RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women movements' perspective on the WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Assessing "human security" and peacebuilding

Silvia CITTADINI

Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna

Clara DELLA VALLE

Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna

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.

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 (Stiglmayer, 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.

CONTACT Silvia Cittadini, silvia.cittadini2@unibo.it, at the Department of Political and Social Sciences. Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna (Italy)

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 perspective [3] 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 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 2020[4] 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.

ORCID
Silvia Cittadini 0000-0001-8882-3818

Clara della Valle 0000-0002-5256-0849

REFERENCES
Acharya, A., & Christie, R. (2008). *Human Security Research: Progress, Limitations and New Directions.* School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol.

Agency for Gender Equality. (2019). *Izvještaj o implementaciji Gender akcionog plana Bosne i Hercegovine 2018 - 2022. godina* [Implementation report of the Gender Action Plan 2018-2022].

Ahmic, M. (2019). *Measures taken by the BiH MoD and Armed Forces within the Women, Peace and Security Project.* [PowerPoint slides]. https://sedmprocess.org/documents/97323/206998/FINAL+AHMIC+WPS++Sarajevo+11.11.2019.ppt/a14465e3-cd31-43e0-9212-939b848352d0?version=1.0&targetExtension=pdf (last accessed 5th, July 2022)

Babic-Svetlin, K., Jacevic, M. & Mansury, M. (2016). Localization of Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. *Agency for Gender Equality.* https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Localization-of-Women-Peace-and-Security-Agenda.pdf

Basini, H., & Ryan, C. (2016). National Action Plans as an obstacle to meaningful local ownership of UNSCR 1325 in Liberia and Sierra Leone. *International Political Science Review*, *37*(3), 390–403. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116636121

Berry, M.E. & Lake, M. (2021). On Inconvenient Findings. *The Duck of Minerva*, 5 January. https://www.duckofminerva.com/2021/01/on-inconvenient-findings.html

Berry, M.E. & Rana, T.R. (2019). What Prevents Peace? Women and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Nepal. *Peace & Change,* 44(3), 321–349. https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12351

Björkdahl, A. (2012). A Gender-Just Peace? Exploring the Post-Dayton Peace Process in Bosnia. *Peace & Change, 37*(2), 286–317. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2011.00746.x

Björkdahl, A. & Mannergren Selimovic, J. (2019). WPS and Civil Society. In S.E. Davies & J. True (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security* (pp. 428–439). Oxford University Press.

Cockburn, C. (2013). Against the odds: Sustaining feminist momentum in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *37*, 26–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.01.003

Cohn, C. (2017). *Beyond the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Why We Need a Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace.* Background Paper, Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace Project. https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/Cohn_-_Beyond_the_Women_Peace_and_Security_Agenda_Why_We_Need_a_Feminist_Roadmap_for_Sustainable_Peace.pdf

Davis, L. & Stern, J. (2019). WPS and LGBTI Rights. In S.E. Davies & J. True (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security* (pp. 657–669). Oxford University Press.

Deiana, M.A. (2018). Navigating Consociationalism's Afterlives: Women, Peace and Security in Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, *24*(1), 33–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2017.1422638

della Valle, C. (2022). "Which women? What agenda?" Situating WPS in North Africa: the case of Tunisia. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, *8*(1), 121–142

della Valle, C. & Piras, E. (2022) Introduction to the Special Issue 'The Women, Peace and Security Agenda: time to gild the cracks?', *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, *8*(1), 5-13

Doeland, E.M. & Skjelsbæk, I. (2018). Narratives of Support and Resistance: A Political Psychological Analysis of the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Political Psychology*, *39*(5), 995–1011. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12466

Džekman, V. & Kanalstein, E. (2020). Gender Activism: a vibrant narrative for post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Agency for Peacebuilding*, 2 August. https://www.peaceagency.org/gender-activism-a-vibrant-narrative-for-post-war-bosnia-and-herzegovina/

Džekman, V., Tomljanović, M., Zelić, D., Đurić, D. & Vilušić, M. (2017). *Rat nije Jednorodan* [war is not a one gender affair], Kvinna till Kvinna. http://fondacijalara.com/images/docs/RatNijeJednorodan.pdf

Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security. (2021). *Women, Peace and Secuirty Index 2021/2022: Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and*

security for women. GIWPS and PRIO. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf

Gopinath, M. & Machanda, R. (2019). Women's Peacemaking in South Asia. In S.E. Davies & J. True (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security* (pp. 803–815). Oxford University Press.

Hadziristic, T. (2016). Is Bosnia the worst place in Europe to be a woman? *OpenDemocracy*, 5 December. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/women-in-bosnia/

Helms, E. (2013). *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Initiative 'Peace with Women's Face'. (2019). *Peace with Women's Face*, Sarajevo. http://www.dwp-balkan.org/cms_dwp/userfiles/file/20190307_KATALOG_MSZL_web.pdf

Jacobs, J. (2017). The memorial at Srebrenica: Gender and the social meanings of collective memory in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Memory Studies*, *10*(4), 423–439. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016650485

Kadribašić, A. (2020). Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security": Implementation in BiH. In A. Ždralović, S. Gavrić & M. Rožajac-Zulčić (Eds.). *What is the Gender of Security? 20 years of the Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" and its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (pp. 63–81). Sarajevo Open Centre.

Kaldor, M. (2006). Human Security: A Relevant Concept? *Politique étrangère*, 4 (Winter Issue), 901–914.

Kirby, P., & Shepherd, L.J. (2021). Women, Peace, and Security: Mapping the (Re)Production of a Policy Ecosystem. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *6*(3). https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa045

Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2003). https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GEL_32_10_E.pdf>.

Luna, K.C., & Whetstone, C. (2022). Rethinking women, peace, and security through the localization of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 & National Action Plans: A study of Nepal and Sri Lanka. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *92*(102575). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102575

Lynch, M. (2019). Localizing Gender Equality after Conflict. *Peace Review*, *31*(1), 83–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2019.1613600

Naraghi-Anderlini, S. (2020). Key-note speech for the second panel of the international conference "Celebrating 20 years of UNSCR 1325: Past, present and future of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda". Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (Pisa) and online on WebEx, 4 November 2020.

Ní Aoláin, F.D. & Valji, N. (2019). Scholarly Debates and Contested meanings of WPS. In S.E. Davies & J. True (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and* Security (pp. 53–67). Oxford University Press.

OSCE. (2019). *Understanding the role of gender in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism good practices for law enforcement.* https://www.osce.org/secretariat/420563?download=true>.

OSCE & LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security. (2020). *Implementing the women, peace and security agenda in the OSCE region.* https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/4/444577.pdf>.

Pearson, E. (2020). Between Protection and Participation: Affect, Countering Violent Extremism and the Possibility for Agency. In S. Basu, P. Kirby & L.J. Shepherd (Eds.), *New directions in women, peace and security* (pp. 91–110). Bristol University Press.

Pupavac, V. (2005). Empowering women? an assessment of international gender policies in Bosnia. *International Peacekeeping*, *12*(3), 391–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310500074507

Rošul-Gajić, J. (2016). Women's Advocacy in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *17*(4).

Sarajevo Open Center. (2019). *Orange Report 5. Report on the State of Human Rights on Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2016-2019*, November. https://soc.ba/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Orange-report-2016-2019_ENG_web.pdf

Savić-Bojanić, M., & Kalemaj, I. (2021). Art and Memory as Reconciliation Tool? Re-Thinking Reconciliation Strategies in the Western Balkans: An Introduction. *Southeastern Europe*, *45*(3), 273–290. https://doi.org/10.30965/18763332-45030001

SEESAC. (2019). *Gender and Small Arms in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-SALW/Gender-And-Small-Arms_BiH_ENG_WEB.pdf

Šehabović, Š. (Ed.). (2019). *Homage to significant women of B&H and their achievements*. Fondacija CURE. https://www.ceeol.com/search/gray-literature-detail?id=844663

Skjelsbæk, I. (2001). Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship. *European Journal of International Relations*, *7*(2), 211–237. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354066101007002003

Shepherd, L.J. (2020). Knowing Women, Peace and Security: new issues and new modes of. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *22*(5), 625-628. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1844398

Sjoberg, L., & Peet, J. (2011). A(nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket: Targeting Women in Wars. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *13*(2), 163-182. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.560751

Stiglmayer, A. (Ed.) (1994). *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. University of Nebraska Press.

Takševa, T. (2018). Building a Culture of Peace and Collective Memory in Post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina: Sarajevo's Museum of War Childhood. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, *18*(1), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12265

Thomasson, R. (2006). *To make room for changes: peace strategies from women organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.* Kvinna till Kvinna.

Tomić, A. (2015). Gender Mainstreaming of the Security Sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina: From the Policy Papers to Reality. *Connections*, *14*(3), 87–102.

Weitsman, P.A. (2008). The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *30*(3), 561–578.

Women Organising for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Syria. (2018). F*eminist (re)interpretations of the Dayton Peace Accords*. Peace Women. http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/DPA-report-FINAL.pdf

Ždralović, A., Gavrić, S. & Rožajac-Zulčić, M. (2020). Introduction: What is the Gender of Security 2.0? In *What is the Gender of Security? 20 years of the Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" and its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (pp. 11–25). Sarajevo Open Centre.

List of Interviews

Interview 1. National Agency for Gender Equality, 25 June 2020, remotely.
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.
Interview 10. Local women's CSO, 12 May 2020, remotely.
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.