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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 2000[1] 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 2022 [4] – 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 local [5] 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 Borillo 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 2020 [9] (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 Revolution*[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 Republique 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 Republique 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. 1325 [20] 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 2020 [25] 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 2022 [27] 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).

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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 requires 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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**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.