENA regional Office, 25th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 12. Official Un Women - Morocco, 18th May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 13. Activist, *Fédération de la Ligue Démocratique des droits des femmes*, 18th May 2020, remotely.
- Interview 14. Official 1, Ministry of Woman, Family, Solidarity and Social Development, remotely.
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- Conversation with an Activist and Founder of *Union de l'Action Féminine*, 2nd June 2022, remotely.
- Interview 17. Assembly of People's Representatives, parliamentarian, 9th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 18. CAWTAR, member of the Technical Committee, 9th September 2020, remotely.
- Interview 19. African Women's Forum, regional representative, 15th September 2020, remotely.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Local Voices in Transnational Spaces

Diaspora Activists and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the status of women diaspora activists in transnational advocacy working to advance the WPS Agenda. Despite calls for solidarity, even “feminist” spaces face challenges for linking the Global North and South to advance advocacy efforts, challenges that are magnified when dealing with the issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). We focus on the stories of women diaspora activists working on active conflicts in the Global South and the ways these activists sought to embed themselves discursively in the WPS framework. We adopt an insider-outsider perspective to study their participation and draw insights on gender-related aspects of diaspora inclusion. We argue that the constraints on including local voices and perspectives in WPS advocacy is certainly contributing to some of the cracks in implementation. However, the construction of transnational solidarity by women for women’s security issues is improving the possibilities for meaningful participation.

Keywords: Diaspora; Transnational advocacy; Sexual violence; Conflict; Gender

Introduction

Following the adoption in 2000 of UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), there appeared to be greater possibilities for addressing the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and promoting their rights in terms of protection and participation in peace and security. However, immediately after the adoption, there was relative silence and inaction on the policy and principles it set forth, particularly the international norm prohibiting sexual violence in conflict. The slowness of translating WPS into actual practice is striking given that specific cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) were being documented around the world, particularly in Darfur (Sudan) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo, henceforth). To generate the political will for implementation in key member states and at the UN, various transnational advocacy networks began CRSV campaigns while others sought to direct attention to the plight of women and children as part of larger campaigns confronting conflict in Darfur and the Congo (Hudson & Budabin 2019). Cracks in implementation in the WPS agenda can be, in part, traced to the lack of meaningful inclusion of local voices and perspectives.

This is due to the fact that a key part of addressing and advocating on behalf of CRSV is the availability of timely information and credible data (Kuehnast et al, 2011, p.6). Yet,

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transnational advocacy networks often face blockages in gathering reliable information during conflict and crisis when international and grassroots NGOs risk repression (Keck & Sikkink 1998). In these cases, diaspora activists in host countries could provide insight to local circumstances or have alternate means for gathering information (Budabin 2014). The extent to which transnational advocacy networks included diaspora activists in addressing gender security is not clear. Therefore, in this contribution, we seek to fill these gaps in our knowledge by looking at two of the first test cases of the WPS Agenda: Darfur and the Congo. We ask, what opportunities or constraints existed for women diaspora activists working on the issue of CRSV? In what ways were diaspora activists able to discursively link local voices and perspectives directly or indirectly to UNSCR 1325?

As part of this special issue on the WPS Agenda, this contribution adopts an insider/outsider lens to illuminate the extent to which Darfuri and Congolese women activists in the US diaspora were able to participate in transnational advocacy on CRSV for their respective conflict situations. Further, we elucidate the ways in which diaspora activists engaged with and leveraged the discursive framework of the WPS Agenda. We argue that diaspora women activists gained “insider” standing and access to advocate on behalf of CRSV, wielding the WPS framework to great advantage. However, they continued to face unique and gendered challenges in reframing the relevance of the WPS agenda on CRSV with ongoing crises for an “outsider” audience thus hampering ongoing efforts in host countries.

This work shines a light on women diaspora activists following the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 to expand the roster of grassroots actors participating in transnational advocacy. While the role of women activists and feminist organizations in the Global North in lobbying for UNSCR 1325 and then seeking its implementation is well documented, the role of grassroots activists from the Global South has been less visible and understudied (Basu 2016). As bridging figures, diaspora activists have been of great interest for their political mobilization in host countries on behalf of their home countries; we build on recent work that looks specifically at transnational women’s activism conducted by diaspora women’s groups (Voller 2014). Though extensive scholarship has shown diaspora activism’s mixed impact on conflict resolution (see Østergaard 2006), research has only just begun to look at political mobilization in the host or residence country around gender security issues in conflict in the home country (see Coffie 2020 for exception).

Here we introduce two diaspora women from Darfur and the Congo who were actively engaged on CRSV in the US (their host country) and UN circles. This scholarship on women diaspora activists engages new ways of studying informal modes of micro-political participation as part of encounters with international institutions (see Holmes et al 2019). Moreover, this research illustrates the limits of the WPS Agenda as a global policy structure to engage and make visible certain voices and stories of insecurity in the context of transnational advocacy (see Shepherd 2021). Finally, this study contributes to the understanding of transnational advocacy on Darfur by focusing on CRSV (Hamilton 2011; Budabin 2014; Lanz 2019) and deepens scholarship on why greater attention has come to focus on the Congo above other CRSV cases (Baaz & Stern 2013; Meger 2016).

The article takes the following form. First, we introduce how we study women’s diaspora activism on CRSV in Darfur and Congo by blending approaches from the study of transnational advocacy campaigns (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Brysk 2013), diaspora activism (Smith & Stares 2007; Godin 2016), and UNSC WPS advocacy (Tickner & True 2018; Shepherd 2021). We put forward an analytical framework using an insider/outsider lens for assessing the status of diaspora activists in terms of their political opportunities, specifically access to resources and organizational platforms (de Waal 2015). Drawing on narrative analysis, we propose to study the security elements of the discourses of the diaspora women activists as they link either directly or indirectly to WPS and UNSCR 1325 (Hudson & Budabin 2019).

We present our case study, concentrating on the period following the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 through 2010. We review the nature of the conflicts and the state of advocacy around Darfur and the Congo highlighting the extent to which attention was paid to CRSV and the activities of diaspora groups. We introduce two diaspora women activists from Darfur and the Congo and review and contrast their experiences. Such analysis allows us to ‘gild the cracks’ of the WPS Agenda by better accounting for the diversity of women activists and deeper appreciation for the opportunities and limits of their role in the implementation of WPS.

Gender Dynamics of Diaspora Activism and Advocacy

Our research on transnational networks and campaigns draws from both political science and sociology to track and evaluate the inclusion of different actors and the ethical dimensions of advocacy practices (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Brysk 2013; de Waal 2015). Diaspora activists can play a critical role in transnational campaigns working with advocates, particularly on issues of international concern such as conflict and women’s rights (Voller 2014). The dynamic between activist and advocate is key here; as Pruce argues, “activism is distinct from advocacy in that, as a practice, it articulates charges against an instrument of power directly by those affected, without proxy” (2017, p.63). Diaspora activists can provide an authentic link to advocacy campaigns as individuals who more closely identify with those affected as well as provide perspectives on the situation on the ground. And while these activists demonstrate agency and strategic choices as perceived insiders, often their participation and status will depend on inclusive practices and support from host country sources and advocates. This inclusion often relies on some level of insider status, but also enables certain types of outsider engagement.

Diaspora Activism and Transnational Advocacy

Diasporas are defined as groups of migrants or with migrant origins who maintain “strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin” (Sheffer 1986, p.3). While much attention has been on material support, diaspora groups often engage in political mobilization on behalf of their homelands, lobbying the host state or international governmental organizations. The ability for diasporas to engage in political mobilization will depend on their access to power (Smith 2007, p.5). In this regard, an organizational platform, an NGO or a network of individuals and organizations with a shared policy goal, can provide an important means by which activists can gain this access to political spheres and propel their ideas to higher visibility (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998). There are established diaspora groups with longer histories, such as the Jewish and Armenian groups in the USA, that are able to sustain their own lobbying through the creation of their own advocacy NGOs (Balakian 2004). However, other diaspora activists and groups may need to seek out coalitions within the host state or transnationally, perhaps joining other organizations or linking their causes to transnational advocacy campaigns.

Diaspora activism is by its very definition a transnational activity, one that is often supported by a constellation of actors and organizations as part of a global advocacy network. Diaspora groups are similar to stakeholders in oppressed states who seek out and connect with allies connect with external allies who could bring pressure on the international community and other states (Keck & Sikkink 1998). The conceptualization of transnational advocacy networks has only recently come to include diaspora groups as one of the network nodes. In cases where local groups cannot connect transnationally due to conflict or repression from the state, diaspora groups can provide a “local” link: furnishing information, testimony, and grassroots connections (Budabin 2014). In turn, diaspora groups can gain access to organizational platforms that are already nodes of power in the network.

Special attention has been paid to diaspora groups who are concerned with conflicts and crises in their homelands. Debates have discussed the promises and pitfalls of their engagement wherein diasporas may be “both peace-wreckers and peace-makers” (Smith & Stares, 2007, p.viii). Generally, diaspora groups in advocacy suffer from low visibility, but shifts in transnational advocacy around conflict have made them more visible – and controversial (see de Waal 2015). As key nodes within transnational networks, advocacy organizations may form and perform – on behalf of distant others – in a different location than the human rights claim or humanitarian crisis (Budabin & Pruce 2018); consider, for example, US and UK NGOs like Invisible Children¹ and ONE². While eager to address far away conflicts and crises, de Waal (2015) has pointed out that such advocacy organizations in the Global North have been reluctant to get involved heavily in home country political movements and prefer political mobilization in the host country. The inclusion of diaspora groups in transnational advocacy networks thus provides a local link that offers credibility to such efforts but may run up against elite and privileged management of direction and messaging (Budabin 2014). These tensions are also present in the universe of transnational advocacy around CRSV, which, as we will show, takes place inside and outside official structures with varying degrees of inclusion and access for Global South voices.

Transnational Advocacy on 1325

The original success of passing UNSCR 1325 had been the result of intensive transnational advocacy efforts by human rights, peacebuilding and women’s NGOs centered on the international community and policy-making in the United Nations (Hill et al. 2003; Cohn 2008). Hudson (2009) argues that this resolution 1325 was a critical first step in framing women’s rights as essential to the maintenance of international peace and security, laying the foundation for securitizing sexual violence. The resolution invested states as the securitizing actors with the responsibility to protect the vulnerable population of women and girls. Though passed as a bold normative agenda, UNSCR 1325 and all the others included in the WPS Agenda have not been enough to translate international policy into practice and provide the needed protection in situations of armed conflict (True 2016)³. Thus, additional pressure was needed to ensure implementation.

Advocacy to implement the WPS Agenda has had both transnational and national dimensions, targeting both individual states and international organizations like the UN (Olonisakin et al. 2011). It was incumbent upon advocates to branch out from the UN and also target states in their campaigns and lobbying. Parallel to the NGOs operating in and around the United Nations, a grassroots effort to mobilize (mainly) women has cropped up to ensure the security of women in conflict (Björkdahl & Selimovic 2019; Kreft 2019). The NGOs and individuals involved in WPS advocacy amount to a network of diverse voices that has been characterized by tensions around not only discourse and framing but in representation; as Taylor describes, the question comes down to “whose goals count in advocacy” (2019).

The intersectional dimensions of transnational advocacy have thus come under scrutiny for reifying and reinforcing power relations across advocates and claimants. Tension around “white men saving brown women from brown men” also extends to white female advocates acting on behalf of transnational feminist causes (Spivak 1985). This critique is salient for considering the efforts of Northern female advocacy, often related to CRSV, on behalf of the Global South (see Chiwengo 2008; Repo & Yrjölä 2011; Bystrom 2013). Representation in

¹ <https://invisiblechildren.com/>

² <https://www.one.org/international/>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>

transnational advocacy takes on new meaning when we consider the dynamics of women diaspora activists from the Global South engaging in women's rights and security in conflict.

Women, Gender and Diaspora Activism

Diasporas have rarely been theorized through a gender or feminist lens but this is changing (see Al-Ali 2007; Campt & Thomas 2008). More recent diasporic politics literature is questioning assumptions about diaspora members being homogenous in their identities and how varying political identities can create new political and discursive opportunities. Al-Ali (2007) argues that existing gender relations and ideologies in the home and host countries will shape women's political involvement and their relation to violence and peace. In her work on women's diaspora activism on behalf of gender-based violence in Kurdistan, Voller has shown how transnational advocacy offers activists "better access to education and communication technologies [...] greater freedom of action, organization, and mobilization" (2014, p.356). This was critical because the home state was hostile toward advocacy around sexual violence. And what happens at the international level on gender issues also matters for local activism (Lake 2018). International commitments around gender-based violence benefited transnational advocacy campaigns by offering diaspora activists "new capacities in promoting international norms and monitoring their implementation" (Voller, 2014, p.355).

Recent research suggests that the majority of the African Diaspora is composed of persons who "were direct victims or had experienced the cause of their dispersal" rather than descendants (Coffie, 2020, p.9-10). This means that "the African Diaspora has implicitly and explicitly served as relevant sources of first-hand knowledge that support the information politics of the women organizations and individual women in Africa" (2020, p.1). And even though gendered engagement on women's struggles has been "limited", Coffie also finds this activism to be "dynamic and beneficial" (2020, p.1).

African Diaspora activism can be understood within broader struggles for democracy, respect for human rights, and post-conflict peacebuilding. Addressing women's rights, specifically CRSV, is a critical component of this activism across the continent. For example, Godin (2018) finds that the CRSV activism of Congolese women in diasporas in UK and Belgium uses a frame in which "women activists mobilise women's rights to emphasise their identity as 'women'. In doing so, they connect all women to a particular grievance arising from sexual violence in the Congo. At the same time, they challenge the ethnic/racial and particularistic bias in the international community's application of universal human rights" (1401). This scholarship builds upon early studies that pointed to the role of social media for Congolese diaspora activism for women's rights (Garbin & Godin 2013) and the creative use of protest art as a political tool to address CRSV for Congolese women in the Belgium diaspora (Godin 2016). In this way, the gendered dimensions of diaspora activism intentionally connect democratizing efforts and human rights to women's experiences in conflict.

Applying an Insider-Outsider Lens to Activists and their Security Narratives

In our case study, we aim to trace how women diaspora activists garner access and resources to enter political spaces, engage in transnational advocacy, and promote locally grounded narratives. We explore their activism around gender security by paying close attention to the site of advocacy as it relates to resources, status and positionality as well as the discursive content. We draw on interest group research by adopting the labels of insider and outsider, but expand these categories to consider positionality within transnational advocacy networks and how this shapes narratives. As a practice, insider lobbying refers to how pressure groups such as advocacy NGOs persuade governments or

international organisations to adopt particular norms in charters, constitutions, and other documents through direct interaction with political officials and decision-makers (Dellmuth & Tallberg 2017). Activists with insider status will enjoy a high degree of access that may include the ability to meet directly with policy and decision makers in a host country to present information about their home countries. However, without direct access to policy and decision makers, it may be necessary to look to the court of public opinion, in what is called outsider lobbying, to build support (Dellmuth & Tallberg 2017). Through outsider lobbying, advocacy organizations draw on grassroots mobilization to gain the attention of the media and then state actors and policy-makers; taking place in public, outsider tactics might include petitions, boycotting, protesting, social media campaigns, and demonstrations (Budabin & Pruce 2018). Activists with outsider status will present claims to a broader public with the hope of mobilizing supporters and finding allies in order to raise their status and potentially gain access to policy making spheres. Women diaspora activists may make use of both insider and outsider lobbying as part of political mobilization in the host country although we propose this will depend on collaboration with an organizational platform.

Even with access to organizational platforms, not all diaspora activists will gain a decent status to craft their own narratives and share local perspectives. Therefore, to further nuance the status of women diaspora activists, we adopt Jauk's use of insider/outsider distinction to discuss how activists navigate within advocacy networks (2014). This attention to status within enables us to recognize how and when diaspora figures are afforded different degrees of access and involvement based on geopolitical background, language, social networks, and knowledge about host country political processes. Since this "situated accessibility" is dependent on the advocacy environment as well as on the agency and status of individual activists, such a view will offer further insights into the transnational advocacy landscape around WPS implementation.

Finally, it is important to consider the discourses of the narratives used by diaspora activists as part of advocacy campaigns. Advocacy narratives are shaped according to audience and context; here, the insider and outsider lens will be important to consider the particular constraints on an activist. Meanwhile, studies have shown that narratives used by advocates are often simplified, stripped of context, and vague on accountability, and this is often connected to lack of input from grassroots activists with in-country experience (Autesserre 2012; de Waal 2015; Budabin 2020). When considering the narratives of activists, it will still be important to see how they engage with security discourses while presenting local perspectives; this balance may determine the effectiveness of diaspora activism. We track this directly, in terms of references to UNSCR 1325 and its components, as well as indirectly, in terms of discourses related to CRSV, particularly the rape-as-weapon-of-war narrative (Hudson & Budabin 2019).

Data for our analysis is drawn from publicly available material from various organizations in the US and UN advocacy spheres. Further, speech texts were located in databases for the US Congress and the UN. Finally, this piece draws on qualitative interviews conducted with advocates and observers by the authors as part of a larger project on transnational advocacy around the WPS Agenda.

Diaspora Activism to Confront CRSV in Darfur and Congo

Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the scourge of CRSV was documented in various conflicts. Two major test cases were Darfur and the Congo. The high incidence of CRSV in the Congo can be traced back to the 1990s to various cycles of violence and was attributed to armed forces, both regular and irregular, and compounded by a culture of impunity (Berwouts 2017). In 2002, Human Rights Watch released a report on what they

called “The War within the War”, focusing on sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern Congo⁴. Most observers agree that the report failed to impel a response and assure effective protection (ENOUGH report cited in Zilberg, 2010, p.116). Whereas the situation of CRSV was considered to be graver in the Congo than in Darfur, attention to the Congo would not become robust for many years (Zilberg, 2010, p.116). As one aid worker for MSF described, “The two places don’t compare. There [in Darfur] you have a lot of people in camps but here [in the Congo] the insecurity is so much worse”⁵.

In Sudan, CRSV was connected to a new pattern of violence in 2003 that flared between rebel groups in the region of Darfur and the government based in Khartoum along with paramilitary troops (see Flint & de Waal 2005; Prunier 2007). Amidst the fighting and scorched earth policy, nearly two million Darfuris became IDPs in camps while 150,000 refugees poured over the border to Eastern Chad. Soon, it was clear that the violence perpetrated in Darfur against non-Arabs included mass rape and other forms of sexual violence that targeted men and women across the landscape of Darfur and Chad. In 2004, Amnesty International released a report entitled “Sudan, Darfur: Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence and Its Consequences” and Physicians for Human Rights issued its own report on “The Use of Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur”⁶. For a number of these early reports, rape was folded into larger investigations of the nature and extent of the widespread and systematic violence that was considered genocidal or ethnic cleansing. In both Darfur and the Congo, however, the prevalence and existence of CRSV was well documented by the early 2000s.

Diaspora Representation in Transnational Advocacy for Darfur and Congo

Despite the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and the global commitment to ensure protection against CRSV, Darfur and the Congo remained low in status at the international level. In the US, the possibilities for diaspora activism were limited because of the relatively small populations of these communities. By 2000, the US Census 2000 counted 881,300 Americans who were African born, marking the increase of the community over the course of the 1990s⁷. But neither the Congo nor Sudan were big sending countries: the US Census only counted four thousand Congolese and twenty thousand Sudanese (many of whom came as refugees from the Sudanese Civil War).

For the Congolese in the US, the cycle of violence and humanitarian crises they left behind did not initially spark a large-scale movement in the US. But the diaspora had been active elsewhere, sometimes with a gender angle: in the UK and Belgium for example, the Congolese diaspora supported Congolese Women in the field of women’s rights advocacy, opening up “new paths of political action for the women” (Coffie, 2020, p.10). In the US, the Congolese diaspora did form a handful of organizations engaging in advocacy and awareness raising. The most prominent of these is Friends of Congo⁸, which was founded in 2004. They facilitated a “Break the Silence Speakers Tour” in 2009 (Zilberg, 2010, p.115). But overall, compared to other Congolese led or Congo-related organizations founded by celebrities or related to environmental causes, these diaspora organizations operated with limited funds and less visibility (Budabin & Richey, 2021, p.67). A short-lived movement

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/12/congo.international>

⁶ For example, a 2003 MSF report of the conflict and the refugee situation stated that MSF had heard militia groups were raping and kidnapping women. A 2003 report published by Amnesty International also documented allegations of abduction and rape by Arab militias.

⁷ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/african-born-residents-united-states-2000>

⁸ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/>

called Congo Global Action tried to coalesce a coalition that included other Congolese diaspora organizations to engage in Congo-related advocacy in Washington⁹.

The Congolese diaspora in the U.S. did include women's issues as part of its efforts. Friends of the Congo included a position of Women's Coordinator and had "Women" as one of its project areas. Here, they shared information on grassroots organizations in the Congo and the situation regarding women¹⁰. One Congolese activist, Nita Evele, member of the diaspora organization Coalition of Pluralists and Congolese Patriots, is featured in the media speaking about women in politics¹¹. There were attempts to present the issue of CRSV to a global audience. For an event on Congo in 2007, a representative from a UN organization spoke about gender security issues¹².

Sudan and its civil war had already been the focus of attention for US advocates and diaspora members (see Hertzke 2004). News and concern for the mass atrocities undertaken in Darfur led to the largest mobilization seen since the heyday of the anti-apartheid campaigns. The violence was quickly labeled by the US government as the 21st century's first case of genocide, and this label not only captured the attention of a number of charismatic leaders and high-profile international NGOs, but it shook the international community as well (Hamilton 2011). As the center of a national and global movement, the NGO Save Darfur Coalition based itself in Washington, DC to run campaigns and lobby the US government and the UN. An NGO within the Save Darfur Coalition, the ENOUGH Project¹³ conducted advocacy campaigns around conflict in both Darfur and Congo as part of its portfolio; however, this was a classic Northern advocacy organization that engaged in insider lobbying led by US advocates and celebrities with some engagement from diaspora activists on occasion for high-profile events and protests¹⁴ (Budabin & Pruce 2018). Overall, inclusion of the Darfuri diaspora was slow and, in the early years of this campaign, the messaging did not include many references to the situation of women.

The difference between the two US movements advocating on behalf of conflicts in Africa is certainly striking. Coley (2013) showed how factors of issue framing, political opportunities, and organizational resources explain why Darfur received attention while the Congo lingered in the shadows; he explains this through the use of the term genocide in the Darfur case, the high status of Sudan for the Bush Administration, and the remarkable funds available for Darfur advocacy. But even with these gross differences, both causes were primarily represented by advocates from the Global North. Moreover, it meant that issues like CRSV, when discussed, were also communicated by professionalized advocates rather than persons with local knowledge. These power dynamics between diaspora activists and transnational advocates are evident in reviewing all congressional hearings for the US Congress that were related to women and the humanitarian situation. Of 17 hearings held between 2002 and 2010, only five included diaspora activists; and within this sample, only a single woman diaspora activist appeared.

On issues related to gender security, there was the 2008 appearance of Dr. Denis Mukwege, on behalf of Congolese women. In this testimony, Dr. Mukwege described in gripping detail the physical, psychological and social consequences of rape as a weapon of war on women, families and societies. He referred to this violence as "sexual terrorism" as the "word rape or sexual violence cannot fully translate the horror that hundreds of thousands of women

⁹ <http://drccoalition.blogspot.com/search/label/About%20Congo%20Global%20Action>

¹⁰ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/women/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z-NYhNfMpl>

¹² <https://afjn.org/congo-voices/>

¹³ <https://enoughproject.org/>

¹⁴ <https://enoughproject.org/blog/congo-activists-deliver-petition-us-presidential-envoy-white-house>

are living” in the Congo¹⁵. His testimony did include three testimonies recounted in the first person of Congolese women who had survived this violence as well as five stories of women and girls treated at Panzi Hospital. Dr. Mukwege has had tremendous influence and access in bringing the experiences of CRSV to the attention of the Global North; his success as an advocate for women was even recognized in 2018 by the Nobel Peace Prize. But the story is incomplete since there were women diaspora activists who were making valiant efforts to fight CRSV in their home countries who weren't afforded such a platform. This crack in the implementation of 1325 and protection against CRSV pushes us to consider the work of two individual diaspora activists who were able to emerge as both insiders and outsiders of transnational advocacy.

Women Diaspora Activists Push Gender Security Issues

Drawing from feminist insights into the problematic hierarchies of knowledge production and the dangers of appropriating the narratives of others, this research considers the importance of two individual stories of women diaspora activists (Agathangelou & Ling 2004). Recognizing that these are just two stories, and that other stories of diaspora women must also be told, we proceed with Lina Tuhiwai Smith's research principle of “getting the story right” and “telling the story well” (2021, p.226). In profiling the work of these two women, we aim to enhance understanding around whose stories count and the political dynamics of insider and outsider narratives in the WPS Agenda (Shepherd 2021).

Bibiane Aningina Tshefu

Bibiane Aningina Tshefu had worked on women's issues in Congo, where she had earned a university degree, worked as an adviser to various government ministers, and co-founded three organizations: the Réseau Action Femmes Kinshasa, the Caucus des Femmes in Nairobi 2002, and the Dynamique des Femmes Politiques. She arrived in the US in 1994 and worked as a consultant for various NGOs, Congolese women's organizations in New York, and the UN. She took part in the larger NGO coalition for the adoption of the UNSCR 1325. She retained a strong link to the Congo, acting as permanent consultant to the UN Gender Office in the Congo and leading a UNDP assignment to evaluate the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in various Great Lakes countries.

In 2002, Tshefu was part of efforts to implement the normative agenda of the WPS Agenda from an organizational platform with extensive “insider” access and a broad “outsider” following. With PeaceWomen, specifically Women's International League for Peace and Freedom¹⁶, Tshefu wrote a brief for the e-newsletter in which she described what was being done in the Congo by women's groups to raise awareness of the WPS Agenda. The brief describes the environment for implementing the Agenda:

The accomplishments of women in the DRC towards implementation of Resolution 1325 have taken place despite huge barriers. Within the government, and among the participants in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, there is still little awareness about Resolution 1325¹⁷.

Early on, Tshefu is focused on the participation pillar of 1325 related to the inclusion of women in peace processes. However, this brief was directed to the organization's followers, not political spheres.

¹⁵ https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/mukwege_testimony_04_01_08.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.wilpf.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/89180>

A few years later, she narrowed in on continuing violence and accountability in the country. In an article on the upcoming elections in Congo in 2006, she stated,

Women are treated like animals in the Congo and many of those responsible for the crimes against them are currently part of the transitional government. As a result, women are involved in this election on a massive scale because they hope it will help remove those responsible for the violent crimes against them. It's been difficult to bring them to justice up until now, but women are really hoping that the elections will lead to justice¹⁸.

She offers a picture of violence and impunity but sees the answer in electoral reform and political empowerment of women. Again, this article was written for a newsletter aimed at outsider audiences.

But the gains were not forthcoming and Tshefu was part of a joint statement that aimed to refocus attention on CRSV. This memo written by the Congolese diaspora women worldwide in 2013 that was explicit about the WPS Agenda:

Recalling the UN SC Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; Diaspora Congolese Women stand in solidarity to express our solidarity and our concern for innocent Congolese populations, particularly women and young girls who are living in human insecurity, poverty, fear, hunger and oppression since 1997 in the D.R. Congo¹⁹.

Again, she appeals to the normative agenda that was failing to have an effect on the ground. This memo was presumably given a wide press release though whether it reached insider spheres is unknown.

Overall, Tshefu represents a well-connected person whose consultative work and activism have crossed both insider and outsider spheres. She writes and speaks in English, and has nearly three decades experience in the US social and political environment, giving her an excellent background for political advocacy in her host country. Her work with the UN gave her official access and a visible transnational platform for her advocacy, often in concert with other organizations. Meanwhile, her work with NGOs and Congolese women allowed her to maintain strong links to her home country and her credibility as a conflict survivor coming from outside the system. However, with local NGOs, her narratives are directed towards outsider audiences even when written with policy specific language. She negotiates identities as both insider and outsider; in fact, in her role as the Women's Coordinator for Friends of the Congo, she is described as "an expert and activist on women's rights with specific focus on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and sexual violence in Africa"²⁰. She continues to work with diaspora organizations in the US, centering on women's issues as part of Congo-related advocacy.

Niemat Ahmadi

Niemat Ahmadi had been helping organize relief efforts and human rights reporting during violent episodes in Darfur²¹. When the conflict escalated in 2003, she faced threats and harassment for her work; in 2005 she left Sudan to take refuge in Kenya and then the US²².

¹⁸ <https://www.dd-rd.ca/no-justice-no-democracy/>

¹⁹ http://www.friendsofthecongo.org/images/pdf/diaspora_memorandum.pdf

²⁰ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/leadership/>

²¹ <https://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/founders-story/>

²² <https://www.registercitizen.com/news/article/NIEMAT-AHMADI-Southern-Sudan-s-vote-for-12113696.php>

She was hired by the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) in 2008 to liaise with the Darfur diaspora community in the US and globally²³. She describes herself as a "genocide survivor" and became a spokesperson for the SDC's efforts on sexual- and gender-based violence. Her hiring was also part of a shift happening within the SDC, which was focusing more attention on women's issues. The SDC funded a Refugees International report on "Ending Sexual Violence in Darfur: An Advocacy Agenda" in 2007; however, this report did not mention 1325 or the WPS Agenda²⁴. The SDC created a dedicated women's page in 2009. By then, it was clear that, with the help of diaspora activists and in the context of global policy making affecting institutional practices, attention to women as victims was regarded as a priority²⁵. SDC offered Ahmadi a key organizational platform for outsider lobbying- reaching a larger public with the issue of CRSV. The organization had ample funds – in the tens of millions of dollars – and Ahmadi was an experienced activist who, crucially for the US audience, spoke English.

The SDC organizational capacity to elevate Ahmadi's voice within Darfur related advocacy soon became clear. Ahmadi was one of the main speakers in February 2008 at "One Night, One Voice: Spotlighting Rape as a War Crime" - an event held in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. After viewing a short film called "Ending Violence Against Women in Darfur"²⁶, Ahmadi declared, "The war in Darfur is actually being fought in women's bodies"²⁷. Her work in Darfur is featured prominently in the film as well as the mortal risks she took to help rape victims. The film urges us to "hear their voices" and "add our own". The focus is on the camps and on how women and girls are common targets. While various women are featured, none have names or titles. The video discusses ongoing genocide and the murders, intoning that "women and girls face some of the most widespread and systematic sexual violence the modern world has ever seen." At the end of the film, we are asked to "stand with the women of Darfur."

In addition to public events, Ahmadi also gained access and invitations to provide testimony in political spheres, a form of insider lobbying that was facilitated by the Save Darfur Coalition. In 2009, she addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a hearing on "Confronting Rape and Other Forms of Violence against Women in Conflict Zones Spotlight: DRC and Sudan"²⁸. She spoke on behalf of women she knew personally: "on a daily basis, through my work and my ability to speak out publicly in the United States, I carry with me the plight of my mother, aunts, sisters, and countless other women in Darfur who face brutality and violence as part of their daily life"²⁹. She cites how the IDPs and refugee camps are populated by of women who "face brutal rape, humiliation, beating, starvation and disease on a daily basis." Her description of CRSV is set firmly in the language of the WPS agenda and dominant narratives circulating at the time:

In Darfur, rape is being used as weapon of war. It is a systematic tactic to destroy the very fabric of our community. Rape and sexual violence in Darfur is not the product of

²³ <https://www.vitalvoices.org/2009/12/save-darfur-coalition-honors-ambassador-at-large-for-global-women%E2%80%B0urs-issues-on-7th-day-of-campaign/>

²⁴ <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/47a6eb950.pdf>

²⁵ It's important to note that the incidence of CRSV during the Darfur conflict was not completely neglected by advocates or the international community even early on. At the international level, the ICC indictment on Bashir was announced in July 2008. He was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in Darfur, and these charges included the subjection of "thousands of civilian women – belonging primarily to [various ethnic] groups – to acts of rape."

²⁶ <https://vimeo.com/26168526>

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rcXfCasNJs>

²⁸ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111shrg53635/html/CHRG-111shrg53635.htm>

²⁹ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AhmadiTestimony090513p1.pdf>

chaos or uncontrollable troops during the attacks. It is not an after-effect of war. It is well planned and orchestrated in a calculation to break apart families, tear down leadership structures, and leave long-term social, emotional, and physical scars on an entire community. Abduction and sexual slavery is a tactic used by the Sudanese government and its allied janjaweed militia. This terrorizing of women, families, and communities is not a nightmare – it is the reality of daily life in Darfur.

She goes on to underscore the inadequate security provided by African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) that has led to CRSV. Ahmadi invokes the WPS directly when she states: “All international instruments concerned with violence against women such as Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1820 have not been implemented”³⁰. Certainly, advocacy narratives on CRSV in Darfur were circulating though mainly in the “rape as a weapon of war” framing. While the motives (opportunistic vs. strategic/tactical) seemed to vary, the victims, the perpetrators, and the form of harm were “clear”. Adopting this narrative, Ahmadi is one of the few to directly connect the Darfur situation to the stalled WPS Agenda. For the insider audience of political elites in the US Congress, the mention of this security agenda makes sense. Ahmadi is a savvy activist who appears to know her audience and that in her narrative she must link women’s rights and protection needs to the pursuit of international peace and security as well as to states’ obligation under international law.

Building on her network connections, familiarity with the US political scene and her expertise, Ahmadi was able to create a new organizational platform to pursue a narrower set of goals. In 2009, Ahmadi founded the Darfur Women Action Group (DWAG), though official NGO status was only granted in 2013³¹. From this organizational platform, DWAG became a place to center the leadership of diaspora activists, with an explicit and critical focus on the experiences of women in Darfur and women as activists. While without the resources and connections enjoyed by the SDC, DWAG attracted attention from celebrity supporters like Hollywood actress Mia Farrow, who joined the Board³². A letter written in 2013 on the occasion of the Commission on the Status of Women shows the more concerted nature of connecting advocacy appeals to the international agenda:

Despite the alarming rate at which rape and other forms of sexual violence occur as part of the ongoing genocide in Darfur, little has been done to address this deadly phenomenon. [...] Despite Sudan’s ratification of several international human rights and humanitarian laws that are favorable to women rights, Sudan has no political will to meet its obligation on those terms. Further, Sudan continues to be reluctant to ratify the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). All the international instruments that concern violence against women such as UN Security Council Resolutions UNSCRs 1325, 1820 and 1888 have not been implemented.

The letter is pitched to the community of the UN- states, institutional bodies, and NGOs. Ahmadi’s organization is arguing for the international community to address Sudan’s recalcitrance in addressing CRSV using the normative power of CEDAW and the various WPS resolutions. These agendas and resolutions will be familiar to the readers of this letter since

³⁰ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AhmadiTestimony090513p1.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/>

³² <https://web.archive.org/web/20150910093448/http://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/board/mia-farrow-member-darfur-women-action-group%E2%80%99s-advisory-board>

Ahmadi's narratives are crafted and directed toward an insider audience, specifically those engaged in the WPS Agenda.

Discussion

These examples show that diaspora activism was able to provide needed first-hand perspectives to transnational advocacy networks in critical host country settings and the United Nations as well as the public at large. Our findings show that in the Darfur case, women diaspora's groups eventually garnered status and resources to share local knowledge to both insider and outside audiences; in contrast, the case of Congo illustrates how transnational advocacy was largely centered on Northern activists making very little space for Congolese women's diaspora to reach host country contexts. While the two women highlighted in this study had varying degrees of inclusion and resources, both were able to navigate insider status to both home country and to elite governance political structures. Both benefited from "situated accessibility" and both skillfully linked the women's rights concerns to security discourses and dominant narratives about the connection between "women, peace and security".

At some level because both are women and both are from the Global South, their status as non-American and non-UN officials is particularly notable from the beginning. That said, Tshetu did gain insider status into the UN, leading a Gender Office, and through an official appointment with the UN. However, that access did not seem as catalyzing as the material access and resources that Ahmadi had with SDC. Further, Ahmadi's platform enabled her to access a public audience and tap into a particular political and popular culture that was responsive to mass atrocity, especially when such violence was linked to women and CRSV. Both cases of advocacy relied on forging local connections with Global South activists who were able to move fluidly - sometimes insiders, sometimes outsiders, and sometimes both. The status and engagement of the diaspora activists also allowed the larger advocacy network to combine insider access with some outsider credibility.

The case of the Congo followed a different trajectory that stands in contrast to Darfur. While there was significant activism on CRSV in the Congo, there was less connection between Northern advocates and Congolese diaspora activists. Tshetu certainly stands as a critical and important activist in this space, we were surprised not to find more women from the Congolese diaspora engaged in this context, particularly in the US. Ahmadi's activism had a reach and staying power that is particularly noteworthy. In part, we can point to the resources and organizational platform that she was able to access; we also recognize a particular individual capacity that further catalyzed her leadership and "situated accessibility" in linking CRSV to WPS as a global policy framework as well as CEDAW as a legally binding instrument for protecting women even in conflict. Still, both women demonstrate serious constraints around meaningful inclusion and participation in the WPS Agenda.

Conclusion

This research on women diaspora activists offers us new ways of analyzing informal modes of micro-political participation and how these forms of activism engage global policies, international institutions, and national governments. Further, the focus on diaspora activism in the US and its limited engagement with 1325 advocacy, particularly in the early years, demonstrates both new pathways and persisting blockages for implementing the WPS Agenda. This is particularly true as we consider the geography of the WPS Agenda and New York City as the primary (and limiting) space of transnational advocacy. The geographical and metaphorical is certainly a "crack" that undermines the full conceptualization and implementation of the WPS Agenda.

More research is needed to understand the fluidity and power dynamics at play for diaspora women who gain “insider” status. The inclusion of diaspora women's voices in the advancement of gender security issues is a certainly a step towards "getting the story right" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 266). Intersectional identities of women, particularly those from the Global South, often mean multiple obstacles to meaningful and sustainable insider status. What we see with diaspora women who serve as the credible expert from a distant conflict is that their insider access to UN and other elite governmental circles is often a way of preserving (at least in performative ways) outsider identity for transnational advocacy networks and reinforcing (or fitting into) existing global policy agendas rather reshaping that agenda and the discourse that supports it. Insider value, at least in theory, depends authenticity of experience as being the distant other, the outsider. But we know that many of those who become insiders may not be able to maintain their connections to the outside due to continuing security concerns. This is especially true for diaspora activists who campaign on behalf of women’s causes in oppressed or conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and the Central African Republic. That diaspora activists operate removed from their home countries does not negate their previous lived experience, but it does push us to consider intentional and unintentional shifts in their identity, status, and access as women working as activists for women’s rights.

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Funding

The research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the research assistance of Gillian Leeds.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conceptual resources for gilding the cracks

Non-essentialist vulnerability and epistemic justice

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Abstract

Recent academic debates concerning the WPS agenda have highlighted the existence of several cracks undermining the conceptualisation as well as the operationalisation and implementation of the principles and actions stemming from the WPS framework. After proposing to consider the WPS Agenda as a norm lab and recognising the urgency to repair its conceptual cracks, this article critically analyses two main conceptual weaknesses limiting the emancipatory potential of the Agenda, namely the conceptualisation of identity and agency that it reflects and projects, arguing that the former reveals a stereotypical and ambiguous formulation, while the latter is thin and unfit for sustaining a transformative political project. The article discusses insights from the discussion on epistemic (in)justice, which originated from the work of Miranda Fricker, arguing that they are valuable heuristic resources for developing a WPS conceptual framework able to escape the essentialist trap, identifying the injustices done to women and men as discriminated and marginalised subjects in their capacity as knowers and active contributors to the dialogues concerning the planning and deployment of measures for conflict and post-conflict management.

Keywords: WPS Agenda; Gender; Vulnerability; Essentialism; Epistemic justice

Introduction

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has been discussed in domestic and international debates concerning security for more than two decades and it has raised curiosity, enthusiasm and disillusionment in a number of scholars and commentators interested in IR and gender studies. Despite the well-studied limits to its operationalisation and implementation (George & Shepherd, 2016; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Deiana & McDonagh, 2018; Cohn & Duncanson, 2020; Scheuermann & Zürn, 2020) and the persisting ambivalences and omissions that characterise its formulation (Hagen, 2016; Jansson & Eduards, 2016; de Almagro, 2018; de la Rosa & Lázaro, 2019; Duncanson, 2019; Parashar, 2019; Duriesmith, 2020; Haastrup & Hagen, 2021), the concepts and ideas at the heart of UNSC Resolution 1325 (Res. 1325) and of the subsequent nine resolutions included in the WPS Agenda have entered a number of security-related discussions in a wide variety of fora and they have spread throughout hundreds of policy documents issued by states as well as by regional and international organisations.¹

¹ Paul Kirby and Laura Shepherd (2021, pp. 9ff) have mapped the core body of policy texts adopted between 2000 and 2018 within the framework of the WPS Agenda, distinguishing three subsets, i.e. documents issued by UN offices and agencies, states' National Action Plans (NAPs) and other WPS-related documents issued by states or by international and regional organisations. They counted a total of 213 WPS policy documents.
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After more than twenty years from the start of this potentially transformative normative project, the WPS Agenda exhibits visible conceptual and practical cracks which undermine its robustness, i.e., its ability to gain consensus and to constrain actors' behaviours within the international realm (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2019). Aiming to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the WPS Agenda as a relevant case for studying the dynamics of norm diffusion and norm contestation and introducing the concept of 'norm lab', this article engages specifically with conceptual cracks, i.e. the ambiguous concepts which leave the WPS Agenda open to discursive and nondiscursive forms of contestation and dissent. Such practices eventually risk undermining the robustness (and resilience) of the norm of gender equality applied to the field of activities related to international security. Conceptual cracks constitute elements of fragility, but their fixing offers precious opportunities for making the norm at the core of the WPS Agenda more robust and resilient and for adding value to it, as happens in the Japanese art of Kintsugi. This art, which originated in the 1400s, consists of repairing broken pots by filling the cracks with gold, combining craftsmanship and art to redefine the form and uses of a common object. This article argues that in order to fix the WPS Agenda's conceptual cracks diagnostic capacity and creative effort are needed; scholars willing to gild the cracks might look beyond the disciplinary boundaries of IR and security studies for heuristic resources.

The article proposes an original reconstruction and critical discussion of the main conceptual cracks undermining the transformative potential of the WPS Agenda. The conceptual analysis is based on the critical study of a heterogeneous body of literature and it connects and elaborates on inputs elaborated by scholars from different academic disciplines: security studies, international relations theory, political philosophy. Thus, it adopts an interdisciplinary approach to theoretically investigate processes of norm production and diffusion in the international realm, looking at how the norm of gender mainstreaming in the field of security, conflict management and peacebuilding has been produced and reproduced after the launch of the WPS Agenda. The critical discussion highlights the tensions and aporias characterising the discursive practices and interactions among the actors involved.

Relying on constructivist assumptions, the second section conceptualizes the WPS Agenda as a 'norm lab', in order to highlight the complex and dynamic processes of norm creation and norm diffusion. Picking up on the insights provided by scholars and practitioners who have developed critical readings of the WPS Agenda, the conceptual analysis developed in the third section offers a brief but systematic critical reconstruction of how identity and agency have been framed within this ambitious normative project, accounting for the main claims for conceptual changes that have emerged with the occasion of the 2020 milestone.² Then, in order to detect conceptual resources that might be useful to gild the cracks, the article looks at contemporary political philosophy and it presents a theoretical exploration of the discussion on epistemic (in)justices, i.e. injustices emerging within processes of

Between 2019 and 2022 two UNSC resolutions have been added to the corpus of the WPS Agenda (Res. 2467 and Res. 2493 in 2019) and 16 NAPs have been adopted during the same period of time. For the present article, it is not necessary to attempt at making an exact count; it suffices to notice that the total number of WPS policy documents is increasing at a steady pace – similarly to what happened in 2010, the celebrations of the 20 years of the WPS might have produced a boost of policy documents' adoption. Res. 1325 and all the UNSC resolutions pertaining to the WPS Agenda are accessible on the dedicated UN Women website: <https://wps.unwomen.org/resolution/>

² Although conceptual inconsistencies and ambiguities have been detected since the adoption of Res. 1325, this article will focus especially on those critiques that have been expressed during the recent debates concerning the twentieth anniversary of Res. 1325, in articles and books published approximately between 2019 and 2021.

knowledge production and reproduction, discussing its potential contribution to the redefinition of identity and agency within the WPS Agenda.

The WPS Agenda as a 'norm lab'

Recently, the WPS Agenda has been considered under the light of the literature on norm diffusion and norm contestation in order to grasp its achievements and acknowledge its limits (de Almagro, 2018; True & Wiener, 2019; Kirby & Shepherd, 2021). Based on the constructivist assumption that the ideas circulating at the international level drive actors' behaviours and thus produce effects on the international structure, early studies on norm diffusion aimed at explaining how norms, intended as *standards of appropriate behaviour*, emerge and gain consensus within the international realm (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). More recently, constructivist scholars have proposed new formulations of norms as complex social phenomena carrying 'specific contextualised meanings' which might originate dynamics of contestation and persuasion (Petrova, 2016; Wiener, 2018), or as processes, i.e. ideas in the making that change in response to internal as well as external inputs (Wiener, 2009; Krook & True, 2010). Generally speaking, these theoretical accounts have contributed to shifting the analytical focus from ideas to practices and processes in the study of international norms (McCourt, 2016; 2022). The practices of norms' contestation or dissent which manifests itself through discourses and behaviours is especially important for explaining how norms evolve over time: different and potentially incompatible meanings of norms compete to gain consensus and sometimes minoritarian interpretations of widely accepted norms might challenge established ones when their proponents exploit favourable conditions and publicly propose alternative understandings (Stimmer & Wisken, 2019; True & Wiener, 2019). Also, playing with the plurality of meanings that can be attached to any norm – or, to say it differently, exploiting a norm's vagueness – is a convenient possibility for actors who do not have the power to resist a certain norm in diplomatic settings but at the same time do not have the will to abide by it. This explains why even norms that are largely uncontested within the international realm, such as the WPS Agenda, do not constrain actors' behaviours: they obtain 'validity', or rhetorical acceptance, but they lack 'facticity', that is, the ability of constraining behaviours (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2019). In similar cases, thus, discursive allegiance and nondiscursive noncompliance are combined and the effect of this ambivalent conduct is to weaken the norm's strength and to reduce its transformative potential.³

The brief discussion of the literature on norm diffusion and norm contestation presented above explains why the WPS Agenda has been considered a valuable case study for testing and revising the explanations about norms' 'life cycle' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 892). However, it is apparent that the WPS agenda is not a norm like women's suffrage or humanitarian law – the first examples analysed by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink in their path-breaking study on the relationship between norms and political change in international relations – or of the abolition of the death penalty, which has been investigated by Ian Manners (2002) in his influential attempt to theorise the EU's potential as norm entrepreneur in terms of a strategic resource for developing its normative power. As a matter of fact, the WPS Agenda embraces not only the ten resolutions constituting

³ It is important to keep in mind that actors' attitudes towards a certain norm are not irreversible. They might change over time, as shown by the UK's shift from 'norm spoiler' to 'norm champion' that occurred throughout the negotiations of the Oslo Process to Ban Cluster Munitions, from 2006 to 2008 (Petrova, 2016). Of course, opposite shifts from 'norm champion' to 'norm spoiler' can occur, too – as for governments that, despite having signed Res. 1325, directly or indirectly obstruct the domestic implementation of the WPS Agenda (Sanders, 2018). Such examples show the importance of dialogue and persuasion in discursive interactions on international norms in order to create, maintain and enlarge the consensus for transformative norms.

different articulations of the conceptual nexus between women and security, but also the institutional architecture that this impressive normative corpus has generated, as well as the many actors that participate to the norms' formulation and implementation. Thus, the WPS Agenda has been recently defined as a 'norm bundle' (True & Wiener, 2019) or a 'policy ecosystem' (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021),⁴ in order to better account for its complexity, porosity and dynamism. Unlike the norm on women's suffrage, which aimed at affirming a universal principle of equality through the well-established practice of voting, the WPS Agenda advocates the critical deconstruction of many consolidated practices and the introduction of new concepts and practices in a wide-ranging field of activities. Unlike the norm regarding the abolition of death penalty, which has been intermittently proposed in UN fora but has not gained global consensus, since 2000 the WPS Agenda has been constantly present on the UNSC's agenda and it is now considered to be an integral part of the Council's mandate. Although limited, its implementation record is far from being 'derisory' (Longhurst, 2021, p. 53): overall, the WPS Agenda has proved to be a resilient project, with high potential for changing discourses and practices connected to international security in many areas of the world.⁵

As of September 2021, 98 countries have adopted at least one National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSC Res. 1325 and of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Over the last two decades, the implementation of this landmark resolution has had its ups and downs and it has progressed unevenly. On the one hand, there are countries, like Canada, Denmark and Sweden, which show remarkable continuity in their efforts to implement the WPS Agenda, through the adoption of several NAPs – for instance, Denmark, which was the first country to adopt a Plan, adopted its fourth in 2020 – as well as through the active participation to the international debate concerning the WPS Agenda. In particular, since 2014 Sweden has associated its commitment to the promotion of the WPS Agenda to the endeavour of adopting a feminist foreign policy and more in general to project abroad the norm of gender equality as a Swedish 'brand' (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Jezierska & Towns, 2018), while Canada has repeatedly highlighted its gender-sensitive approach to the conduct of international relations during the last years, notably through the adoption of a Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017 (Aggestam

⁴ In their study focused on norm contestation, Jacqui True and Antje Wiener (2019) argue that, in order to better appreciate its specificities with respect to other normative agendas, the WPS Agenda should be considered a 'norm bundle', consisting of fundamental norms (e.g. the prohibition against the use of sexual violence in conflict) as well as of 'hidden' or 'emerging' norms (e.g. women's right to inclusion in peace processes). More recently, Paul Kirby and Laura Shepherd (2021, pp. 3–4) propose to adopt an 'ecological perspective' and to consider the WPS Agenda as 'a complex field of ongoing activity with defined but porous boundaries, within which multiple entities and processes interact' in order to promote the 'supernorm of gender equality'. According to them, an ecological perspective would be better able to embrace the plurality of actors participating to the development of the WPS Agenda as well as to the different claims made on a wide range of issues, 'because it does not presume a set horizon but instead treats the field of practice as inherently open and plural' (ibidem, p. 2).

⁵ The articles included in this Special Issue that focus on the empirical and conceptual cracks of the WPS Agenda seem to confirm the mixed record of the implementation processes in geographical areas as diverse as the Eastern Mediterranean and the Post-Soviet regions (Bellou & Chainoglu, 2022; Myrntinen, 2022). However, the studies looking especially at the interplay between governments and civil societies that occurs throughout the processes of NAP formulations reveal that the WPS Agenda has opened some promising spaces for participation (Borrillo, 2022; Cittadini & della Valle, 2022; della Valle, 2022). Notwithstanding the permanence of macroscopic governmental resistances and backlashes to the mainstreaming of inclusive policies in the field of security (Dogan 2022), it seems that the transformative potential of the Agenda is not limited to the inclusion of women in police or military forces, but transcends the security sector, contributing to the transformation of states' attitudes towards international humanitarian law (Nagel et al., 2022) and to the emergence of novel forms of transnational activism on behalf of women's rights (Budabin & Hudson, 2022).

et al., 2019). On the other hand, other countries – among those, regional powers like Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and Security Council's permanent members like China and Russia – have not yet actively engaged in the implementation of the WPS Agenda through the adoption of any NAP, though they have occasionally contributed to the debates within international fora like the UN, NATO and OSCE (Basu, 2016; Lukatela, 2016; Degirmencioglu & Kahana-Dagan, 2020).

To some extent, the current pandemic has downsized the attention paid by governments and media to the many initiatives that had been organized for celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Res. 1325. However, the debate on the WPS Agenda has not stopped. On October 29, 2020 the UN Security Council was asked to vote for passing a resolution on the WPS Agenda proposed by Russia.⁶ Having failed to obtain the required number of votes (5 votes in favor, 0 votes against, 10 abstentions), Draft Res. 1054 was not adopted. Among the main problematic aspects of the draft text, the abstaining states highlighted its preposterousness and shallowness. Moreover, they regretted that the many suggestions for the text's improvement expressed during the negotiations had gone unheeded and several governments highlighted their fear that Russia and China – the latter, together with Indonesia, South Africa and Vietnam voted in favour of the Russian proposal – had the intention to water down the WPS Agenda.⁷ During a heated press conference held the day after the vote, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation at the UN Vassily Nebenzia affirmed that the draft was intended as 'a commemorative text that was not meant to "add to" or "deduct from" the topic' and claimed that the abstentions revealed the

“(...) attempts by certain countries to usurp and establish a monopoly on the protection of the rights of women while denying others the right to take part in the dialogue on how to improve the standing of women, how to work on the establishment of terminology and produce recommendations in this regard”.⁸

On the same day, the Permanent Mission of Russia at the UN issued an official Explanation of Vote, lamenting the 'unconstructive behavior' showed by those members of the Security Council who had 'no genuine will to compromise, bridge the differences and search for solutions' and made WPS 'a controversial topic'. Moreover, taking note of the fact that 'apparently the Security Council has reached the critical mass of resolutions on WPS', the Russian government stated its intention to act accordingly in the future, implicitly threatening to disregard the principles and actions envisaged by the WPS Agenda.⁹

Leaving diplomatic nastiness aside, this episode illustrates that the WPS Agenda is a *norm lab*, a complex and multidimensional field, where actors try to exert their power and contribute to the production of knowledge (Bourdieu 1993) in order to propose competing interpretations of the same norm through discursive and nondiscursive means. Within the norm lab, different options for the norm's operationalisation and implementation are envisaged, tested and evaluated. Nebenzia's words also reveal the (perceived) existence of asymmetries of information within the international realm concerning the issue of women's rights and the power struggles that, behind the veil of alleged consensus characterise the

⁶ The text of the draft is available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s-2020-1054.php>

⁷ The brief note on the explanation of vote issued by the Estonian government is indicative of the positions held by abstaining states: [Explanation of vote on draft resolution on Women, Peace and Security – Estonia in UN \(mfa.ee\)](https://www.mfa.ee/en/press-releases/2020-10-29-explanation-of-vote-on-draft-resolution-on-women-peace-and-security)

⁸ The press conference transcription is available at: https://russiaun.ru/en/news/press_conference301020

⁹ The official note *Explanation of Vote on a draft resolution on Women, Peace and Security* is available at: https://russiaun.ru/en/news/wps_3010

development of the WPS Agenda. Contrary to Nebenzia's interpretation, however, the political and controversial character of the WPS Agenda is no news; rather, it has accompanied it since the very beginning of its life cycle, resurfacing during every negotiation concerning WPS resolutions (Tryggestad, 2009; 2018). However, Nebenzia hits the nail on the head when he claims that when it comes to discussing and deciding on the issues related to women, peace and security, some actors – although it is questionable if these coincide with those represented by the Russian government – are not fairly recognised in their capacity as knowers, i.e., they might suffer *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007); therefore, their contribution to the definition, operationalization and implementation of the norm is not valorised. The question of epistemic injustice will be analysed in detail later, but here it suffices to note that epistemic asymmetries has received little attention so far, although recently epistemic violence has been mentioned in postcolonial critiques on the mainstream interpretations of the WPS Agenda (Parashar, 2019).

Defining the WPS Agenda as a norm lab, with respect to the alternative definitions of policy ecosystem or norm bundle (True & Wiener, 2019; Kirby & Shepherd, 2021), allows to better highlight the open and experimental character of the normative framework in the making while focusing on the interplay between discursive and nondiscursive forms of contestation and dissent as well as on the co-constitutive relation of its conceptual and practical elements. It stresses the fundamental role of academic research for the study and development of the WPS Agenda and furthers the reflection on the possibility of a 'WPS episteme', a field of scientific investigation, which has been thematized by Laura Shepherd (2020, p. 625). Also, confirming the insight about the porous borders of the policy ecosystem, the research lab metaphor hints at the constant expansion of the topics considered (Cohn & Duncanson, 2020; Kirby & Shepherd, 2021, pp. 14–16;) as well as at the need to pinpoint useful conceptual and practical tools developed in other fields of research (Basu & Eichler, 2017, pp. 211–214). Moreover, it opens up to the possibility that the resources developed for the study of the WPS Agenda might generate spillover effects and cross-fertilisation in other fields of investigation. Since any research requires adequate funding and reliable data, the definition of a norm lab serves to draw attention on two of the main obstacles that the WPS Agenda faces in view of the third decade of its life cycle, namely the lack of consistent financial funding and the lack of gender-disaggregated data, which risk to thwart its implementation or to allow only for piecemeal applications of its ambitious normative framework (Newby & O'Malley, 2021, p. 2). Furthermore, it helps to consider the shortcomings of the norm's operationalisation and implementation not as evidence of the project's failure, but as the result of experiments that can be replicated with more attention to their planning and realisation. In this perspective, the hurried and improvident Russian attempt at passing a 'commemorative' resolution and the resistances which emerged within the Security Council is not proof of the reach of a normative saturation point within the international realm on the issue of women, peace and security; rather, it is the signal that different understandings of the conceptual elements of the WPS Agenda, revealing political divergencies and allowing normative contestation (True & Wiener, 2019), persist and risk to undermine its strength.

The WPS Agenda as a 'norm lab'

Considering the WPS Agenda as a norm lab, this section analyses its conceptual tenets to assess the norm's overall transformative potential and to shed light on the cracks that undermine the (current interpretations of the) norm of gender mainstreaming in the security sector. The discussion proposed here relies on Alexander Wendt's influential understanding of the so-called 'agency-structure problem', which 'situates agents and social structures in relation to one another' (Wendt, 1987, p. 337) and investigates the ontological and

epistemological elements of this dyadic relationship. Proposing an understanding of the WPS Agenda as a norm lab constitutes an attempt at redefining the agency-structure problem within a specific sector of activity from a gender-sensitive perspective. While the structure indicates the *quid* that the WPS Agenda aims at transforming – that is, the norms and practices which characterize institutions and policies aimed at the prevention and resolution of conflicts and at the deployment of peacebuilding operations – the agency broadly understood spells out who might bring about the transformation of this structure, and how. For the sake of the present analysis, then, Wendt's understanding of agency is fine-tuned by distinguishing its separate but connected conceptual elements, namely *identity* (who are the agents?) and *agency* (how does agents' capacity to act within a certain structure in order to transform it manifest itself?). Keeping in mind that the definitions of agents and agency underpinning the WPS Agenda have been changing during the last twenty years and that they will continue to do so, the analysis' main goal is diagnostic: it aspires to shed light on the conceptual cracks that limit the transformative potential of the WPS Agenda, before proposing – in the next section of the article – possible conceptual resources for gilding these cracks.

Identity: victims of war or agents of peace?

Since the elaboration of the text of Res. 1325, the debate on women, peace and security has been represented as a *discursive intervention* undertaken by feminist scholars and practitioners to unpack the hegemonic discourse on security, revealing its gendered implicit dimensions and spotlighting the hidden co-protagonists of conflicts, namely (non-combatant) women and the people that they take care of (children, elderly people, sick and disabled people). However, in so doing it has reproduced the binary and stereotypical conceptions of male perpetrators/female victims and male protectors/female victims; moreover, it has reinforced the distinction between a public sphere where politics and violence occur daily and a private sphere where women conduct their caring lives in their maternal, filial and bridal capacity within a supposedly pacific environment. Although these stereotypical representations have been challenged since the auroral stage of the discussions that preceded the adoption of Res. 1325 by influential feminist scholars such as Catharine MacKinnon (1993),¹⁰ the WPS Agenda reproduced the dichotomous, stereotypical and essentialising thinking focusing primarily on conflict-related violence. Hence, its transformative potential was reduced.

Especially in its early articulations, the WPS Agenda has represented women – always together with children and other vulnerable groups – as the blameless victims of violence, while men have been mainly depicted as the primary agents of violence. Women are usually included in groups of people who are defined as vulnerable: vulnerability becomes an

¹⁰ In her analysis of the available evidence concerning human rights' violations harming women that were occurring on a mass scale in the Balkan conflict, McKinnon challenged the simplistic yet widely held association between gender-based violence and war – according to which women arguing instead that women are target of sexual and reproductive violence even in peace time and often within their homes, by family members. With reference to the gendered experiences of violence in war contexts within the broader framework of the just war theory, Jan Bethke Elshtain (1982) deconstructed the archetypes of the 'beautiful souls' and 'just warriors' (and their variations) used to represent women and men well before the start of the debates that eventually led to the drafting and signing of the WPS Agenda. According to Elshtain, these archetypes have been perpetuating the social imagery of war, from time to time associating all women to the 'collective projection of a pure, rarified, self-sacrificing, otherworldly and pacific Other' (ibidem, p. 342). As a feminist reaction to the imposition of this imagery, she proposed to substitute the archetypical images of war with the relational and peaceful images of 'maternal thinking' – a solution embraced and developed by influential feminist scholars (Ruddick, 1993; Cohn, 2014) and criticized by others for its pro-family stance and essentialising effects (Dietz, 1985; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015).

ontological state for women, children, elderly people and sick or disabled people: they are inherently vulnerable. Thus, vulnerability is neither a common condition of all human beings nor a social label: rather, it is a tattoo, an indelible mark defining the identity and social perception of people belonging to specific groups (Cohn, 2014). Drawing on Adriana Cavarero's feminist reflection, one might notice that in contemporary discourses on international security women and other groups of non-combatant agents within conflict and post-conflict contexts are conceived of in terms of *inclined vulnerability*. While men fight, negotiate and rebuild as (self-)standing autonomous individuals acting 'on a vertical axis', vulnerable people are depicted as inclined, unbalanced, always caring for someone or in need of care (Cavarero, 2014). This kind of vulnerability is indeed stereotypical – based on sedimented impressions of traditional representations of the female condition, epitomized by caring or grieving holy virgins – and it risks crystallising the identities of people belonging to certain groups, depriving them of the possibility to interact as equals and peers with 'vertical' (male) individuals. There is another problematic aspect with women being often represented primarily as caregivers: although they contribute actively to peace and war economies and to post-war society reconstruction, their needs and claims as workers or entrepreneurs are rarely taken into account and this limits their empowerment opportunities.

It is true that Res. 1325 aimed at highlighting women's transformative potential in the field of conflict prevention and conflict resolution, launching and spreading globally the trope of women as 'agents of peace': it stated 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building' and stressed 'the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution'. Moreover, in art. 13 it acknowledged the existence of female ex-combatants and encouraged all the parties involved in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) to take into account their needs. However, in Res. 1325 – as well as in other WPS resolutions and documents – women are represented as men's 'others':¹¹ all the calls and urges to take action are addressed to 'actors' and 'parties' whose identity is gendered: it is up to (*male*) combatants, mediators, peacekeepers, to 'take into account the particular needs of women and girls' and to take 'special measures to protect women and girls', especially as far as (conflict-related) gender-based violence is concerned. Hence, although one cannot easily conclude that the WPS Agenda only proposes stereotypical and essentialised images of women, it is possible to shed light on its ambiguity, a tension between women depicted either as victims of conflict or as agents of peace, that reveals a macroscopical conceptual crack.

After the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1820, the stress on conflict-related sexual violence reinforced the stereotypical characterisation of women as (sexually objectified) victims, entrapping them in the condition of defenceless, vulnerable and traumatised 'others' of combatants while depriving them of the possibility to define themselves in non-victimising terms. The suffering resulting from a trauma is often a basis on which the subject

¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir (1949) has introduced in the contemporary feminist debate the idea, rooted in her reading of Hegel's depiction of the 'Other' within the framework of the master-slave dialectic relationship, that men discursively construct women as 'absolute others', denying them a fully-fledged subjectivity and relegating them to an alienated status. This idea has been influential among feminist scholars, although during the last decades critical interpretations have been advanced to overcome the problematic notion of agency proposed by de Beauvoir. For instance, Luce Irigaray (1995) challenged the singularity of the subject and advanced a collective and relational understanding of subjectivity instead, in order 'to extricate the two from the one, the two from the many, the other from the same, and to do so horizontally, suspending the authority of the One' (ibidem, p. 12).

(re)constructs his or her own identity, but it is not necessarily articulated in victimizing terms and it does not need to produce a proliferation of victims, which would create incentives to transform the imaginary of victimhood into a power device (Fassin & Rechtman, 2007). Within the conceptual framework of the WPS Agenda, adopting a 'women-as-victims identity' and an idea of harm centered on physical suffering has led to the development of humanitarian practices – i.e., practices inspired by compassion –¹² for the protection of civilians in conflict, leaving aside the need to implement policies and practices inspired by justice, compensation or redress for the DDR and post-conflict phases. Also, this focus on sexual violence has reduced the attention for non-sexual forms of violence experienced by women during and after conflicts, such as psychological and especially economic gender-based violence (Duncanson, 2019; Ertürk, 2020). Furthermore, representing 'others' almost exclusively in terms of innocence, vulnerability and victimhood ultimately turns out to be a mere rephrasing of the discourse of the strong, i.e., a tool of domination and control exerted under the veil of 'protection', which can assume paternalistic tones and contribute to the reassertion of a patriarchal social order (Åse, 2018).

It is important to notice that women are not the only agents who tend to be misrepresented because of an essentialised identity in the WPS Agenda: men are similarly reduced to the stereotypical models of the (non-Western) bloody combatant/rapist and of the (Western or Western-allied) enlightened peacekeeper. As UNSC Resolution 2538, adopted in 2020, shows, 'allegations of sexual harassment in peacekeeping operations' are still worrisome after twelve years of 'zero tolerance' policy, declared in UNSC Res. 1820, the first document to focus especially on sexual violence and sexual abuse in conflicts. Generally, in discussions concerning the WPS Agenda masculinities – like femininities – are not seriously taken into consideration or their integration within the WPS normative framework has been pursued haphazardly (Myrntinen, 2019; Duriesmith, 2020; Wright, 2020). This is especially problematic when, within the norm lab, attempts at enlarging the critical mass of people embracing the principles and goals of the WPS Agenda target men and boys. Drawing on the insight that 'feminist curiosity' – or more generally, a critical perspective – is needed to unpack fixed (stereotypical) notions of masculinity and femininity (Enloe, 2004) – it is possible to appreciate the recent calls for including masculinities and non-binary gender identities in the WPS (Hagen, 2016).

UNSC Resolution 2106, adopted in 2013, called for the 'enlistment of men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women' as one of the 'long-term efforts to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations'. Moreover, it recognised that men and boys can suffer when they happen to be 'secondarily traumatized as forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members'. The first mention of men and boys as targets and victims of sexual gender-based violence eventually appeared in a WPS document in 2019, with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2467. This recent development signals the ongoing contestation to the reproduction of stereotypical images of women and men which characterizes the discussion on the WPS Agenda as well as the need to broaden its scope to focus on everyday masculinities and not only on harmful masculinities, in order to positively influence men and boys' worldviews and to mobilise them for achieving the goals of gender mainstreaming in peace and in war (Duriesmith, 2020). As far as the recent appearance of alternative forms of masculinities challenging traditional hegemonic and militarised masculinities is concerned, it is important to inquire whether they allow to

¹² Hannah Arendt (1963) used the expression 'politics of mercy' while discussing the political logic based on a non-empathic recognition of the suffering of others; Arendt criticises this kind of politics as well as the politics based on compassion and supports a politics based on solidarity, which is grounded on human reason, instead.

change not only individual and collective behaviours, but people's worldviews and cultural perceptions, contributing to the rejection of patriarchal social orders and not only to the reproduction of patriarchy in disguise (Myrntinen, 2019). In order to avoid agents' essentialisation, a thorough reflection on the possibility of considering non-binary identities is needed, blurring the dichotomous distinction between men and women. Although the WPS resolutions and main official documents still reflect the women-centered and 'heteronormative assumptions' lying at the heart of the WPS Agenda (Hagen, 2016), recent implementation documents such as the third German NAP (2021-2024) are proof of the fact that, within the norm lab, there are actors keen on adopting a multidimensional and inclusive concept of gender. Such a conceptual shift would make the implementation of the WPS Agenda more apt to detect and address gender-based violence directed against men and LGBT+ people, to protect and support movements and activists defending LGBT+ people's rights, to recognise and meet specific LGBT+ people's needs in crisis or emergency situations.¹³ Scholars' and activists' calls for redressing the WPS Agenda focusing on gender, rather than on women only, have been circulating within the norm lab and they seem to produce some effects (de Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2020).

The dynamic character of the WPS Agenda's norm lab has brought to the fore feminist and postcolonial critiques to the images or 'conceptual metaphors' conveyed by WPS Resolutions and policy documents, producing a gradual shift over time from images of victimhood and notions of protection towards the image of agents of change and empowerment (de la Rosa & Lázaro, 2019). For instance, UNSC Resolution 2242, adopted in 2015, calls for planning, funding and implementing aid programmes aimed at furthering gender equality and women's empowerment. Along the same line, UNSC Resolution 2493, adopted in 2019, explicitly recognises the efforts of 'formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights' and requires the international community to actively support them. These examples – as well as the more general shift of attention from the protection pillar to the participation pillar – show that there is still room for transformative conceptual innovation within the WPS Agenda's norm lab.

Political agency: assessing the WPS Agenda's transformative potential

As Hidemi Suganami (2008) suggests, the reality of contemporary international norms and structures is so complex and multidimensional that the classical constructivist dyad 'agency-structure', which constitutes the theoretical basis of the literature about norm diffusion, appears too restrictive. Therefore, this article distinguishes between the broader concept of agency which has been proposed by Wendt (1987) and used by many constructivist IR scholars (Debrix, 2015; Zanotti, 2019) and a narrower concept of *political agency*, which is helpful to investigate agents' capacity to act within given social structures with the intention of transforming them. Political agency refers to the capacity of social actors – individuals or collectivities – to make an impact on their social world, to change the socio-political structure they live in, contributing to human emancipation and therefore advancing moral progress. Having this moral dimension, political agency is akin to definitions of agency that have recently been proposed and discussed by political philosophers in the framework of contemporary debates on global justice and international ethics (Ypi, 2012).¹⁴ With respect to the broader concept presented above, a narrower

¹³ The text of the third German NAP is available online: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2445264/d7d78947490f454a5342c1dff737a474/aktionsplan-1325-2021-2024-en-data.pdf>

¹⁴ For instance, in her philosophical-political account of avant-garde political agency, Lea Ypi (2012, p. 131) contends that 'political agency obtains when it is both feasible, that is, relevant political, legal, and social

concept of political agency can better emphasise the transformative potential of individuals' and institutions' behaviours for the advancement of progressive values such as gender equality. Thus, political agency refers to transformative action, i.e., an action oriented by the deliberate and meaningful intention to change (in its entirety or in part) a given social context. Moreover, agency pertains to *moral agents*, be they individuals or collectivities, and therefore it relates to concepts of justification and responsibility: actions can be questioned and judged in light of moral values, e.g. justice, and actors request and provide morally acceptable reasons for justifying action (or inaction) (Erskine, 2003; Debrix, 2015).

The question that one needs to ask, thus, is the following: which actors have the capacity to act effectively and consistently with transformative values for the implementation of the WPS Agenda? It is worth pointing out that the agency required to bring about the advancement of Res. 1325 is strictly connected to the actors' identity as well as to their positioning within the framework of world politics. This means that international and regional organisations, states and civil society actors (be they organisations, groups or individuals) operating in the field of security, all play a role within the norm lab. However, if one looks at the UNSC resolutions pertaining to the WPS Agenda, these roles are not well defined and the goals for the medium and long term are not spelled out. This means that the conception of agency emerging from the official documents is extremely 'thin' from a moral perspective and it does not seem apt for sustaining a transformative project.¹⁵ In order to make it thicker, a broader consensus on the transformative effects of the WPS Agenda ought to be built through a straightforward discursive engagement within the norm lab, addressing the *vexata quaestio* of reconciling its validity and facticity (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2019), facing the existence of norm contestation and requiring justifications for the cases of noncompliance with the norm of gender mainstreaming.

As far as states' engagement is considered, during the last years there have been attempts at thickening the notion of agency through the adoption and updating of the NAPs. However, they generally developed non-reflexive understandings of agency, since they have been focusing excessively on their ability to intervene within conflict and post-conflict contexts, neglecting the prospects for internal change and the daily practices reproducing gender injustices even where conflict is absent.¹⁶ Moreover, the agency of the women and men operating in conflict and post-conflict settings – whose identity has been represented in

mechanisms are in place to operate the necessary changes in the system, and when the outcome of political action is sustainable, that is, it has a chance to survive without disrupting existing social ties'. As far as the WPS Agenda norm lab is concerned, paying attention to the dimensions of feasibility and sustainability of the norm of gender mainstreaming in the security sector might help to develop a diagnostic, analytical reflection on the current limits of the norm's implementation and a prognostic, open-ended and creative investigation about the possible heuristic resources to overcome these limits.

¹⁵ Political philosopher Michael Walzer (1994) has advanced the distinction between thin and thick forms of morality and moral actions. Universal principles – e.g. gender equality – are thin forms of morality, while their adaptations to specific historical circumstances are thick forms. In order to be transformative, political agency needs to be grounded on the knowledge of the existing circumstances of injustice and of the institutional settings and dynamics in order to transform them.

¹⁶ For instance, with the document 'Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820', adopted by the EU Council in 2008, and with the 'Revised indicators annex' elaborated in 2016, the EU tried to define its agency. However, by stating that its Comprehensive approach 'covers the whole spectrum of EU's external action instruments throughout the conflict continuum, from conflict prevention to crisis management, peace-building, reconstruction and development co-operation', the new comprehensive approach seems to envisage a thin conception of agency and replicates the non-reflexive engagement with the WPS Agenda that has been undertaken by the majority of EU member states so far. The 2008 document is available online at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15671-2008-REV-1/en/pdf>

stereotypical and distorted ways, as discussed above – has been underestimated or misunderstood, leading to the exclusion from or marginalization within the WPS Agenda norm lab of a number of individual and collective actors. For instance, while female combatants' and ex combatants' agency is hardly considered in debates concerning conflict management and peacekeeping (Henshaw, 2020; Schneiker, 2021) and the involvement of civil society actors is piecemeal and non-organic (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016, pp. 383–385), female peacekeepers' agency within change-resistant institutional settings is misunderstood, leaving the door open to practices of 'gender-sidestreaming', i.e. to the instrumental use of the norm of gender mainstreaming aimed at neutralising its transformative potential and reasserting the *status quo* (Newby & Sebag, 2021). Similarly, within the WPS Agenda norm lab men's and boys' political agency has been poorly developed; their 'enlistment' in the WPS project or their vague status as 'allied' do not seem to envisage a thick political agency (Myrntinen, 2019; Duriesmith, 2020).

To conclude this brief analysis, it is important to point out that contestation can constitute a form of political agency potentially leading to the advancement of the WPS Agenda's transformative project, but not all kinds of contestation serve this purpose. On a recent contribution to the debate on the WPS Agenda, Jacqui True and Antje Wiener (2019) look at the capacity of different actors – namely civil society organisations, states and intergovernmental organisations – to produce impactful change within the international society and to contribute to the realization of the norm of gender mainstreaming in the security sector. They highlight the 'plurality of political agency in global society' while discussing the different interests of actors who take part in the debate about the WPS Agenda and they examine the different forms of discursive and behavioural contestation that actors have been raising throughout this debate. The distinction between reactive and proactive contestation – the former being an actor's objection to norms that are explicitly rejected or ignored, while the latter entails 'critical engagement' with norms, meant as a political act – sheds light on the fact that only some forms of norm contestation have a transformative effect and produce norm change and structural impact and can, therefore, be considered expressions of political agency bearing transformative potential (ibidem, pp. 556–561). With respect to the WPS Agenda norm lab, as the case of the 'commemorative' draft resolution proposed by the Russian government shows, critical engagement seems to be lacking, while reactive contestations expressed through words, omissions and actions seem daily practices. Such contestations, rather than contributing to the strengthening and transformative reinterpretation of the norm, depotentiate it, opening new conceptual cracks and widening the old ones.

Looking for conceptual resources for gilding the cracks

The previous section has presented and discussed two main conceptual cracks – identity and agency – that undermine the robustness and resilience of the WPS Agenda, reducing the transformative potential of the norm of gender mainstreaming within the field of security and conflict management. In order to find conceptual resources and elaborate transformative concepts of identity and agency, this section proposes to look at some insights from the contemporary political-philosophical debate on epistemic injustices. This discussion is based on the assumption that knowledge production is a social endeavour and it revolves around the power asymmetries underlying the production and circulation of knowledge and information within contemporary societies. Considering the WPS Agenda as a norm lab permits to shed light on the mechanisms and circuits of knowledge production and knowledge circulation. Since the two cracks analysed above derive from the difficulties of elaborating transformative concepts of agency and identity, incorporating them in the documents of the WPS Agenda as well as in operational documents, it is possible to argue

that they pertain to the sphere of knowledge production. As has been recently highlighted by many within the debates on the twenty years of the WPS Agenda, the collection of reliable data and the inclusion of marginalised perspectives within the norm lab has proved to be problematic. Since the success of the WPS Agenda is crucially linked to its capacity to obtain consensus and diffusing the norm of gender mainstreaming within the security sector, knowledge exchanges and discursive strategies are fundamental. Therefore, looking at epistemic injustices might help to pinpoint the persisting blocks to knowledge exchanges and to devise solutions to overcome these blocks and improve the functioning of the norm lab.

Detecting epistemic injustices within the WPS norm lab

About fifteen years ago, Miranda Fricker (2007) notably defined epistemic injustice as a two-faced manifestation of problematic (unequal) knowledge/information exchanges. First, *testimonial injustice* occurs when a person's testimony is not considered reliable or is not taken seriously because of her/his (misperceived and essentialised) identity; second, *hermeneutical injustice* applies when a person suffers injustice but she/he is not fully aware of it because lacks the conceptual resources to clearly articulate a claim for justice. Two examples concerning issues relevant for the WPS Agenda may help to illustrate the two parts of the concept of epistemic injustice. While the non-inclusion of (combatant or non-combatant) women in the negotiations for peace agreements can be associated to testimonial injustice, the difficulty of male combatants who are victims of sexual violence to recognise the specific form of violence they have suffered is an instance of hermeneutical injustice. The persistence of epistemic injustices hampers the WPS Agenda's transformative potential. On the one hand, they limit the norm lab's inclusiveness, since not all the participants to the discussions concerning the norm of gender mainstreaming in the field of security are assigned the same level of credibility and some of them are progressively marginalised or excluded from the discussions. On the other hand, asymmetries of credibility tend to reinforce power asymmetries and to hamper the discussions within the norm lab, preventing the reconciliation of the discursive and nondiscursive dimensions of norm acceptance and compliance.

Besides the two forms of epistemic injustice described above, it is possible to identify a variety of ways in which marginalized individuals or groups are unjustly denied the opportunity to take part in the generation of knowledge. Without looking in detail at the many different forms of epistemic injustice, it suffices here to briefly note that the WPS Agenda norm lab is characterised not only by testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, but also by practices of epistemic silencing, appropriation, exploitation and trespassing. A brief explanation of these terms is in order. First, practices of *epistemic silencing* occur when an audience systematically fails to identify someone who wants to communicate a message as a knower or when this someone is inhibited because she/he perceives the audience as unwilling to listen (Dotson, 2011). In both cases, the result is that marginalised voices are silenced. For instance, in debates about the WPS Agenda focusing exclusively on women, LGBT+ people might perceive the audience as hostile to queer claims, giving up the opportunity to contribute to those debates (Hagen, 2016). Second, the concept of *epistemic appropriation* refers to the (wrongful) appropriation of informational resources created by marginalized individuals and groups by dominant discourses which eventually benefit relatively privileged people (Davis, 2018). Third, *epistemic exploitation* takes place whenever marginalised persons are required an unpaid and often unacknowledged work of providing information, resources, and evidence of oppression to privileged persons in order to educate them (Berenstain, 2016). Examples of practices of epistemic appropriation and exploitation concern the problematic and understudied relationship within the WPS norm

lab between people in conflict or post-conflict societies and researchers: very often, their contributions to the production of research might contribute to the strengthening of the researcher's professional profile and to an up-to-date and evidence-based education for students, improving the overall knowledge on the prospects and challenges for a global diffusion of the norm of gender mainstreaming in specific contexts. However, very often the researches and educational/training programmes developed within the norm lab produce minimal (if any) beneficial effects on the actual implementation of the norm of gender mainstreaming in those societies, because of the loose links that scholars and activists activate with local policymakers and the difficult engagement with the local education system (Parashar, 2019). Fourth, *epistemic trespassing* indicates the practices of experts of a certain field – people who occupy privileged positions in the circuit of knowledge production – issuing judgments or opinions on questions beyond their expertise, i.e. their training and competence (Ballantyne, 2019). Instances of this form of epistemic injustices can be found in cases revealing patterns of feminism's cooptation by international governance and militarized actors (de Almagro, 2018; Chappell & Mackay, 2021). Moreover, recently some attention has been raised within the racialized hierarchies of knowledge production revolving around the WPS Agenda, thanks to the creation of 'a system of knowledge production supported by selective sites of WPS expertise situated within the "secure" global north often based on work on the "insecure" global south' (Haastrup & Hagen, 2021, p. 27). The epistemic asymmetry between (academic and non-academic) experts and the women and men working toward the achievement of peace and gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings is striking; even more striking is the fact that some individuals and groups struggle to make their voices heard within the WPS Agenda's norm lab, as is the case for LGBT+ people (Hagen, 2016).

In general, all the six forms of epistemic injustices are the product of credibility asymmetries rooted in (positive and negative) identity stereotypes: because of their privileged identities, some people are normally accorded credibility by a majority of people; on the contrary, people belonging to discriminated and marginalised groups are (consciously or unconsciously) considered as lacking in credibility by a large number of people. What is especially worrisome is that institutions tend to reproduce these credibility asymmetries and filter knowledge accordingly, even those who engage in transformative experiments, such as states and organisations actively involved in the activities of the WPS norm lab. This has important implications: even when potentially transformative policies aiming at improving the social conditions of marginalised people are elaborated and implemented, they are the product of knowledge produced by privileged people and they can lack a thick conception of political agency and an accurate perception of the phenomenon because of the geographical, social or emotional distance from the context where injustices occur. In processes where conflicting narratives about a given violent event or process (e.g. a present or past conflict) are weighed up, epistemic injustices can play a crucial role in the perceptions of the actors involved, and the dynamics of the economy of credibility can matter more than the determination of factual truth for the elaboration of the mainstream interpretations of the event or process and the assignment of the stereotypical and misleading identities of victims and perpetrators of violence.

Conclusion

The article proposed an original and interdisciplinary analytical perspective to contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the conceptual cracks characterizing the WPS Agenda. Claiming that the ambiguity of some of its key concepts reduces the WPS Agenda's strength, the article analysed, in the light of the constructivist reflection on norm diffusion and norm contestation, the main conceptual cracks threatening the validity and facticity of the norm

of gender mainstreaming in the field of security. Like the Japanese artists/artisans who keep alive the ancient technique of Kintsugi, gilding pots' cracks with gold, scholars willing to adopt an interdisciplinary approach might explore other debates in their search for new conceptual resources.

Conceptualising the WPS Agenda as a norm lab, in the second section the article proposed to stress the importance of the dimension of the production, reproduction and circulation of knowledge, shedding light on the underlying discursive dynamics that at the same time allow the expression of norm contestation and create opportunities for persuasion. Moreover, the norm lab model highlights the complex interactions among a plurality of heterogeneous actors who participate to the norm lab as well as the compresence of political, cultural and economic interests. The strong reactions shown by several members of the UNSC towards the draft resolution proposed in 2020 by the Russian government – perceived as an attempt to water down the transformative character of the WPS Agenda – are presented as evidence that, for the diffusion of the norm of gender mainstreaming in the field of security, the conceptual dimension is at least as important as the dimension of its operationalization and implementation, although the literature has focused mainly on the latter.

One way to contribute to the crucial task of gilding the WPS Agenda's conceptual cracks – combining conceptual craftsmanship and creativity and using diverse materials, in line with the Kintsugi tradition – might be to resort to new conceptual tools, suitable for reconstructing the patterns and dynamics characterizing knowledge production and reproduction within the norm lab. The article's third section unfolded a critical discussion of the WPS Agenda's main conceptual cracks, expanding the discussion which has emerged with the occasion of the twentieth anniversary celebrations, to propose a creative solution: going beyond the traditional repertoire of feminist security studies to assess the WPS Agenda's capacity to reframe the concepts of identity and (political) agency, in order to open up new paths and conceptualise to overcome the limits to the transformative potential of the norm of gender mainstreaming in the field of security posed by the essentialist understandings of identity and the thin interpretations of agency that have characterized the Agenda so far.

In the fourth section, finally, the article explored some conceptual resources that have been developed by political philosophers to investigate the role that credibility asymmetries play in discursive contexts of knowledge production and reproduction. Although a fully-fledged theoretical exploration would require a more ambitious research design, the article presented a first attempt to move in this direction, proposing – as one among many experiments carried out within the norm lab – to recast the concepts of identity and agency, drawing on the resources developed within the recent debate on epistemic injustice. Detecting the different forms of epistemic injustice occurring within the WPS Agenda's norm lab – which hamper the creation and circulation of knowledge and worsen the discursive interactions among the actors, fostering reactive contestations and endangering the possibility to reach a genuine consensus – can be a first step towards the development of further interdisciplinary research projects, aimed at locating the short circuits in the production and circulation of knowledge within the WPS Agenda norm lab which produce the conceptual cracks. While the main goal of the present contribution was primarily diagnostic, future projects should focus on prognostic theorization, experimenting within the norm lab for forging new interdisciplinary conceptual resources for gilding the cracks.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Editorial Committee of *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* and one anonymous reviewer for commenting on previous drafts of the manuscript. Since the first draft of the article was completed during a DAAD-funded research stay at the Research Centre “Normative Orders” of Goethe University Frankfurt, she is grateful to Professor Rainer Forst, Professor Darrel Moellendorf and the researchers and students who have been participating in the Political Theory Kolloquium during the Fall of 2021, for the stimulating discussions on international norms’ formation and diffusion.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The Level Playing Field Issue

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Abstract

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) was completed at the end of 2020 and governs the relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom, as a third country. The most controversial issue during the negotiations of the TCA was the so-called level playing field, by which the EU wanted the UK to follow its rules and standards on labor and social areas, on environmental policy and on State aid. The European Union claims to be a global regulatory power, being able to extend its normative weight in the framework of trade agreements with other nations. When compared to recent preferential trade agreements, the TCA allows the EU to extend its own rules and standards in the areas covered by the level playing field, even if it was the trade-off for UK goods to benefit from a greater degree of access to the single market. In any case, the TCA can be seen as a step forward in the EU ability to spread its regulatory influence.

Keywords: Post-Brexit deal; European Union; level playing field; regulatory power; State aid

Introduction

After the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union both parties went on arduous negotiations to rule on their future relationship, with the UK acting as a third country. The post-Brexit deal, officially known as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), was completed at the end of 2020 and came into force immediately after.

According to the European Commission, the TCA is at the forefront of modern and sustainable trade policy by upholding high standards regarding the protection of labor and social rules, environmental protection and the fight against climate change and also adding common provisions on the use of subsidies.¹ Besides, the post-Brexit arrangement goes beyond the new generation of EU trade agreements with third countries by providing zero tariffs and zero quotas on the commerce of goods, including farming and fishing products (D'Erman 2021, p.223).

Even if the Trade and Cooperation Agreement did not reproduce the level of economic integration that existed when the United Kingdom was an EU member state, the European Union announced the TCA as an unprecedented free trade deal, overseeing an ambitious

¹ European Commission 2020, *EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. A new relationship, with big changes*, viewed 8 April 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/brexit_files/info_site/6_pager_final.pdf

cooperation on economic, social and environmental issues, along with a partnership for citizens' security and providing an embracing governance structure².

From the beginning of Brexit negotiations, the EU warned that any free trade agreement should be balanced and comprehensive, furthermore underscoring: 'It must ensure a level playing field, notably in terms of competition and State aid, and in this regard encompass safeguards against unfair competitive advantages through, inter alia, tax, social, environmental and regulatory measures and practices.'³

The making of trade agreements with third countries is a good opportunity to extend the territorial scope of EU rules and standards. The EU is generally presented as a global rule maker considering the ability to spread its normative influence. Yet, some studies show that the whole amount of European Union legal authority is less than suggested by the literature that portrays as EU as a global regulatory power.

The level playing field issue was at the center of the negotiations of the post-Brexit agreement. When at the end of the formal rounds of talks the EU and the UK were close to achieving a compromise on trade in goods, services and investment, social security coordination and civil nuclear cooperation, there still were persistent divergences on a subject of crucial importance for the EU: the level playing field subject.⁴

This article intends to explore the level playing field subject in the framework of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. It seeks to understand why this matter became a major issue on EU trade agreements, by examining what the level playing field is about, what its main political and economic purposes are and why the European Union was so resolute about it during the negotiations with the United Kingdom. It then analyses how the main areas dealt under the level playing field heading were settled in the post-Brexit deal, aiming to understand the degree of regulatory influence the EU was able to exercise with the TCA, compared to the outcomes achieved in recent preferential trade agreements.

The level playing field issue

The European Union plays a leading role in international economic relations, namely, in the areas of trade and development aid. In fact, external relations are a pillar in the making of the European bloc as a global actor. With the failure of the Doha Round multilateral negotiations, the United States and the European Union undertook a trade policy shift to make bilateral pacts, in which they found it easier to impose their preferences on technical rules regarding the production and marketing of goods, in exchange for access to their markets (Dehousse & Miny 2018, p. 2). The joint effect of some dozens of bilateral trade agreements signed since the beginning of the century allowed the European Union to export its regulatory corpus in the field of technical regulation to many countries (Larik 2017, p. 324). As a result, the Union is said to become a global rule maker, given its ability to set regulatory standards in a wide number of areas, such as product safety, environmental protection, food safety, public procurement, financial regulation and accounting (Bradford 2020, p. 21).

According to Anu Bradford, bilateral trade agreements are an instrument of a broader strategy that aims to affirm the European Union's ability to impose its preferences on the global regulation of the markets. In addition, the Union impetus on technical regulation in order to achieve the single market also benefits from its growing external dimension, due

² Idem.

³ European Council, Guidelines, EUCO XT 20004/17 (2017), para. 20, viewed 2 November 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21763/29-euco-art50-guidelinesen.pdf>

⁴ European Commission 2020, Statement by Michel Barnier following Round 9 of negotiations for a new partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom, STATEMENT/20/1817, viewed 2 November 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_1817

to the size of the European market. Indeed, multinational companies tend to incorporate EU technical standards in their production processes and marketing methods, with the purpose of guaranteeing access to the single market – the market with the largest number of consumers, among developed countries (Bradford 2020, p. 2). Hence, those companies have an increased interest to put pressure on the agencies of their home countries, as well as on regulators from other markets where they do business, to adopt the regulatory standards settled by the European Union – triggering the so-called Brussels effect. In this way, the Union acquires the ability to regulate international markets unilaterally.

Beyond the effect that European technical regulation of the single market can achieve externally through the spread of EU standards operated by the action of transnational industries, the European Union makes use of some legal tools to increase the global use of its rules. The making of trade agreements with third countries, or with regional organizations, is the most valuable means of the Union strategy to extend the territorial scope of its technical standards (Bradford 2020, p. 68).

The European Union imposes a kind of regulatory conditionality to grant access to the single market for goods produced by third countries. The intensity of the conditions depends on the degree of economic approximation of those countries. In the case of preferential trade agreements, the European Union finds it easy to externalize its regulatory framework, due to the negotiation asymmetry with its partners. The Union opens the access to a market of almost five hundred million consumers, with high purchasing power. In exchange, it requires the contracting countries to adopt its regulatory standards. In fact, the growing number of bilateral trade deals leads the Union to apply a common typology of regulatory requirements in the provisions of the agreements.

In terms of effective outcomes, Young notes that in the area of preferential trade agreements the EU has greater influence with smaller partners with lower regulatory capacity than with larger commercial partners. Concerning those trade deals, the EU ambition tend to vary with the power of the partners, pursuing more ambitious results with least influential countries than with the most powerful nations (Young 2015, p.1245). However, the author refers that the whole extent of influence is less that what could be suggested by the view of the EU as global regulatory power.

It is worthwhile to also mention a critical analysis on the use of conditionality in the framework of EU trade agreements made by Sandrin & Hoffmann. Taking a post-structuralist scrutiny of the narrative on common values and norms shared across a diverse continent they consider the European Union “places itself in a superior level [...] dictating what others should do, since it has already ‘discovered’ a better way of doing things” (Sandrin & Hoffman 2018, p.10). In their opinion, the European Union intends to shape a paradigm in international relations, on the basis that it has settled the patterns for the new technical and industrial challenges. According to the same authors, the Union discourse and practice in the field of diplomacy is “infused with a sense of moral superiority” (Id., p. 13) vis-à-vis countries with which is negotiating trade and cooperation agreements. A situation that underlies the narrative developed by the Union when projecting itself as a regulatory model, embodying an advanced political entity. The Union believes to play a leading role on global governance, as opposed to its contracting nations. Hence, the Union claims authority to lay down its own rules, as a legitimate producer of regulatory standards with international application.

If the rationale for the EU’s external strategy could be reported to a worldview based on the leading role played by European cultural and political values in the evolution of global affairs, the economic justification for adding an extra-territorial dimension to its normative model is more prosaic. For the Union, the goal of achieving third countries’ regulatory alignment with EU standards aims to prevent situations of competitive disadvantage for its

companies. Thus, imported products should be exposed to the same social and environmental requirements as goods manufactured in the Union. Likewise, goods exported by European nations should compete on equal terms in foreign markets. Hence, the main purpose for externalizing the EU regulatory system is to reduce the adjustment costs of European companies in the framework of international trade flows (Bradford 2020, p. 23).

In the scope of EU trade policy, regulatory alignment with European standards is an instrument for protecting the integrity of the internal market. In fact, fearing that countries with greater access to the single market could provide subsidies to their companies, or reduce production costs through less demanding social and environmental standards, the Union has settled a regulatory alignment strategy aimed at ensuring fair competition between European undertakings and companies from third countries - referred to in EU jargon as the level playing field issue.

The matching of production costs in third countries aims to break off competitive advantages from goods produced in those countries when compared to similar products manufactured in the European Union. Thus, the aim of ensuring a level playing field ultimately consists of a hidden attempt to implement EU protectionism. Free trade agreements are an instrument for the liberalization of international trade, and the Union has entered into such agreements with third countries on a regular basis. However, it takes advantage of its greater bargaining power, derived from the size of the single market, to introduce safeguard clauses in the content of those agreements (Barnard, 2020). Indeed, the level playing field can be seen as an understatement of EU trade defense strategy.

Post-Brexit negotiations

The issue of regulatory alignment was at the center of the EU strategy regarding the conditions to be observed by the United Kingdom in order to be granted access to the single market, on zero tariffs and zero quotas basis (Eeckhout 2021, p.14). According to the Union, the post-Brexit agreement was supposed to set 'high standards in the areas of State aid, competition, state-owned enterprises, social and employment standards, environmental standards, climate change, and relevant tax matters. In so doing, the agreement should rely on appropriate and relevant Union and international standards'.⁵

It is interesting to recall the origin of the expression that would become the most contentious subject in the post-Brexit negotiations. The level playing field was a saying used in the sports area to underline the importance of teams facing each other on equal terms, without the terrain tipping to one side. Football clubs used this aphorism to denounce a slope in the field before the game, in reference to extra-sports factors affecting the outcome of the match.

The level playing field was appropriated by the EU's vocabulary to mention the need for fair competition in trade agreements. However, its use is not limited to external relations; it is also employed in the framework of domestic regulation of the single market. For example, the adoption of a directive providing for new conditions for the posting of workers in the European Union was based on the need 'to guarantee a level playing field for businesses and respect for the rights of workers.'⁶ The posting of workers is a common situation when a European company provides its services in another Member State. By reducing the length

⁵ European Commission 2020, *Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, COM (2020) 35, para. 89, viewed 2 November 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020PC0035>

⁶ European Parliament and Council 2018, Directive (EU) 2018/957 of June 2018 amending Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services, 2018 O.J.(L 173) Whereas 1, viewed 2 November 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32018L0957>

of posting and increasing the requirements for service providers, the new directive introduced greater restrictions on one of the economic foundations of the single market – the freedom to provide services. Thus, the new legal framework for posted workers was inspired by a desire for protection, aiming to shield home companies from competition from foreign providers of services and strike ‘the right balance between the need to promote the freedom to provide services and ensure a level playing field (...)’.⁷ The legislative reform was achieved after strong political pressure from President Macron, who welcomed the new directive for allowing ‘more protection and less fraud’ (Tani, 2017).

The 2020 Council Guidelines stated that the post-Brexit agreement should ensure the application of EU rules on State aid to and in the United Kingdom, while also requiring the creation of an independent authority to enforce the applicable rules. The independent authority should work in close collaboration with the European Commission.⁸ Hence, the Union aimed to hold its State aid rules, and supervise their implementation, as it does in the member states.

As far as labor and social protection was concerned, the European Union wanted the post-Brexit deal to ensure that protection would

not reduce below the level provided by the common standards applicable within the Union and the United Kingdom at the end of the transition period in relation to at least the following areas: fundamental rights at work; occupational health and safety, including the precautionary principle; fair working conditions and employment standards; and information and consultation rights at company level and restructuring. It should also protect and promote social dialogue on labor matters among workers and employers, and their respective organizations, and governments.⁹

Hence, the Union wanted to include the idea of non-regression in the area of labor and social protection covering a wide number of issues.

Regarding environmental protection, the Council Guidelines required that the post-Brexit deal also include a clause on non-regression from European protection standards applicable at the end of the transition period, but with an even larger scope of application:

access to environmental information; public participation and access to justice in environmental matters; environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment; industrial emissions; air emissions and air quality targets and ceilings; nature and biodiversity conservation; waste management; the protection and preservation of the aquatic environment; the protection and preservation of the marine environment; the prevention, reduction and elimination of risks to human health or the environment arising from the production, use, release and disposal of chemical substances; and climate change.¹⁰

For the European Union, the vast demand for regulatory alignment resulted from the United Kingdom being granted wider access to the single market, when compared to the scope of free trade agreements celebrated with third countries. In particular, the EU wanted

⁷ *Id.*, whereas 4.

⁸ European Commission 2020, *supra*, note 3, para. 91.

⁹ *Id.*, para. 96.

¹⁰ *Id.*, para. 98.

to safeguard that a portion of the so-called *acquis communautaire* – in the areas covered by the level playing field – would not be reversed by the UK in the future, since they were part of the overall attempt to complete the single market. If the UK goods would benefit from entering the internal market with no tariffs and quotas, the United Kingdom needed to be bound by the European standards in labor and social affairs, on environment and climate change policies, as well as on State aid rules. Hence, the position of the EU was largely to be defending the integrity of the single market.

Considering its market size, the European Union also aimed to sign a position of force in the negotiations on post-Brexit relationship (Bressanelli & Chelotti 2021, p. 2), asserting its status as an international trade power. The premises of its negotiating strategy were not only based on the purpose of maximizing trade, but rather on a power game *vis-à-vis* the United Kingdom, seeking to condition the aim of restoring regulatory autonomy in the above-mentioned areas (Munchau 2020), and to confront the UK Government with the pointlessness of recovering sovereignty. The Union intended to demonstrate the scarcity of meaning in the United Kingdom's taking back control over trade policy if the country did not have the negotiating force to impose its trade preferences, for it would be obliged to accept the dictates of commercial partners. Indeed, during the negotiations the Union took an approach aimed to show its stronger trade influence, pretending to expose the misunderstandings between power and sovereignty that inspired Brexit supporters (Stephens 2020).

For its part, the UK Government emphasized the need for the Union to assume that the withdrawal from the European bloc implied the recovery of sovereignty by the United Kingdom (Eeckhout 2021, p. 13). To that extent, the parties were to negotiate a free trade agreement, without any interference in the regulatory field. The emphasis on sovereignty also led Prime Minister Johnson to reject the EU's claims about the continuity of State aid rules, the incorporation of institutional mechanisms to supervise the implementation of the agreement and the role of the European Court of Justice in the settlement of disputes involving the post-Brexit deal (Brunsden 2020).

The European Union's request to keep the United Kingdom bound by EU social, labor and environmental standards contrasted with the requirements set out in trade agreements signed with other developed nations. For example, in the free trade agreement with Canada – a paradigm for the UK Government – the levels of labor or environmental protection were settled taking into account international law, such as the International Labor Organization conventions or the international agreements in the field of environmental protection.¹¹

As far as the scope of EU regulatory power is concerned, Young ranked the extent of EU regulatory influence on recent preferential trade agreements showing that the EU was able to achieve a larger degree of regulatory alignment with Central American countries regarding competition policy, as well as on labor and environment areas, although the agreement reached a weak convergence on regulatory standards. Singapura was rated at a similar level in the hierarchy of regulatory influence, but with the degree of convergence limited to the labor field. A lower degree of convergence was recognized to the Korea trade

¹¹ *Chapter Twenty-Three - Trade And Labour*: "In this chapter the EU and Canada commit to respecting the labour standards set by the International Labour Organization), and to ratifying and implementing the international Labour Organization's fundamental conventions."

Chapter Twenty-Four - Trade And Environment: "This chapter commits the EU and Canada to putting into practice international environmental agreements. It: protects each side's right to regulate on environmental matters; requires each side to enforce its domestic environmental laws; prevents either side from relaxing their laws to boost trade."

EU- Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) 2016, viewed 2 November 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ceta/ceta-chapter-by-chapter/>

agreement, a country with larger commercial weight when compared to the previous nations. Finally, the commercial treaty signed with Canada was considered to have a very limited ability on rule changing (Young 2015, p. 1246). In any case, there was a full absence of legal harmonization in those trade agreements based on EU rules. Indeed, regulatory convergence was grounded on international standards, rather than on European rules. (Young (b) 2015, p. 1266)

For the United Kingdom, the refusal to align with EU rules was to report to the roots of Brexit itself (Holmes & Rollo 2020, p. 527), which was also motivated by the purpose of regaining national control over technical standards in the areas ruled by the Union. The rejection of EU law led Boris Johnson to announce that, as an alternative to a free trade agreement, the United Kingdom could follow the Australian model in post-Brexit relationship. In fact, in the absence of a bilateral agreement trade between Australia and the Union is governed by the World Trade Organization principles.

Negotiations for a post-Brexit deal were initiated in March 2020. However, the coronavirus and the spread of the pandemic in Europe prevented the due course of the trade talks, leading to the postponement of its timetable. Indeed, the rise of COVID-19 in Europe put post-Brexit talks on the back burner (Yeoh 2021, p. 62).

State aid

Having failed to lead the initial response to the cross-border dimension of the spread of the pandemic across the European Union, the Commission sought to adopt measures to ease member states' response to the economic problems derived from the lockdown. After declaring the suspension of the Stability Pact rules on fiscal policy for the eurozone countries, the Commission also announced the suspension of EU State aid provisions to

allow Member States to use all the flexibility provided for in the State aid rules to support the economy in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. (...) The Temporary Framework allows Member States to ensure the availability of sufficient liquidity for all types of companies and to preserve the continuity of economic activity during and after the outbreak of COVID-19.¹²

The so-called Temporary Framework on State aid announced by the Commission – allowing the granting of direct subsidies to companies, tax advantages, State guarantees for loans taken from banks, subsidized public loans for companies and export credit insurance – was used asymmetrically by the member states, due to their different fiscal situation. Thus, EU nations with lower public debt, and less affected by the first wave of the pandemic, benefited more from the freezing of State aid rules.

Indeed, countries such Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark or Austria injected huge amounts of money in national companies. In the first six weeks of suspension of State aid rules, the Commission approved ninety-five decisions, coming from twenty-six countries, for a total amount of €1.9 trillion of public aid. Germany's subsidies to its companies amounted to 52 percent of the whole public funding awarded (Fleming 2020).

In view of the disparity of subsidies granted, nations like Italy or Spain – among those most affected by the pandemic (Marcus et al. 2021) – feared that the avalanche of liquidity to the benefit of northern undertakings could erode the integrity of the single market, by increasing unequal conditions of competition between economic agents. Hence, the

¹² European Commission 2020, *State aid: Commission adopts Temporary Framework to enable Member States to further support the economy in the COVID-19 outbreak*, C 1863, viewed 2 November 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/sa_covid19_temporary-framework.pdf

cooling-off of European State aid rules, which the European Union wanted to include in the post-Brexit agreement, was used by member states in a way that threaten a level playing field between EU companies.

It should be noted that the lawfulness of the Commission's State aid scheme adopted in order to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic was for the first time assessed by the EU General Court, in the framework of actions brought by Ryanair against subventions granted by France and Sweden to national airlines. Those actions challenged the Commission's decisions to authorize loan guarantees granted by the Swedish Government and to defer tax payments conceded by the French authorities, raising the legality under Article 107(2)(b) TFEU of the State aid scheme that had been adopted to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In fact, during the pandemic, European governments injected more than thirty billion euros into their national air carriers. As the financial support was provided to flag-carrying companies, the low-cost airline Ryanair filed sixteen cases in the EU General Court to test State aid rules, arguing that national subsidies were discriminatory and would distort the level playing field in aviation for decades. In the framework of national subventions granted to airflight companies, the Irish based budget carrier made a distinction between State aid provided only to specific airlines and subventions open to all airflight companies. Curiously, the UK Government followed the later funding mechanism, through the so-called Covid Corporation Financing Facility, which allowed Ryanair to benefit from public money in the United Kingdom (Espinoza, 2021).

The EU General Court declared the national measures at issue were intended to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of those member states caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the significant adverse effects of the pandemic on the aviation sector and on the air services of the same countries.¹³ The General Court stated that the subsidies at stake were appropriate for achieving the objective of relieving the serious disturbance in the economy of those countries and that the Commission did not commit any error of assessment in considering that the aid schemes did not go beyond what was necessary to achieve the objectives, declaring that the aims of both the loan guarantee scheme and the deferral of tax payment satisfied the requirements of the derogation laid down in Article 107(3)(b) TFEU.

As mentioned above, the European Union wanted to impose its own State aid rules on the United Kingdom, as well as to ensure the Commission's collaboration with the British authority in charge of the implementation of those standards (Davison 2018, p. 101). This demand was rejected by the United Kingdom, based on the sovereignty claim. However, the impetus of EU demands weakened during the negotiations, in part due to the freezing of State aid rules in the Union.

The United Kingdom was open to the incorporation of provisions on the control of subsidies with harmful effects on competition into the post-Brexit agreement, provided they were inspired by the World Trade Organization principles. However, the UK Government rejected the claim for an ex ante control on public subventions, which is a distinctive element of the EU State aid system.

Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) concluded between the European Union and the United Kingdom on 2020 Christmas eve,¹⁴ includes a chapter regarding the control of

¹³ EU General Court 2021, *Ryanair DAC v. Commission*, Cases T-238/20 and T-259/20, 17 February.

¹⁴ European Commission 2020, "Trade and Cooperation Agreement Between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern

subsidies, within the title devoted to the level playing field. The chapter of the TCA devoted to subsidy control recognizes the right of the parties to maintain an autonomous system on State aid, and to implement it in accordance with the procedures provided for in the respective legal system. The agreement establishes a set of common principles on subventions to companies. It also provides that the control of subsidies must be made by an independent authority or body (Art. 3.9).

The principles set out in the TCA allow the parties to grant subsidies to companies with the aim of remedying an identified market failure. The subsidies must be proportionate to the objectives, constituting an appropriate policy instrument to achieve a public policy objective, and the positive contributions of the grants should outweigh any negative effects (Art. 3.4). Subsidies must be granted in compliance with the principle of transparency, with the need to make information on the decision of State aid publicly available.

Under the TCA, the ban on subsidies does not apply to State aid granted to compensate for the damage caused by natural disasters or other exceptional non-economic occurrences, subventions of a social character, subsidies to respond to economic emergencies, subventions granted to agriculture, fisheries or related to the audiovisual sector, as well as State aid granted to services of public economic interest (Arts. 3.2 and 3.3).

The TCA prohibits subsidies in the form of unlimited State guarantees, as well as grants for the recovery of companies without a credible restructuring plan. The same principle applies to State aid provided to banks, credit institutions and insurance companies (Wardhaugh 2021, p. 85). Public aid subject to the incorporation of national products is prohibited. Export subsidies are limited to the so-called non-marketable risks. Subsidies to air carriers for the operation of routes are reduced to public service obligations, new routes to regional airports and, in special cases, where funding provides benefits for society at large (Art. 3.5).

The EU's perseverance on the effective implementation of the State aid rules led to the inclusion in the TCA of a provision recognizing the jurisdiction of the parties' courts to review subsidy decisions taken by the granting authority. The tribunals of the parties, at the request of private competitors, may decide on remedies that include the suspension, prohibition or even the recovery of the subsidy from its beneficiary, in accordance with the law of the party on State aid, implementing the principles of the TCA (Art. 3.10). Hence, a British airline may challenge in the Swedish courts subsidies granted to local companies, because of an alleged violation of the principles set out in the post-Brexit deal.

Considering the United Kingdom's traditional frugality in granting public aid,¹⁵ British companies may resort to national courts across Europe to challenge subventions to German banks, credit loans to the French car industry, funding to Italian shipyards, tax benefits to Spanish telecommunications or subsidies to the Polish retail sector. In that case, the Union's persistence on control of subsidies could have a boomerang effect on the old industrial policy practices of the European nations.

Ireland, of the other part", COM (2020) 857 final, viewed 2 November 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/brexit_files/info_site/tca-20-12-28.pdf. The TCA was signed on December 30, 2020; was applied provisionally from January 1; and it entered into force on May 1, 2021.

¹⁵ The United Kingdom was among the Member States spending less in State aids when compared to the EU average for the period 2013-2019. See: European Commission 2021, *Stated Aid Scoreboard 2020*, p. 44, viewed 8 April 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/system/files/2021-06/state_aid_scoreboard_note_2020.pdf

Regulatory alignment

British companies – from agriculture and food processing to car industry, from the chemical sector to the service industries – have a strong economic incentive to produce their goods and services in accordance with European standards, should they wish to export to the single market. In terms of technical regulation, the Brussels effect operates naturally on British economic agents who maintain trade relations with EU member states. Yet, regulatory alignment required by the European Union did not refer to technical rules on the manufacture of goods, but rather to issues related to production costs, such as subsidies to companies, workers' social rights or environmental protection (Mariani & Sacerdoti 2021).

At the beginning of the negotiations of the post-Brexit deal, the United Kingdom refused the demand for regulatory alignment with European standards, claiming that those issues were to be regulated according to international law conventions, in the same way as the EU trade agreement with Canada.

European standards in social and labor areas, as well as on environment protection, were adopted through EU directives. Directives are legal acts that need to be incorporated into the domestic law of the member states. According to the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, European law was to be applied to the United Kingdom until the end of the transitional period. Thus, EU rules on social and environmental protection were part of the UK domestic legal order, because of European law.

Directives aim for legal harmonization among the member states and are, therefore, seen as a privileged legal tool in the framework of Europeanization. This notion has generally been defined as a process of domestic change resulting from EU policies. Considered the EU multilevel governance system, studies on Europeanization tend to focus on a double dimension: the procedure whereby European institutions influence national policies; and the implementation of EU policies by the member states (Pollack 2015, p. 38). As far as the latter is concerned, it should be noted that implementation plays a central role within the Union because policy-making is normally achieved by EU directives, which later must be transposed by member states into their legal order and need further to be rightly enforced by national authorities.

However, the strength of EU policies depends not only on the capacity of the European Commission to ensure the accurate enforcement of EU directives, by supervising the work of national governments, but also on the by ability of national courts to refer domestic cases to the European Court of Justice concerning the scope of EU rules. Hence, the Union jurisdictional system plays an active role on the whole Europeanization procedure.

During the negotiations, the United Kingdom gave some signs that it could shift from its standpoint of rejecting regulatory alignment in social and environmental areas. As a matter of fact, those rules were already part of national law. Indeed, negotiators appeared to have reached consensus in the social and environmental field, on the basis that the United Kingdom would be bound by European standards that were in force at the end of 2020. Those rules were supposed to settle basic standards, with the United Kingdom being prevented from decreasing the levels of protection afforded in the same areas. In legal terms, the post-Brexit agreement would provide for a non-regression clause (Barnard 2020). In exchange, the Union waived its claim to involve the European Court of Justice in the governance mechanism of the post-Brexit agreement.

After the ninth round of negotiations, EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier mentioned the need for the parties to establish a "commitment to non-regression in social, fiscal, environmental and climate protection standards".¹⁶ Thus, the Union seemed to concentrate its claims in the incorporation of a non-regression clause.

¹⁶ European Commission, *supra*, note 2.

However, UK receptiveness on the level playing field issue was faced with a new EU demand. Under pressure from some national leaders, namely, by French President Emmanuel Macron (Parker 2020), the European Union also wanted to extend the United Kingdom's duty on regulatory alignment in the social and environmental areas to standards to be settled after 2021, when it would be already separated from the scope of application of European law.

The EU updated its position in the negotiations due to concerns expressed by some member states on the risk that British companies could take advantage from less stringent labor and environmental protection standards than those set by future European rules. Indeed, the EU wanted the United Kingdom to be bound to follow its upcoming regulatory reforms. The negotiations on the level playing field thus faced a new development, with the request for a dynamic regulatory alignment (Parker 2020).

On the backstage of new EU demands, there would be the so-called pillar of social rights.¹⁷ The European social pillar is a unanimous document, aimed at strengthening social rights and supporting European construction. Having been only proclaimed by the EU institutions involved in the legislative procedure, it is not endowed with legal binding force. The main goal of the social pillar seems to be the adoption of a minimum wage at European level, providing for the satisfaction of the needs of the worker and his or her family in the light of national economic and social conditions.¹⁸ Indeed, by the end of the post-Brexit negotiations, the European Commission announced a draft directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, to ensure that the workers in the Union are protected by minimum wages allowing for a decent living wherever they work.¹⁹ However, the creation of a European minimum salary will be conditioned by the socio-economic constraints of member states with low-wage policies, which tend to be lower than the salaries received by low-paid British workers (Barnard 2020).

In any case, the United Kingdom rejected the idea of an evolution clause in the post-Brexit deal, as it would carry an automatic duty to accept future European legislation, without taking part in the law-making procedure. Such a provision could also have unpredictable domestic political effects. For instance, a potential improvement in workers' rights by a Labor Government could not be reversed by a future Conservative Cabinet, insofar as it would be seen as a decrease on social protection.

The struggle over the extent of regulatory alignment with European standards lasted until the end of the post-Brexit talks, increasing the political stalemate. The negotiators bounced around scenarios in search of a solution that would allow British freedom to settle its own rules while giving the Union assurance it could retaliate in case of significant regulatory divergence (Brunsden & Parker 2020).

A compromise would be reached around the so-called rebalancing mechanism. Nonetheless, there was no consensus on the extent of retaliatory measures. The European Union claimed the inclusion of sanctions in case of significant divergence in protection levels, with the application of tariffs on the import of goods or restrictions on the access to the single market (Barnard, 2020).

The provision on sanctions, labeled by the British as a ratchet clause, raised new disagreement: Would its application be automatic, as the Union intended, or should it be previously submitted to conflict resolution by an arbitration panel, as the United Kingdom

¹⁷ European Commission 2021, *The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles*, viewed 2 November 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

¹⁸ *Id.*, Chapter II, n^o6 (Wages).

¹⁹ European Commission 2020, *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union*, COM(2020) 682 final 2020/0310 (COD), viewed 2 November 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0682&from=EN>

defended? Could the sanctions involve cross-retaliation, that is, divergences in environment protection would determine restrictions on services, as the Union intended, or should its scope be limited to the area of dispute, as required by the UK Government? (Salter, 2020)

The chapter on labor and social standards included in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement covers all issues claimed by the European Union in the Council's Guidelines. However, the extent of the chapter on environment and climate is more limited than the long list of issues included in the Union's mandate, for the chapter does not include impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment, access to information, public participation and access to information and to justice, or goals and air quality.

In the chapter devoted to labor and social protection, as well as in the chapter dedicated to the environment and climate, the TCA recognizes the right of each part to set its policies and priorities, to determine the levels of protection that it deems appropriate, adopting laws and public policies in a manner consistent with each party's international commitments, including the agreement (Arts. 6.2 and 7.2). In line with this principle, the chapters on social and labor standards and on environment and climate settled non-regression clauses regarding the levels of protection (Leonelli 2021). Drafted in the same way, those provisions state that the parties should not weaken or reduce the protection below the levels in place at the end of 2020, including by failing to enforce its laws and standards, in a manner that could affect trade or investment between them.

All the issues included in the title of the TCA devoted to the level playing field – labor and social standards, protection of the environment and climate, competition policy, control of subsidies, companies of general interest and taxation – benefit from a special dispute settlement procedure. Thus, the general provisions of the TCA on dispute settlement are not to be applied to the different chapters under the head of the level playing field.

However, the dispute settlement procedure on labor and social norms and on environment and climate protection follows the model of the basic mechanism provided for in the TCA. If the consultation phase between the parties does not produce a consensual solution, a panel of experts will be convened. The panel of experts shall be composed of three members with specialized knowledge in labor or environmental law, without requiring qualifications for the exercise of high judicial functions, as is the case with the arbitration tribunal (Art. 9.2).

In the framework of the so-called non-regression areas, if the responding party chooses not to take any action to conform with the panel of experts' report and with the provisions of the TCA, the complaining party has the power to apply temporary remedies authorized under the provisions of Part Six of the agreement (Art. 9.3).

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement also provides for the so-called rebalancing mechanism, in case of significant divergences between the parties with respect the labor and social standards, environmental or climate protection, or subsidy control (Art. 9.4). This mechanism was included in the TCA to temper the claims of some EU countries that wanted the United Kingdom regulatory alignment to go beyond the principle of non-regression from levels of protection in those areas.

For rebalancing measures to be applied, it is required that the existence of significant divergences be capable of impacting trade or investment between the parties, in a manner that changes the circumstances that have formed the basis for the conclusion of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The impact assessment should be based on reliable evidence and not merely on conjecture or remote possibility. The rebalancing measures shall be proportionate to the impact caused on commercial relations and restricted with respect to their scope and duration to what is strictly necessary to remedy the situation. Moreover, priority shall be given to measures with lesser disturbing effects on the overall functioning of the TCA. The rebalancing measures can be submitted to an arbitration tribunal to decide

on their conformity with the TCA. The rebalancing mechanism does not apply to the parties' laws and standards relating to social security and pensions (Art. 6.1).

Conclusion

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement governs the relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom, as a third country. The TCA goes beyond recent EU trade deals with third countries, like Canada or Japan, by providing for zero tariffs and zero quota on the whole commerce of goods. The completion of the TCA in a short period of time was a positive outcome, when compared to the risks faced in the event of failure, in a framework marked by the global pandemic, which caused a strong economic recession in all European countries.

The level playing field was the most controversial issue during the post-Brexit negotiations, and it almost threatened the accomplishment of a final deal between the European Union and United Kingdom, due to the struggle over of the extent of regulatory alignment with the EU. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement ensures the EU concerns on labor and social protection, as well as those on environment and climate standards, based on the principle of non-regression from the levels of protection conferred in these areas at the end of 2020. Yet, and under the level playing field umbrella, the Union failed to extend the application of EU State aid rules to the United Kingdom.

Compared to previous preferential trade agreements, the TCA allows the EU to extend its own rules and standards in the areas covered by the level playing field, which was considered to be the price for UK goods to benefit from a greater degree of access to the single market. In this sense, the TCA is a step forward in the EU ability to spread its regulatory influence. However, those EU directives were part of the UK domestic legal order at the end 2020.

Regarding the principle of non-regression to be applied by the TCA both to labor and social protection areas and to environmental policy it should be noted that the degree of UK Europeanization could face a further setback. Indeed, the post-Brexit deal does not recognize a direct role to the European Commission to oversee how the United Kingdom authorities enforce the EU standards covered by the level playing field. In the same way, the TCA prevents the jurisdiction of European Court of Justice insofar as the application of the agreement is concerned. Hence, UK courts will not follow a centralized interpretation of EU rules provided by the ECJ and will probably deviate on the application of those provisions across time.

The European Union sought to test a new dimension in commercial relations with third countries, endowing the TCA with a rebalancing mechanism applicable in the event of significant regulatory divergence in environmental protection or in the scope of workers' rights. Despite not having enshrined automatic and unilateral sanctions, the new mechanism allows for the application of trade remedies.

For its part, the UK Government proclaimed that the Trade and Cooperation Agreement formally endorses the United Kingdom claims of sovereignty – in line with its motto of taking back control. The UK recovered trade policy power, sovereignty over maritime waters, borders and migration and no longer needs to fund the EU budget. However, and despite Prime Minister Johnson statement that the TCA also allowed recovering control over the legal system, by affording no role for EU law and no jurisdiction for the European Court of Justice,²⁰ there will be some constraints stemming from the type of regulatory alignment

²⁰ UK Government 2020, *UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement – Summary*, Viewed 14 April 2022, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962125/TCA_SUMMARY_PDF_V1-.pdf

with the Union on labor and social standards and on environmental protection. In fact, whenever the UK will decide to review the regulatory commitments covered by the level playing field header it could face the application of retaliatory measures from the European Union.

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Funding

The research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Ann Henshall for her very helpful linguistic revision of the article.

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BOOK REVIEW

Gender, Protests and Political Change in Africa, edited by Awino Okech

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 258

Reviewed by

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Several countries aspiring for democracy and social justice, including the recognition of youth and women's rights, have steadily used non-violent insurrections as a tool to challenge oppression from tyrannical governments. African countries are no exception. In this book, Awino Okech and all the co-authors explore how youth-hood and gender collaborate in raising non-violent movements by challenging state power for social development and political change in recalcitrant patriarchal societies. Through non-violent protests, young men and women trigger popular uprisings making use of their soft power to create social change. Indeed, one might understand the interest of the authors in these themes through their theoretical backgrounds in the fields of gender, feminism, activism, sexuality, and the nation-state in their manifestations in post-conflict societies.

In the book, many African societies appear as been shaped by male-based political and economic perspectives that have been shrinking rights and freedom space for women. For decades after independence, the patriarchal societies have been involved in non-action by the state on violence against women and gender non-conforming people. Therefore, considering that women and youth are among the most fragile and neglected categories, women's rights organizations and youth movements found a common objective to fight together against injustices from authoritarian regimes. However, despite the increased awareness of the current generation of youth and women's rights movements of their potential to claim for political change, there is still the critical threat of co-option by political parties or governments. More specifically, in Sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal, African youth movements and especially students' protests have been criticized for being manipulated by political opposition parties in order to transform them into real opponents of the governmental system. However, how can this threat of instrumentalization of youth be dealt with to foster the most appropriate social structures for women including gender issues? This task may be difficult to examine but it deserves to be approached.

In addition, although the authors do mention patriarchy as a crucial cause of gender and women's injustices, they fail to explore other potential ways on how to deconstruct the patriarchal structures that prevent gender from accessing certain rights or being free from all forms of violence.

The protest action from women and youth including both young men and women is the central element to produce socio-political change through a well and strong organized civil society. In this vein, the book argues that students' movements against authoritarian regimes have been decisive in changing political bases of power in countries like Senegal,

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Uganda, Sudan, and South Africa. Also, in most of them, digital means have been used by female figures in a highly demonstrative way to fulminate sexism, racism, sexual harassment, injustice at work, and violence in heteronormative societies. To some extent, as stated in the book, the extensive sexual violence seems to be a trigger for the collective action of women in countries like Egypt and Tunisia to stand for their rights and gain a certain power in the socio-political arena. However, although the regimes where the “Spring Revolution” began often claim to make efforts in favour of women, it is possible to notice a significant decline in gender equality and women’s backdrop in structures of power in those countries. The outcomes of these protests have not been effective enough to sustainably impact women’s lives in the long run. Even though, in some African countries, women’s protests and activism have been so meaningful that they contributed to ousting certain dictators such as Omar El Bashir.

As anticipated, while challenging autocratic regimes for socio-political change, youth-hood movements including students and feminist protests are not exempt from corruption and manipulation for the benefit of partisan interests and their leaders can be co-opted. The main problem around co-optation is that once the leaders of protests, either women or men, are approached by governments or opposition for diverse reasons laying between personal interests and ethnic arrangements for power, their actions become biased. Once “corrupted” by the system, they are very often forced to put away their convictions. In the meantime, their political power serves to establish well-rooted and sustainable societal structures in the frame of social and political programs which do not violate youth and especially gender issues. Apart from ousting some dictators, in some contexts women’s protests are not that effective to enhance sustainable change or gain gender equality because of the way they are organized and construct their discourses is not elaborate enough. Additionally, when some dictators have been ousted from power, it does not mean that the repressive regime has vanished as new forms of authoritarianism may be established. One disadvantage of the book is its failure to emphasize the question of how to deconstruct patriarchal structures that must be understood as the ideal gateway to equal rights between women and men. This would also integrate African societies’ new values and practices that do not violate women’s rights or relegate them as inferior to men. In this frame, educated young Africans and open to world diversity will be favourable to fight against anti-gender behaviours and even ethically equipped to turn down political parties or any other entities’ proposals aiming at corrupting them to drop the protests.

Besides that, and remarkably, the authors suggest opportunities to embrace new conceptual views to give rise to an understanding of gender freedom in public commitment. However, the threat of co-optation, the corruption of youth, and the deconstruction of patriarchy represent critical issues to be examined deeply.

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BOOK REVIEW

Democracy and Fake News, Information, Manipulation and Post-Truth Politics, edited by Serena Giusti and Elisa Piras

New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 232

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Serena Giusti and Elisa Piras's edited book is a collective effort to analyze, through sixteen essays and an interdisciplinary perspective, how the creation and dissemination of distorted information negatively affects the quality of democracy. This issue is timely and urgent. Indeed, fake news spreading through social media largely influenced two of the most important elections in the last decade, namely that of Mr. Donald Trump as the President of the United States and the Brexit referendum. More recently, the Covid-19 crisis has been accompanied by the massive presence of distorted information in the public sphere, known as "infodemic".

Against this background, the authors first focus on the limitations of the political strategies currently implemented by institutions, journalists and platforms to limit disinformation and then suggest alternative solutions. The book reaches three main conclusions. Firstly, *a posteriori* debunking and fact-checking tools might not be adequate to stop the flow of online fake news. Secondly, it is paramount to face the question of the political accountability of platforms, by legally regulating their role in the fight against disinformation. Otherwise, the risk is to create informal governance led by private companies gaining unprecedented power in handling a problem that is in fact inherently political and public. Finally, not only social media, but traditional media too should be included in a more general legal effort to find a solution to the spreading of fake news.

In its first part, *Post-truth politics and the challenges of democracy* features theoretical contributions dealing with the relationship between fake news and democracy through a reading of Hannah Arendt's political theory (Merenda), the problem of an inclusive public sphere through epistemic justice (Piras), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethics (Ireni-Saban and Sherman). The *fil rouge* in this theoretical debate lies in the theorization of an inclusive public sphere, which is able to face the fact that algorithms contain racial and gender biases. Notably, making AI algorithms inclusive is at the very core of a just digital public sphere with collective effort in this direction from academia, industry and media agencies. This is what makes this first section of the book extremely relevant.

By shifting the focus from political theory to empirical political science, Cassidy's and Pizzimenti and Curini's chapters tackle the relationship between fake news and electoral outcomes by reaching opposite conclusions. Indeed, whereas Cassidy states that in the case of Brexit, "the leave vote was motivated by post-truth politics" (p. 54), Pizzimenti and Curini show that people are rarely affected by targeted news in an electoral turnout. These two opposite conclusions well summarize the debate in political behavior studies. While different outcomes might be due to political systems peculiarities, the conclusion reached

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in this chapter is coherent with the advancement of the field towards comparative analyses built on causal inference research designs.

Along a similar line, Hazelton's chapter argues that a more specific attention on the "science of science communication" (p.100) is required in order for scientific yet comprehensible information to circulate. If this is not achieved, fake news is more likely to circulate. The role of experts in the public sphere, especially with regard to scientific knowledge dissemination, is at the center of several innovative studies and its salience is steadily increasing as exemplified by the debate on Covid-19 vaccination.

The second book section, titled *From disinformation to post-truth politics: evidence from Russia*, auspices a broader look at the relationship between Russia and the West in analyzing new forms of hybrid warfare, whose one of the main tools is disinformation. Furthermore, as Morini states, connecting the hybrid war as a foreign policy tool with post-truth politics as an internal political strategy could advance our understanding of the phenomenon.

Specifically, as Zafesova's argues, the creation of an *ad-hoc* reality perpetuating Putin's regime is one of the main goals of Russian internal policy. In foreign policy, instead, as Bechis writes, Russia employs a strategy of constant warfare that does not depend on a specific conflict but rather is the cornerstone of a long-term power strategy. He calls such a strategy "sharp power". He develops this concept further elaborating from Mark Galeotti's seminal article on the definition of hybrid warfare in the "transformation of war" literature in International Relations.

These insights are relevant especially nowadays as the Ukraine crisis is permeated by all the above-mentioned elements, from disinformation to the Russia/West divide up to the implementation of a hybrid system of warfare. In the third part of the book, Caldarelli, De Nicola, Petrocchi and Saracco focus instead on the *Dilemmas of contrasting disinformation and fake news*. They analyze social media activities by looking at tweets concerning migration and Covid-19 in Italy. They find that the most active accounts in propagating messages have a higher number of bots among their followers compared to the average. Caiani and Susanszky go on analyzing social media data. Their comparative political analysis focuses on Central and Eastern Europe social movements, adding to mainstream literature, which has traditionally paid attention only to Western populist movements. In their views, right-wing movements in Central European countries are not monolithic actors. Indeed, a greater degree of online activism is present in contexts where right-wing forces are not in government. As such, Czech and Slovak radical right organizations use visual and textual propaganda more actively than Hungarian and Polish ones. Consistently with the more recent literature in sociology of communication, these two studies show the centrality of online tools for activism and disinformation networks.

Shifting from a political to a legal perspective, Stojanoski and Monti analyze the German law against fake news and the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation respectively. Stojanoski underlies two main weaknesses in the German anti fake-news law. First is that the journalistic and editorial content are removed from the scope of the law that assesses specifically social media activity. Second is that this law neither aims at preventing the appearance of fake news nor at strengthening the media literacy of the public. Hence, these laws address fake news in a merely defensive manner. Furthermore, according to Monti, the biggest constraints of the EU Code of Practice is that it "can be framed as part of a broader general trend that delegates to Internet platforms the process of balancing fundamental rights online" (p.218) by leading to the so-called privatization of censorship. Normatively speaking, Monti states that a right to appeal to independent authorities (which is only granted in the French system) could be the benchmark in fighting fake news.

Finally, Larssen's chapter shows a paradox in the debate on fact-checking. Journalists express the need for digital fact-checking tools, such as web-based applications to be used in day-to-day journalistic tasks, and yet they fear that institutionalized forms of fact-checking could damage their professional autonomy, by ultimately leading to enhanced control and surveillance on a managerial level.

Overall, Giusti and Piras' edited book contributes to several subfields in the social sciences. Yet, the book lacks a conclusion that goes beyond each section's disciplinary boundary. An introduction to each section and a concluding chapter would have helped the reader to better navigate this interdisciplinary collective effort. This notwithstanding, the book sheds light on AI ethics, electoral behavior, law and foreign policy by critically discussing the most recent trends concerning fake news in its relationship with the quality of democracy.

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