



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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