

Palestinian encounters with the Women, Peace and Security agenda: between state-building, human rights and justice

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Resumo

Embora celebrada pelo reconhecimento das experiências e perspectivas das mulheres em situações de conflito, a agenda das Nações Unidas para as Mulheres, Paz e Segurança (WPS) permanece enraizada na lógicas de poder patriarcal, colonial e racial inscritas nos discursos e práticas hegemónicas de segurança internacional. Apoiando-se nos contributos dos feminismos pós-coloniais e decoloniais, esta tese desvela o modo como as intersecções destas estruturas de poder na agenda WPS perpetuam a marginalização e silenciamento das narrativas e experiências palestinianas. Em particular, a tese examina dois momentos que caracterizam a experiência palestiniana com a agenda WPS: a proliferação de iniciativas da sociedade civil centradas na construção da paz e empoderamento das mulheres no período pós-Oslo; e o desenvolvimento dos Planos Nacionais de Ação (NAPs) para a implementação da agenda WPS na Palestina. Esta análise confirma o alinhamento sistemático da agenda WPS com as agendas liberais e humanitárias promovidas pelas Nações Unidas e governos ocidentais na Palestina, que sustentam a manutenção e expansão do projeto sionista e colonial na Palestina. No entanto, a análise sublinha também a natureza multifacetada e ambivalente das relações entre a sociedade civil palestiniana e os atores internacionais que apoiam a agenda MPS na Palestina.

Palavras-chave: mulheres, paz e segurança; Nações Unidas; interseccionalidade; feminismo; Palestina

Abstract

Although celebrated for its recognition of women's experiences and needs in post/conflict situations, the United Nations (UN) Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda remains strongly rooted in the patriarchal, colonial and racial hierarchies of power that constitute hegemonic discourses and practices of international security. Building on postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship, this thesis reveals the specific ways that intersectional structures of power contribute to the marginalisation and silencing of Palestinian narratives and experiences in the WPS agenda. In particular, the thesis examines two instances of Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda: the proliferation of civil society initiatives focused on peace-building, dialogue and women's empowerment in the post-Oslo period; and the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the implementation of WPS in Palestine. The analysis reaffirms the systematic alignment of the WPS agenda with the liberal and humanitarian agendas of international donors, which fuel into the maintenance and expansion of Israel's Zionist settler/colonial project in Palestine. However, it also underscores the multifaceted and ambivalent nature of Palestinian civil society engagements with the UN and the WPS agenda in Palestine, from contestation and distancing to co-optation and pragmatism.

Keywords: women, peace and security (WPS); United Nations; intersectionality; feminism; Palestine

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Introduction

“Your silence will not protect you. (...). The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”

— Audre Lorde (1984)

“To express solidarity with Palestine is to be a killjoy, wherever we are. We get in the way because of how we mourn, or who we mourn, becoming a problem because of what we point to or because of the violence we refuse to pass over; the violence of colonial occupation, the violence enacted right now against people in Gaza by the Israeli state. To see the violence can be to unlearn how it is not seen. To see unseen violence is to be a killjoy at work.”

— Sara Ahmed (2023)

In an essay originally written at the end of the 1970s, which I refer to in the first epigraph opening this thesis, Audre Lorde speaks about the power of silence, voice and (in)visibility. For Lorde, silences held both a personal and political meaning. She had learned that breaking the silence and finding out the language that wasn't there yet to speak her own truth (the multiple forms of discrimination she experienced along gender, racial and sexual axes) were powerful sources of compassion and mobilisation, but also danger and vulnerability. Lorde wrote that "within the women's movement, we have had to fight, and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our Blackness" (Lorde, 1984, p. 25). In their attempts to speak up and claim recognition as subjects of the women's movement in the United States (US), Black women were often silenced and made invisible by White, upper and middle-class women leading the feminist movement.

Women organising at the transnational level encountered similar kinds of marginalisation and silencing, especially Arab and Palestinian women. In the second epigraph, I quote Sara

Ahmed's recent blog publication containing a statement of solidarity with Palestine. In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed (2007) introduced the figure of the killjoy to describe how being a feminist comes down to killing the joy of others and ourselves: we become 'feminist killjoys' by seeing, naming and opposing violence, injustice and oppression we come upon. Because others are not willing to do this 'feminist work', we come across as killjoys, troublemakers, disturbers of the peace (Ahmed, 2007).

I bring this concept here because it also seemed to capture what it is like navigating the world as a Palestinian—even more so amid the most recent wave of Israel's colonial practices of ethnic cleansing and genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.¹ Palestinians are killjoys because of their existence getting in the way of the success of the Zionist settler-colonial project; Palestinians become a problem by refusing to be erased, occupied, colonised; by coming up against colonial violence in 'the postcolonial moment.' These colonial distortions are at the core of what Nada Elia termed 'Feminists Except for Palestine' (Elia, 2022, p. 70), as a group of Arab-American feminists made clear when they wrote about their experiences with Zionism, racism and sexism in the US (Naber et al., 2016). At the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi, Betty Friedan, then a leading figure of US feminism (who coined the expression 'the personal is political'), attempted to remove 'the question of Palestine' outside the conference debates. "Please do not bring up Palestine in your speech. This is a women's conference, not a political conference", she told Egyptian feminist Nawal al-Saadawi (who did 'brought up Palestine' in her speech anyway) (Elia, 2016, p. 48).

That feminists have produced and reproduced silences, exclusions and hierarchies among themselves is thus no longer open to question, as the writings of Black, Third World and post-colonial feminists have shown us, given the colonial and racist background against which women's and feminist movements have emerged (Mohanty, 2004). As feminist ideas and knowledges began to 'walk the halls the of power' (Halley et al., 2019), it is important that we ask why some feminist ideas and knowledges are reaching those spaces while others remain at the margins of power? And what happens when those who were supposed to keep inhabiting

¹ Since Hamas' attacks in October 2023, the Israeli regime launched what has become the deadliest assault on Gaza. Contrary to dominant claims of 'self-defence' and 'counter-terrorism' made by the Israeli government to justify the disproportionate violence it has unleashed and to gather the support of Western governments, Palestinians and solidarity movements across the world have called attention to the massive collective punishment and ethnic cleansing that is unfolding in Gaza.

those margins and silences defy their subaltern status? Is it possible to think of feminism as an universally shared discourse that travels across national borders or does it make more sense to think of it as a plural and contestable set of discourses and practices where claims over who decides what 'feminism' means and for whom become themselves the terrain of politics? And if the latter is true, then how do power hierarchies steeped in colonial legacies and continuities explain feminists' practices of silencing, marginalisation and exclusion among themselves? Where does feminist knowledge production sit at these debates, and what role does it play in fostering or rather preventing these multiple forms of hierarchies and exclusions?

Throughout the past century, feminists scholars, activists and policymakers have strived for women's experiences of violence, insecurity and war to inform the practices of national governments and international institutions. From World War I women's peace movements to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, a 'distinct, feminist form of pragmatism' has characterised women's engagements at the international level (Tickner & True, 2018, p. 222), producing notable outcomes like the adoption of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which has established gender mainstreaming (GM) as a global strategy for achieving gender equality. The significance that 'gender expertise' has acquired in the practices of states and international institutions has therefore altered the conditions under which feminist knowledge has been produced, demanding that feminist scholars and activists confront the biases, distortions, hierarchies, and opportunities that have emerged from these feminist encounters with international governance (see Rai & Waylen, 2008; Çağlar et al., 2013; Halley et al., 2019; Kunz et al., 2019).

Much of these debates have begun to centre around the so-called Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The WPS agenda was formally launched with the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in October 2000, which was the first in a series of resolutions calling for the recognition of the gendered impacts of armed conflict and the significance of women's meaningful participation and protection in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes (Cohn et al., 2004). So far, a total of ten WPS resolutions were adopted: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019); and 2493 (2019). The WPS framework is currently structured along four pillars, which have been made and remade several times: i)

protection (from conflict-related sexual violence); ii) participation (in conflict resolution and peacebuilding); iii) prevention (of armed conflict and its gendered impact on women and girls); iv) and relief and recovery.

In the last decades, the WPS agenda grew into an assemblage of actors, institutions, discourses and instruments located within and beyond the UN architecture, especially with the making of National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement WPS commitments at the state level, involving both international, national and local actors. Although the adoption and expansion of WPS drew significantly on the knowledges and practices of feminist actors operating across national borders, in-depth conversations about geopolitics, race, class, and coloniality in WPS have only recently started to take place (see Basu, 2016; Shepherd, 2020b; Haastrup & Hagen, 2020, 2021; Stern & Towns, 2022). Drawing on earlier postcolonial feminist contributions pointing to the gendered, racialised and colonial undertones of WPS discourses (see Hudson, 2012; Pratt, 2013; Parashar, 2018), as well as to the the historical and geopolitical context structuring previous feminist engagements with UN (Harrington, 2011), this thesis sets out to develop a critical understanding of the geopolitical context shaping the development and implementation of the WPS agenda.

My specific aim has thus been to situate and critically examine the WPS agenda against the broader geopolitical context in which it has emerged and developed. Delving more deeply into the ways that colonial and racial hierarchies shaping global North-South relations have affected the meaning and practice of WPS, I have sought to confront the critical literature on WPS with Palestinian narratives and experiences with the agenda, searching for parallels, tensions, silences, and alternatives to current ways of knowing and doing WPS. By weaving together scholarly and activist knowledges on WPS, I have posed the following questions:

- *How have geopolitical and colonial hierarchies shaped practices and discourses associated with the WPS agenda, and with what implications for feminist research and praxis?*
- *What possibilities are there for more intersectional and decolonial critiques of the WPS agenda that better reflect the plurality of narratives and experiences of insecurity, violence, and war?*
- *To what extent have Palestinian women's experiences and aspirations been included or excluded in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and with what implications?*

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 begins with a review of the existing literature on the WPS agenda, looking at how postcolonial and decolonial feminist contributions have problematised the colonial and racial power hierarchies associated with WPS governance. Chapter 2 is concerned with the theoretical and methodological framework informing the research. It proposes an intersectional approach to studying Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda, grounded in the writings of postcolonial, decolonial, and Middle Eastern feminist scholars in international relations. Chapters 3 and 4 zoom into Palestinian experiences with and narratives about the WPS agenda, drawing attention to some of the ways Palestinian women have navigated the tensions, silences, and criticisms of Resolution 1325 and its operation in a context marked by settler-colonial occupation, anti-colonial resistance, and everyday violence. Specifically, I focus on two instances of Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda: the integration of gender concerns in donor-led agendas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Oslo period, explaining the processes leading up to the formation of a globalised elite of Palestinian women NGOs (Chapter 3); and the making of Palestine's National Action Plan (NAP), highlighting the visions and struggles of Palestinian civil society organisations working on WPS issues (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 1

Colonial power hierarchies in the Women, Peace and Security agenda

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda was formally launched with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000. Since then, feminist scholars have produced a remarkable volume of knowledge about the WPS agenda, describing the multiple layers and forms of gendered insecurity, violence, and agency in conflict and post-conflict situations, identifying gaps and silences produced by the agenda, assessing the impact of WPS norms across different sites of implementation, and elaborating critiques of the racial, neo-colonial, and geopolitical dimensions of WPS (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Basu et al., 2020). The purpose of this chapter is to review existing postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship on the WPS agenda. It gives an account of the ways scholars have problematised the reproduction of colonial, racialised, and gendered discourses and relations in and through WPS governance in the last two decades. In particular, I look at the re/production of global power hierarchies across three scales of WPS interventions: ‘the global’ (the United Nations), ‘the national’ (national governments), and ‘the local’ (civil society organisations).²

² My understanding of these scales in WPS governance draws on Laura J. Shepherd’s (2017) work on gender, space and the UN peacebuilding discourse. Shepherd shows how the UN is discursively produced “as the locus of peacebuilding authority, legitimized through its association with local actors, who in turn derive their legitimacy from positioning in civil society as spatial domain. Civil society, however, tends to be delegitimized through its articulation with women, and through a logic of space that constitutes authority and privilege in the form of political community captured in the sovereign state” (Shepherd, 2017, p. 165). The logics captured by Shepherd (2017) also explain the organisation of this chapter in three different scales of WPS governance (the global, the national, and the local) along which different degrees of power, authority and legitimacy on WPS may be ascribed.

1.1. UN Security Council resolutions

The alliance of feminist politics and knowledge played a vital role in the adoption of landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace, and Security’ in 2000. The adoption of gender mainstreaming (GM) at the 1995 Beijing Conference and the rise of the violence against women (VAW) agenda in the post-Cold War security agenda raised the need to collect ‘gender data’ on the impact of armed conflict and peace operations on women and girls (Harrington, 2011; Reeves, 2012). Women and human rights NGOs working with the UN channelled increasing amounts of resources into the production of gender-related knowledge by collecting, analysing, and reporting their findings to UN institutions. Thus, adding to the decades of feminist knowledge production on the gendered dimensions of war, militarism, and violence, the NGO Working Group on WPS (NGOWG)³ formed in March 2000 grounded their political advocacy and lobbying work in the collection of empirical ‘evidence’ and ‘facts’ supporting the need for a ‘women, peace, and security’ agenda at the Security Council. This paved the ground for the NGOWG to be involved in the ‘invisible’ yet pivotal labour leading up to the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in October, participating in high-level meetings and negotiations and drafting the original text of the resolution (Cohn, 2008).

Over the last two decades, feminist scholars and activists have produced a remarkable volume of knowledge on different themes associated with the WPS agenda. Laura McLeod and Maria O’Reilly (2019, p. 9) even classify the ongoing academic interest in WPS as ‘an industry.’⁴ Contributions to the WPS literature investigated the multiple layers and forms of women’s insecurity and agency, identified gaps and silences produced by the agenda, assessed the impact of WPS norms across different sites of implementation, and provided sophisticated

³ The NGO Working Group on WPS was formed at the end of March 2000 during the 44th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to advocate for a Security Council resolution on women, peace and security. Its six founding members were the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF); Amnesty International; International Alert; Hague Appeal for Peace; Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children; and Women’s Caucus for Gender Justice (Cohn, 2008, p. 187). More details can be found in the Working Group’s webpage: www.womenpeacesecurity.org.

⁴ For this reason, is nearly impossible to provide a full overview of WPS scholarship. Alternatively, the following works offer more detailed insights on the evolution of debates, themes, and tensions within the WPS subfield: Basu et al. (2020); Davies & True (2018); Duncanson (2016); Hastrup & Hagen (2021); Kirby & Shepherd (2016a; 2016b); Parashar (2018); Pratt & Richter-Devroe (2011).

critiques of the geopolitics of WPS (Basu et al., 2020, p. 2). Several feminist analyses pointed to the persisting tensions between radical, anti-imperialist feminist activism in the ‘global periphery’ and the masculinist, imperialist, and neo-colonial practices of the Security Council and its member states, in particular the dynamics of co-optation and instrumentalisation of feminist discourses of protection by Western governments in order to produce legitimacy for projects of intervention in ‘conflict-affected’ countries (Hudson, 2012; Pratt, 2013).

These tensions can also be identified in the narrowing of the agenda around the pillar of protection (from conflict-related sexual violence), as opposed to “making the links between sexualized violence and participation to reveal the ways in which sexualized and gender-based violence frequently inhibits women’s meaningful participation in formal and informal politics” (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016, p. 381). Moreover, postcolonial feminists such as Nicola Pratt (2013) problematised the exclusion of black and postcolonial feminist concerns from the conceptualisation of Resolution 1325, which in turn explained the lack of attention to the intersections of gender, class, race, and sexuality in women’s experiences and responses to conflict. Instead, 1325 reconfigured ‘gendered, racialised, and sexualized boundaries’ by constituting ‘women and girls in conflict zones as objects of security’, “brown men as threats to international peace and security” and “the international community as the legitimate agents of security”, especially during the so-called ‘war on terror’ (Pratt, 2013, p. 777).

In addition to these neo-colonial and racialised discourses, the articulation of gender security as a ‘policy problem’ that can be managed and resolved with a depoliticised, technical, and instrumental approach subscribes to the neo-liberal governmentality logic of international peacebuilding. Audrey Reeves (2012) argues that gender mainstreaming initiatives in peacekeeping operations are often reduced to concerns with ‘gender expertise’ and ‘gender balance’ for the sake of ‘operational effectiveness.’ As I show in the next section, the diffusion and localisation of WPS through National Action Plans (NAPs) reinscribed, albeit in different ways, the gendered, racial, and neoliberal logics governing the WPS agenda.

1.2. National action plans

The making of National Action Plans (NAPs) has emerged as a crucial site of struggle and contestation over the meaning of women, peace, and security. NAPs are policy documents that constitute “the primary means by which countries articulate how they intend to instru-

mentalise and localise” the WPS agenda, shedding light on “how the state understands what WPS is and who WPS is for” (Haastrup & Hagen, 2021, p. 146). In 2004, the Security Council issued a presidential statement encouraging the development of NAPs for the implementation of Resolution 1325 at the state level.⁵ It also stressed the importance of civil society participation, placing emphasis on ‘local women’s networks and organisations’, in order to strengthen implementation (UNSC, 2004). As of September 2023, more than 100 countries and regional organisations had released NAPs for the implementation of the WPS resolutions.

While the numbers presented above might suggest a positive development, feminist scholars, practitioners, and activists have begun to interrogate the constitutive nature and effects of these engagements. Studies showed that NAPs (especially, but not only, NAPs produced in the global north) have largely converged into an externally-oriented, militarised, and securitised approach that reduces WPS to “a foreign policy tool” (Aroussi, 2017) and does not address gendered insecurities and violence located within the borders of the nation-state. Instead, NAPs are mainly concerned with ‘making war safe for women’ (Shepherd, 2016), that is, promoting the participation of women in the military and security sector and criminalising ‘conflict-related sexual violence’ rather than focusing on preventing conflict and violence in the first place (see Shepherd, 2016; Aroussi, 2017; Basu & Shepherd, 2018).

Building on earlier postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship in the WPS literature (Pratt, 2013; Parashar, 2018), recent contributions have critically examined the colonial and racialised hierarchies shaping NAP discourses and practices (Jauhola, 2016; Haastrup & Hagen, 2020; Holvikivi & Reeves, 2020). Drawing on Black and decolonial feminist theory, Haastrup and Hagen (2020) show that global racial hierarchies have undermined the potential of WPS by perpetuating “an image wherein the peaceful north (...) is obliged to ‘rescue’ the insecure global South” through the language of NAPs produced in the global North. They contend that since countries in the global North are positioned as donors and those in the global South as recipients of WPS norms (Basu, 2016), NAPs produced by the former remain externally oriented and placed within the realm of foreign policy. As such, WPS discourses reins-

⁵ Denmark became the first country to adopt a NAP in 2005, followed by other Western European and Nordic countries. As of 2023, over one hundred countries have developed NAPs. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) runs an on-line database to track the development of NAPs and to report on their implementation. The database is fully available on their webpage: <www.1325naps.peacewomen.org>.

cribe hegemonic representations of the global South as devoid of political agency as well as contributes to the artificial construction of a 'peaceful', 'modern', and 'gender-progressive' Global North (Jauhola, 2016; Holvikivi & Reeves, 2020; Haastrup & Hagen, 2020).

Recent contributions have further examined how these hierarchies have shaped encounters between states and civil society in and through NAP making processes (Muehlenhoff, 2022). WPS discourses have consistently referred to 'civil society participation' and 'local ownership' as key principles of the agenda. In this process, states and non-state actors such as UN agencies, regional organisations, and civil society organisations (CSOs) have become increasingly entangled in NAP making processes.

1.3. Civil society organisations

The emergence and development of the WPS agenda have been largely sustained by the commitments and strategies of women's and feminist networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and grassroots movements mobilising for peace, justice, and anti-militarism across national borders (Cohn et al., 2004; Cockburn, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2021). Formed in March 2020, the NGO Working Group (NGOWG) on Women, Peace, and Security has been a cornerstone of civil society organising for WPS. The group provided UN Security with the initial draught and coordinated the political organising and lobbying towards the Council members. Since then, the NGOWG has worked in partnership with many local and international women's organisations to continue advancing the WPS agenda (Cohn, 2008, p. 187).

Even though the resolution was not originally designed to be used as an organising tool for women's movements, some of these have used it for their own strategic purposes, including 'consciousness raising', accountability towards the UN and national governments, and as a channel towards greater political access and influence (Cohn, 2008, p. 190). Through these activities, women and feminist CSOs produce their own gendered narratives of conflict/post-conflict, peace, or security, therefore participating in the localisation and translation of WPS (McLeod, 2011). For instance, in post-conflict Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, local and regional women's organisations have used Resolution 1325 as a strategic tool for organising and advocating for national and international actors, either in support of women's participation in decision-making, peacebuilding, or transitional justice mechanisms (Irvine, 2013). In Palestine, women's and human rights organisations with stronger connections to

transnational advocacy networks (such as MIFTAH, for example) have used Resolution 1325 to leverage international recognition and accountability for Israel's violations of international law (Farr, 2011). Yet WPS has been frequently regarded as a tool of the Western liberal peacebuilding agenda and has thus generated strong opposition from most Palestinian grassroots organisations, including women's movements working within the broader political framework of anti-colonial resistance and national liberation (Richter-Devroe, 2018).

On the other hand, civil society has also emerged as a subject of WPS interventions in post-conflict settings. Both the UN Security Council and national governments have been placing growing emphasis on the need for greater participation and inclusion of civil society in WPS interventions, especially women's and human rights activists, advocates, and experts (Shepherd, 2015). As such, feminist scholars have increasingly turned to the emergence of civil society as both an object and subject of WPS interventions, attending to the multiple ways in which civil society agents have made use of WPS norms and how, in turn, the WPS agenda has been (re)constituted by civil society practices throughout its existence. According to Hamilton, Mundkur, and Shepherd (2021, pp. 11–12), civil society organisations have been 'making 1325 work' through the performance of three major roles: i) advocacy (political activism and lobbying directed at national and international institutions); ii) expertise (especially in NAP making); and iii) implementation (delivery of WPS programmes or activities).

Therefore, one of the major avenues for increasing the participation of civil society has been through NAP making (Martin de Almagro, 2017; Ryan & Basini, 2017; Muehlenhoff, 2022). An argument that is often made in policy circles is that the inclusion and participation of civil society fosters legitimacy and ownership of NAPs. Under neoliberal governmentality, civil society actors are increasingly regarded as legitimate political actors; they are perceived and treated as implementing 'partners' to donors and international NGOs, who now recognise the need to consult and include civil society in their projects. In doing so, they recognise them as the legitimate 'authors' and providers of local knowledge and thus potentially destabilise previous logics of intervention and authority (Shepherd, 2017).

However, many contributions have pointed that power relations and hierarchies that civil society actors encounter among themselves are not sufficiently accounted for in the WPS literature. Looking at the Dutch NAP, Hanna Muehlenhoff (2022) asserts that NAPs (re)produce racial hierarchies of legitimate knowledge through the marginalisation of civil society actors

from ‘target countries’ in the global south. The allocation of funds to CSOs in accordance with donors’ requirements of project based activities and measurable outcomes not only undermines the transformative orientation of many feminist organisations but also creates or reinforces divisions between larger, professionalised organisations and small, grassroots movements and networks (Cueva et al., 2022). In Palestine, the dynamics of state-building and NGOisation of the 1990s led to the emergence of a ‘globalised elite’ (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005) that disempowered and fragmented Palestinian social movements, including women’s movements (Jad, 2007). Moreover, the increase in Western donor assistance for gender empowerment and the lack of understanding of the Palestinian women’s movement ended up disempowering grassroots activists and reinforcing political fragmentation between women’s groups that could access donor funding and those that could not (Jamal, 2015).

Although there is extensive research in feminist development studies interrogating the problems and tensions associated with the growing relationships between donors and civil society, particularly the questions of de-politicisation, co-optation (de Jong, 2017), and NGOisation of social movements (Alvarez, 1999), there is still room in the WPS literature for a deeper reconsideration of these dynamics against the broader gendered, racialised, and colonial hierarchies underpinning feminist interventions in global politics (Haastrup & Hagen, 2020). In the next chapter, I address this problem through the use of an intersectional approach to studying Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda, grounded in the writings of post-colonial, decolonial, and Middle Eastern feminist scholars in international relations.

CHAPTER 2

Towards an Intersectional Approach to Women, Peace, and Security in Palestine and Beyond

This chapter proposes a theoretical and methodological framework grounded in the concept of intersectionality. Drawing upon various strands of feminist scholarship in the WPS literature as well as in Palestinian and Middle Eastern studies, the chapter starts by reviewing existing studies in the WPS literature using an intersectional approach. Then, it stresses the significance of intersectional approaches in shedding light on the intersecting structures of patriarchy, settler/colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism shaping Palestinian women's experiences and narratives about the WPS agenda. Finally, the chapter presents the methodological approach used in the study, describing the methods for collecting and interpreting empirical data on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Palestine.

2.1. Intersectionality, Palestine and the WPS agenda

Although the adoption and expansion of WPS drew significantly on the knowledges and practices of feminist actors operating across national borders, in-depth conversations about geopolitics, race, class, and coloniality in WPS have only recently started to take place (see Basu, 2016; Martin de Almagro, 2017; Haastrup & Hagen, 2020, 2021). Drawing on earlier postcolonial feminist contributions pointing to the gendered, racialised and colonial undertones of WPS discourses, this thesis sets out to develop a critical understanding of the intersecting structures of power shaping the development and implementation of the WPS agenda.

The intersections of race, gender and class in women's experiences of violence and subordination, encapsulated by the term 'intersectionality' associated with Black feminist thought in the 1980s (Crenshaw, 1989), is now widely recognised in many instances of feminist activism and scholarship. Importantly, intersectionality denotes the cross-cutting, mutually constitutive character of these categories not only in the experiences of individuals and groups but also in power structures and practices (Cockburn, p. 8). As such, Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt's approach to transnational feminism recognises that "women's oppression and

struggles are constituted by a wide array of structural inequalities linked to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, as well as nationality” (p. 6) (rather than characterising women’s individual identities separately), and these are in turn constructed and resisted within, across and beyond national borders (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009).

In the WPS literature, postcolonial feminists such as Nicola Pratt (2013) problematised the exclusion of Black and postcolonial feminist concerns from the conceptualisation of Resolution 1325, which in turn explained the lack of attention to the intersections of gender, class, race and sexuality in women’s experiences and responses to conflict. Instead, Resolution 1325 reconfigured ‘gendered, racialised and sexualised boundaries’ by constituting ‘women and girls in conflict zones as objects of security’, “brown men as threats to international peace and security” and “the international community as the legitimate agents of security”, especially during the so-called ‘war on terror’ (Pratt, 2013, p. 777).

In this context, transnational feminist praxis and theory were confronted with two types of problems. Firstly, Western feminist discourses and mobilisation in support of the US campaign to ‘save Afghan women’ revealed the embeddedness of transnational feminism in ongoing legacies of colonial and racial domination. Here, the depiction of Afghan and Muslim women as ‘helpless victims in need of saving’ built on orientalist discourses of universalism and ethnocentrism that reaffirm the perceived cultural superiority and material domination of ‘the West’ ‘over ‘the East’ in postcolonial power structures (Said, 1978). As Chandra Mohanty also noted two decades earlier in her critique of Western feminist scholarship:

“...a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an “average third world woman.” This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being “third world” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 337).

Secondly, though constituting a challenge for transnational feminist praxis in terms of political agendas, alliances or funding, these power hierarchies may actively constrain and eli-

minate the possibilities for political agency and radical transformation in conflict zones. As Al-Ali and Pratt neatly point out:

“In some post-conflict settings, the insistence by the UN, other international agencies and foreign governments on the inclusion of women may be perceived or presented by certain political actors as part of a ‘Western plot’ to undermine a society’s ‘traditional’ culture and values. (...). Threats to sovereignty posed by foreign interventions may lead to intensified attempts among some actors to affirm an ‘authentic’ national identity that is different from the West (...). Gender relations are central to processes of national differentiation, and local political actors often instrumentalize women by promoting conservative gender ideologies, relations and roles in their struggle to assert their authority within emerging political, economic and social institutions.” (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, p. 19)

More recently, there has been an emerging number of contributions to the postcolonial and decolonial feminist literature on the WPS agenda that has drawn attention to the reproduction of global power hierarchies across the various scales of WPS governance. Even though many of these contributions incorporate (either implicitly or explicitly) the concepts and tools of intersectionality in their analyses, an in-depth, contextualised engagement with intersectionality is still lacking in WPS scholarship and practice. There are, however, a few notable contributions that have explicitly used intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical approach (Pratt, 2013; Martin de Almagro, 2017; Kaya, 2020; Haastrup & Hagen, 2021; Smith & Stavrevska, 2022). For instance, Smith and Stavrevska’s intersectional analysis has drawn attention to the limited extent to which intersectionality has been integrated in the text of the WPS resolutions and NAPs. Alternatively, they argue that “policy and practice ought to incorporate intersectionality in its view of both power and identities, as well as in its organising frameworks, and thereby take into consideration how intersecting systems of power affect lived experiences for groups and individuals, their access to justice, and their ability to exercise agency” (Smith and Stavrevska, 2022, p. 64).

These contributions certainly hold the potential to broaden existing debates and promote critical analyses of intersectionality, coloniality and global North-South divides in WPS research and practice. However, most of these studies have concentrated heavily on hegemonic discourses (re)produced in and through the UN Security Council resolutions and the NAPs

produced in countries from the global north. I contend that in order to better understand the operation of global power hierarchies, we must look beyond ‘success stories’ and study ambivalent engagements with the WPS agenda. I follow Soumita Basu’s (2016, p. 363) suggestion to take into account instances of both “implementation” (through NAP making and participation in UN peacekeeping) and “nonimplementation” (through contestation or lack of interest in WPS) as equally significant ways actors in the global South have contributed to the writing of Resolution 1325 and claimed ownership over the broader WPS discourse. As Basu eloquently puts it (2016, p. 371), “there will always be a hegemonic WPS narrative, articulated in dominant readings of UNSCR 1325, but it exists within a much larger discourse on WPS.”

Furthermore, as Martin de Almagro and Ryan (2019) and others have pointed out, there is a need for greater scholarly attention to *both* the discursive representations *and* the materiality of women’s lives amid peacebuilding and development interventions. Many Palestinian scholars have drawn attention to the cross-cutting nature of the gender, colonial, and class inequalities and hierarchies produced by international peace/state-building, militarised and settler/colonial interventions in Palestine and to their connection with local, regional, and transnational power configurations (Abdo, 1999, 2010; Hanafi & Tabar, 2005; Jad, 2010; Jamal, 2001, 2015; Richter-Devroe, 2009, 2018). For instance, Palestinian feminist scholar Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian calls for a feminist analysis that recognises “American, European, and global support for the Zionist entity in its various stages of development”, taking into account “not only how this support condoned and reinforced the inhumane Zionist discourse on Palestinian suffering, but also how the ongoing denial by the international community of the justice of the Palestinian cause, by invisibilizing Palestinian suffering, reinforced the settler colonial regime and dispossession” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014, p. 7).

Attending to the coloniality of international security governance holds particular significance for understanding the power dynamics of the internationally sponsored ‘peace agreement’ in Palestine-Israel, also known as the Oslo peace process, and their implications for WPS governance in subsequent decades. In this study, Palestine is understood as a critical case for understanding the operation of complex, intersecting structures of power through the global expansion of feminist and peacebuilding agendas such as WPS. First, way before the introduction of UNSCR 1325, there was a decades-long tradition of Palestinian women’s political activism and organising. However, Palestinian NGOs (including women’s NGOs) have

become increasingly prominent since the beginning of the Oslo peacebuilding process in 1993. In particular, donor assistance for women NGOs created a ‘globalised elite’ by targeting those that more closely aligned with global development agendas (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005; Jamal, 2015). The obstacles and dilemmas faced by women’s civil society organisations can be linked with the structure of meanings and relations within which the WPS agenda operates, reflecting deeply entrenched gendered, racialised and colonial hierarchies, as discussed above (Haastrup & Hagen, 2020; Parashar, 2018). The inclusion of civil society in the design and implementation of NAPs, for instance, has revealed some of the tensions that arise from WPS governing practices (Martin de Almagro, 2017; Ryan & Basini, 2017; Muehlenhoff, 2022). Even though feminist research in peace and conflict studies has provided rich accounts of such dynamics – focusing on the gendered constitution of humanitarian and refugee subjects (Olivius, 2016), and civil society subjects (Hamilton et al., 2021)–, gender analyses are still placed in the margins of debates in the critical peace literature (McLeod, & O’Reilly, 2019).

Second, the context of colonial occupation and violence in Palestine also provides an opportunity for studying the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in contexts that do not necessarily fit into traditional understandings of conflict or post-conflict. In this regard, some contributions have been exposing silences of WPS policies in contexts such as the United Kingdom, India and Australia about previous and/or ongoing domestic conflicts in Northern Ireland, Kashmir, and settler-colonial violence against Indigenous populations, respectively (Basu & Shepherd, 2018). The Palestinian context of settler-colonialism and its connection with global racial capitalism, militarism and imperialism pushes WPS scholars and practitioners to re-examine their own colonial biases, creating space for the plurality and interconnectedness of global and local expressions and regimes of gendered violence, insecurity and agency.

2.2. Methods and sources

Throughout the research, my specific aim has thus been to situate and critically examine the WPS agenda against the broader geopolitical context in which it has emerged and developed. Delving more deeply into the ways that colonial and racial hierarchies shaping global North-South relations have affected the meaning and practice of WPS, I have sought to confront the critical literature on WPS with Palestinian narratives and experiences with the agenda. The

analysis I present here follows a qualitative interpretative research design aimed at generating a rich set of data on Palestinian narratives and experiences with the WPS agenda.

Specifically, I look at two instances of Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda: the proliferation of initiatives and organisations centred on gender, peacebuilding, and civil society since the Oslo process in the 1990s (Chapter 3); and second, the making of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of Resolution 1325 since the early 2000s (Chapter 4). The empirical data was generated from a selection of documentary sources, both primary (official documents and reports) and secondary (academic literature), as well as through remote fieldwork with feminist and Palestinian scholarly, practitioner, and activist communities and five semi-structured interviews, between March and August 2023.

First, I conducted an in-depth review of existing academic research along three thematic axes: (i) the gendered, colonial and transnational dimensions of violence, resistance and solidarity in/towards Palestine (Sharoni, 1995, 2012; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Daniele, 2014; Jad, 2018; Richter-Devroe, 2018; Erakat, 2019; Atshan, 2020; Medien, 2021; Elia, 2022); (ii) the relationship between feminist movements, NGOs and international interventions in Palestine (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005; Jad 2003, 20070; Allen, 2013; Jamal, 2015; Natil, 2021) and the Middle East (Al-Ali & Pratt 2009; Abdo, 2010); and (iii) the links between Euro-American imperialism, settler-colonialism and Zionism, and post-Oslo international peace/state-building agendas in Palestine (Riley et al., 2008; Tabar, 2016; Turner, 2016; Tartir & Seidel, 2019). These contributions were selected on the basis of their analytical and empirical significance for understanding the political and sociocultural context of colonial occupation, international intervention, and resistance shaping Palestinian encounters with the WPS agenda.

Second, given the scarcity of academic research on the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) (with some notable exceptions, e.g., Farr, 2011; Daniele, 2014; Richter-Devroe, 2018), findings from the academic literature were cross-referenced with those contained in the grey literature. This includes key WPS implementation documents produced by international organisations, national governments, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are available in the organisations' digital archives. I examined three documents produced by Palestine's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) for the development of the Palestinian NAP: (i) the 2015 National Strategic Framework for the implementation of UNSCR 1325; (ii) the first Palestinian NAP (2017–2019);

and (iii) the second Palestinian NAP (2020–2024). As I demonstrated in the first chapter, the development and implementation of NAPs are important sites of WPS encounters, bringing together a wide range of actors and agendas that are differently positioned as subjects of WPS governance, from women activists and civil society organisations to national governments and UN agencies. Then, I complemented my analysis with reports and statements of international NGOs such as UN Women, WILPF, and Oxfam, as well as national NGOs such as MIFTAH (the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy) and the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC).

Third, I conducted five individual, online, semi-structured interviews between June and August 2023. I reached out to them either directly, through the contact information provided at the websites and social media profiles of the organisations they have worked with, or indirectly, by contacting representatives of key actors involved in the implementation of the WPS agenda in Palestine. The five Palestinian women I interviewed have worked with the WPS agenda throughout their professional and/or political trajectories, either as experts, advocates, or managers in WPS-related projects, such as Palestinian-Israeli joint peace initiatives or the civil society coalition for the implementation of Resolution 1325 in Palestine. The organisations they have worked with were mainly local and international human rights NGOs, but some of them have also worked with academic institutions and governments located in Europe or North America. All of them had either completed or were enrolled in a postgraduate degree at a European or North American university. Crucially, my interviewees recognised their fragmented, conflicting positions as both insiders and outsiders of WPS communities, as they navigated both the Palestinian globalised, NGO-ised elite that formed after Oslo (Hanafi & Tabar 2005) and the activist spaces of women's, human rights, and solidarity groups based in Palestine, Europe, or North America.

Fourth, my own personal experiences with various WPS and Palestinian communities of practice are also reflected in my analysis. Throughout the first semester of 2023, I kept track of the content published on the social media accounts and websites of key Palestinian organisations working on WPS-related issues and/or engaging in intersectional and Palestinian solidarity action in Europe. I have also learned much about the WPS agenda, feminism, and women's activism in Palestine, the Middle East, and beyond by attending and getting to know the participants of the academic events I attended. These include webinars, debates, conferences,

and workshops organised by academic centres and women's and human rights organisations located in Europe and Palestine. There were two initiatives that offered particularly valuable insights and constructive criticism of my work: the workshop Palestine Studies in Portuguese Academia, coordinated by Giulia Daniele, held on May 2023, in Lisbon, at the University Institute of Lisbon's (ISCTE) Centre for International Studies (CEI); and the course Critical Feminist Analysis of Formations of Gender and Power in the "Middle East", instructed by Lena Meari (Birzeit University), as part of the Barcelona Institute for International Studies' (IBEI) Summer School of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, held on July 2023, in Barcelona.

Some of the limitations of this study that I have not yet addressed here but are worth reflecting on have to do with the ethics and politics of researching 'distant others', posing difficult questions about privilege, positionality, and intersectionality. As a white, female student born and residing in a semi-peripheral European country, I recognise that I am inevitably entangled by the global hierarchies responsible for existing forms of exclusion and violence, which are deeply rooted in European colonialism and imperialism. These hierarchies push populations from the Global South, including the community of feminist scholars, practitioners, and activists, further to the margins of conversations and debates around policies and interventions directly targeting them. I have attempted to grapple with the systematic exclusion of Palestinian voices in the WPS literature by weaving scholarly debates in the WPS literature together with Palestinian narratives about the WPS agenda, including through the empirical data generated from my analysis of documentation produced by Palestinian CSOs and the five semi-structured interviews I conducted with Palestinian researchers and practitioners.

Questions of location and language are not insignificant, as these create limits on what can be known and said about the issue at hand and who gets to be heard and participate in the research. In my analysis, the sources I have chosen to work with produce similar kinds of problems, as I engage mostly with academic literature available in English and authored by predominantly white scholars affiliated with academic 'centres of excellence' located in the global North (Haastrup & Hagen, 2022). Though I do refer to some Palestinian works published in English, this is not in itself evidence of the scarcity of knowledge production about the WPS agenda in Palestine; rather, it is a reflection of my own partial, situated knowledge (or lack thereof) and a product of the global epistemic hierarchies I participate in as an European, non-Arabic speaker researching about Palestine and 'the Middle East.'

CHAPTER 3

Contextualising Resolution 1325 and women's political activism in Palestine

This chapter situates Palestinian encounters with the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda in the specific geopolitical and settler/colonial context in which Palestinian women's political activism and Resolution 1325 have emerged. It considers the historical trajectory of Palestinian women's engagements with nationalist and anti-colonial struggles, followed by an examination of the social and political transformations prompted by the large influx of international donor assistance for development, peacebuilding, and state-building projects in the post-Oslo period, drawing attention to the gendered and colonial power relations underpinning these processes. Moreover, the chapter sets these developments against debates over the meanings and limitations of WPS for Palestinians, taking into account the power asymmetries that have shaped encounters between Palestinian and Israeli feminists in joint dialogue projects, as well as between Palestinian women's organisations, international organisations, and Western donor governments.⁶

3.1. Palestinian women's activism and Resolution 1325 in historical context

Long before the adoption of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in October 2000, there was already a longstanding history of Palestinian women's political organising dating back to the early twentieth century (Peteet, 1991; Sharoni, 1995; Jad, 2018), as part of popular resistance movements against the British mandate in Palestine, the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel in 1948, and the *Nakba* ('the catastrophe') in 1948–49, referring to Israel's policies of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of millions of Palestinians (Pappé, 2007). As explained in the previous chapter, similar to other women's movements in the context of Third World anti-colonial and nationalist struggles, the Palestinian women's movement

⁶ The discussion in this section draws on my previous work, particularly on the essay 'Limits of Liberal Feminist Peacebuilding in the Occupied Palestinian Territory' (2022) that I wrote for *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/12/21/limits-of-liberal-feminist-peacebuilding-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory/>

was historically intertwined with the national struggle of resistance against British colonialism and Zionist settler/colonialism and, more recently, with transnational struggles against European and US imperialism, neo-colonialism, and militarism in the Middle East and beyond (Peteet, 1991; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009).

Palestinian women's activism has been characterised by "a tension between feminist and national demands, secularism, a decentralised structure, a largely urban character, an upper- and middle-class leadership and membership, and a close alignment with the national political movement" (Peteet, 1991, p. 40). Yet Palestinian women had attempted to claim their own political space within the national struggle, challenging "the construction of Palestinian nationalism centred on the image of the male fighter as liberator of the nation" (Jad, 2018, p. 1), especially through the creation of women's committees and charities during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet many of these organisations remained affiliated with the different factions of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), created in 1965 as a representative body within the PLO (Jad, 2018).

The first *intifada* (1987–1993) marked a turning point for Palestinian women's political activism. Many women participated actively in popular resistance through their involvement in grassroots organisations that sustained the uprising, taking on roles ranging from organising strikes and demonstrations, providing support for political prisoners and their families, and meeting the reproductive care needs of their communities through healthcare, education, and other social services (Peteet, 1991; Sharoni, 1995; Jad, 2018). On the other hand, Israel's violent crackdown on the uprising took on specific gendered and sexualised forms, with significant and wide-ranging implications for Palestinian women. As Islah Jad notes,

"This led to contradictory gender effects: an expansion of venues for women in the political public sphere and, at the same time, an expansion of venues for the imposition of sexual control. The Israeli authority frequently used social conservatism, especially with regard to female sexuality, to repress the Palestinian population. This was implemented in two ways: girls and women detained and accused of nationalist activities were sexually assaulted or threatened with such violence, especially during interrogations; and Israeli interrogators frequently threatened sexual violence against daughters, sisters, or wives as a method of extracting information or "confessions" from male detainees" (Jad, 2018, pp. 24–25).

At the end of the intifada, Palestinian women had developed a feminist consciousness that was more attuned to the practical needs and realities of women living under Israeli occupation. By the late 1980s, women's centres, a new type of women's organisation, were established to promote women's research, training, and counselling, including the Women's Studies Centre (WSC) (1989) and the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) (1991) (Sharoni, 1995, p. 76). Setting the groundwork for women's political organising in the post-Oslo period of state-building and peacebuilding, these centres performed advocacy and research work that highlighted Palestinian women's rights violations and provided legal, social, and psychological support to Palestinian women survivors of gendered violence (Sharoni, 1995; Jad, 2018). In the next sections, I explain how the specific targeting of 'women' by international donor agendas—especially under the umbrella of support for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325—shaped Palestinian women's activism through the logics of de-politicisation, NGOisation and fragmentation, in ways that would strongly determine their relationship with the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda in the following decades.

3.2. Gendering post-Oslo peacebuilding and dialogue

The Oslo agreements and the growing international support for peacebuilding and state-building projects in the subsequent decades produced a significant shift in the Palestinian women's movement. Starting as a series of 'peace talks' sponsored by 'the Quartet' (the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union and the United States) at the Madrid conference in 1991, the so-called 'Oslo peace process' resulted in the signing of two 'peace agreements' between Israel and the PLO in 1993 and 1995 (Turner, 2016). As the peace negotiations unfolded in Madrid and Oslo, with Hanan Ashrawi and Zahira Kamal as the only female members of the Palestinian delegation in Madrid, it became increasingly apparent that women's experiences and concerns would be marginalised from formal peacebuilding and state-building processes (Sharoni, 1995, p. 85).

With the adoption of the Oslo accords, international donors imposed a series of liberal peace-building and state-building interventions with two major aims. The first aim was to develop the institutional architecture of the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA) through the adoption of economic, political, and legal reforms that would set the framework for liberal democratic governance, market capitalism, and security coordination with Israel (Turner,

2016). The creation of the PA had particularly gendered implications for Palestinian women's activism, which are extensively discussed by Palestinian feminist scholar Islah Jad (2007; 2010; 2018). According to Jad, "the PA's treatment of women and the dramatic transformation in the image of women fostered by the PA (...) helped alter the role of woman in modern Palestinian history from militaristic guerrilla fighter and grass-roots organizer to – at least on the secular front – professional femocrat heading a new kind of non-governmental organization, or NGO" (Jad, 2010, p. 150). These changes, especially the NGOisation of the Palestinian women's movement, are more thoroughly discussed in the following section.

The second aim of the Oslo process was to create platforms for dialogue and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis through the implementation of so-called People-to-People (P2P) programmes, in accordance with the liberal peacebuilding agenda, which promotes reconciliation and dialogue as privileged methods for conflict resolution (Richter-Devroe, 2009, 2018). Joint initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian women had taken place since the first intifada, taking the form of dialogue groups, local and international women's conferences, or collaborative projects and solidarity initiatives (Sharoni, 1995, p. 139). In 1989, women from around the Mediterranean, including Palestinian women, participated in an international women's peace conference in Brussels called "Give Peace a Chance: Women Speak Out." However, according to Simona Sharoni, "although peace conferences have moved beyond some of the constraints of dialogue groups and have often taken into account the political context of women's encounters and alliances, they did not challenge the presumed symmetry between Israelis and Palestinians" (Sharoni, 1995, p. 145).

The first experience of a joint dialogue project was Jerusalem Link, an informal platform established in 1993, when the Oslo process was still ongoing, with the funding of the European Union. Jerusalem Link brought together Palestinian and Israeli activists from two women's organisations: the Jerusalem Centre for Women (JCW) on the Palestinian side, and the Bat Shalom on the Israeli side. Both organisations have organised one of the earliest initiatives focused on Resolution 1325, connecting international legal and political action with civil society and grassroots peace movements (Daniele, 2014, p. 107). Furthermore, in 2005, Palestinian and Israeli women established another coalition, the International Women's Commission (IWC), with the support of international women and the UN Development Fund for (UNIFEM). The IWC was committed to "contributing to the achievement of mutual recognition

and reconciliation towards an end of the Israeli military occupation and, thus, a final status of enduring peace” (Daniele, 2014, p. 107).

However, the failure of the peace process and the outbreak of the second intifada revealed the conflicting needs and expectations of Israeli and Palestinian women activists, ultimately determining the end of the joint dialogue projects. In 2002, Palestinian activists left Jerusalem Link, disappointed by their Israeli counterparts unwillingness to move beyond formal condemnations of Israeli military occupation and recognise occupier/occupied power imbalances within feminist coalitions (Farr, 2011; Richter-Devroe, 2009, 2018; Sharoni, 2012). As one of my interviewees eloquently concluded:

"The same issues that men did not agree on, women did not agree on. When we started talking about what the root cause of this conflict was, when Palestinian women said that it was really important to them that Israel recognises—that these women who we work with recognise—that 1948 and the displacement of Palestinians were the responsibility of the Israeli side, and that the root cause was actually the creation of the state of Israel... this was a no-go! The issue of ['48 Palestinian] refugees was a no-go. If you recognise that it is your responsibility, then you have to act accordingly. And these Israeli women were not willing to act accordingly." — Interview 3, 2023

The liberal peacebuilding approach embodied in the Oslo process was also opposed by the Palestinian population. Instead of establishing the basis for the emergence of long-term, sustainable ‘liberal-democratic peace’, the Oslo Accords ended up creating the conditions for the perpetuation of authoritarianism and colonial occupation (Turner, 2012; Sen, 2022). Against the backdrop of Israel's violent repression of Palestinian resistance during the second intifada, Palestinians have opposed the liberal peace paradigm in favour of a politicised framework of resistance and just peace. According to Richter-Devroe, while liberal peacebuilding does not reverse “the structural asymmetries between colonizer and colonized”, just peace aims for political resistance against “the structural discrimination inherent in Israeli policies of settler colonialism, ethno-religious nationalism, and occupation” (2018, pp. 15-16). Since the Oslo framework was unable to tackle the power imbalance between Israel and the PA, the root causes of the ‘conflict’ were ultimately left intact, thus maintaining the status quo of prolonged Israeli colonial occupation and domination over the Palestinian population.

Despite the strong popular opposition to women's peacebuilding and joint dialogue initiatives such as Jerusalem Link and IWC, donors such as the European Union (EU) developed a stronger interest in women's peacebuilding and dialogue projects with the adoption of Resolution 1325 in October 2000 (Daniele, 2014; Richter-Devroe, 2009, 2018). As Sophie Richter-Devroe aptly puts it, "women's peacebuilding, grounded in the WPS agenda and the UNSCR 1325, thus has become one of the main products displayed on the shelves of the post-Oslo peace supermarket", and it has since then been incorporated into the agenda of many local and international organisations in the field of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, or women's rights in Palestine (Richter-Devroe, 2018, p. 30). This contrasted strikingly with the Palestinian population's legitimate scepticism towards the United Nations for its inability to enforce several other resolutions that condemned Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and its violations of international humanitarian law (Richter-Devroe, 2009, 2018; Farr, 2011). Relying on the gendered construction of women as 'peace-makers' inherent in the WPS agenda, these initiatives have failed to raise local awareness of and support for Resolution 1325. As one of my interviewees put it,

"there is this UN resolution, which is very beautifully written... but also nobody knew what to do with it! Most activities focused on awareness raising, talking about 1325, writing about it, training women in the different places about it. But actually it didn't change any reality for women. It didn't change how they feel." (Interview 5, 2023)

The majority of women's joint initiatives under the WPS umbrella are carried out by Western-funded NGOs, being perceived as "foreign-imposed and elitist policies (...) leaving unaddressed the political root causes of the conflict and people's everyday needs unaddressed" (Richter-Devroe, 2009, p. 159). As Richter-Devroe further explains, the WPS agenda:

"is largely detached from Palestinian women's realities on the ground: it is organized mainly through foreign-funded NGOs with an accompanying risk of fragmentation of the national movement; it strives for reconciliation and attitudinal-behavioural change while neglecting to address the historical and political dimensions of the conflict; and it follows a (...) feminist anti-nationalist peace-building strategy aiming to bridge the national divide on the basis of a shared gender or feminist rather than political agenda. (...). Unsurprisingly, such a mainstream depoliticized gender and conflict-resolution approach is perceived by a large number of Palestinians as a western agenda"

aimed at undermining and weakening the unifying political discourse of resistance to the occupation” (Richter-Devroe, 2009, p. 184).

As I will discuss in the next section, Western donor agendas guided by the liberal-feminist WPS framework ended up contributing to gradually depoliticise and disempower the Palestinian women’s movement, not only through the promotion of joint women's peace initiatives but also through ‘NGOisation’ and fragmentation of Palestinian women’s activism.

3.3. Donor assistance and Palestinian women’s organisations

The parallel donor-led dynamics of state-building and NGOisation resulted in the disempowerment and fragmentation of Palestinian social movements, including women’s movements (Jad, 2007). After Oslo, the settler-colonial control over Palestinian land and population was further accompanied by the growing dependence on foreign aid. The hegemonic agendas of neoliberal development and statebuilding promoted by international donors such as the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations agencies have significantly transformed the structure of the Palestinian political economy. Crucially, the provision of basic human needs and services to the Palestinian population has become entirely dependent on international humanitarian and development assistance, particularly in the Gaza Strip since it has come under Israeli blockade and Hamas rule (Tartir et al., 2021; Turner, 2012).

A significant component of the Western neoliberal agendas is the support for civil society organisations, regarded as ‘partners’ in development given the reduced role of the state (Haddad 2016; Hanafi & Tabar, 2005). While Palestinian NGOs and political parties’ committees alike have historically performed the role of service providers in the absence of state institutions, donor aid for NGOs expanded significantly in the post-Oslo period, leading to a proliferation of new NGOs and a concomitant process of ‘NGOisation’ of Palestinian social movements, including women’s movements (Jad, 2007). Palestinian women activists which were willing to improve their chances of obtaining Western donor funding either adapted existing organisations to meet the requirements of professionalisation or established new NGOs such as research institutes and specialised women’s centres in the oPt. A few examples of these professional women’s NGOs are the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, the Women’s Studies Center and the Jerusalem Center for Women (Jamal, 2015). Yet as opposed to

the purported aim of improving women's participation in civil society, the donor-led process of professionalisation has created additional bureaucratic obstacles that ended up disempowering grassroots women activists. As Jad (2007) suggests:

“...professionalisation, as part of an NGOisation process, might not lead to more participation for the ‘target groups’ or the grassroots. ‘Project logic’ pushes towards upward vertical participation and not downward horizontal participation, and can lead to further concentration of power in the hands of administrators or technocrats. NGOisation leads to the transformation of a cause for social change into a project with a plan, a timetable, and a limited budget, which is ‘owned’ for reporting and used for the purposes of accountability vis-à-vis the funders.” (Jad, 2007, pp. 627-628)

This process was accompanied by more far-reaching, negative consequences for grassroots political activism. The large influx of international donor assistance to women's and gender issues created a ‘globalised elite’ of Palestinian NGO leaders, which aligned with international donor agendas and the Oslo liberal peace paradigm (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005). By only supporting depoliticised liberal women's organisations that could access donor funding and marginalising the others, Western donor assistance centred on ‘women's empowerment’ largely contributed to the fragmentation of the national women's movement. This was mainly a result of “Western donors’ lack of understanding of the Palestinian women's movement (...) and lack of recognition of the extent to which women were adversely affected by the ongoing military occupation policies” (Jamal, 2015, p. 235). One of my interviewees lamented this evolution, that she describes as “one of the last stages of reducing civil society into NGOs that are irrelevant to the needs of Palestinians.” According to her, it has made Palestinian civil society “increasingly irrelevant”, since “it is diluting its role as a watchdog, firstly over the Palestinian Authority (PA) to hold it accountable for its legal obligations for Palestinians” and “in holding the occupation accountable.” (Interview 2, 2023).

The types of activities conducted by newly professionalised women's organisations in Palestine have also shifted, concentrating on gender training, awareness campaigns and lobbying (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005). The process through which women's NGOs become more accountable to international donors than to the local population is not only problematic itself but is also a clear example of the tensions and problems that arise from the incorporation of feminist knowledge in global governance agendas. These dynamics counter the dominant

framing of donor funding as ‘apolitical’, as the growing influx of Western donor assistance to women’s empowerment in the post-Oslo period ended up exacerbating political divisions between women’s groups that were able to access donor funding and those that could not (Jamal, 2015). The selective allocation of funding to more professionalised organisations that more closely aligned with international donor agendas created “a struggle for organisational survival between the urban middle class activists in the NGOs and the traditional elite in the charitable societies and grassroots leadership within the committees” (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005, p. 23). Paradoxically, the strategies through which women’s political empowerment was to be promoted (i.e., donor assistance to a selected group of professionalised NGOs) had undermined the goal of promoting women’s participation by disempowering grassroots women’s movements embedded in the politics of resistance against the colonial occupation.

Another worrying political implication of the increasing dependence of women and human rights NGOs on international donor agendas has emerged from the decision of some European governments to freeze funding for six Palestinian NGOs designated as “terror organisations” by the Israeli government in October 2021.⁷ These accusations were widely condemned by UN representatives, international human rights organisations, and nine members of the EU in 2022. Palestinian legal scholars and activists have argued that “Israel’s persecution of leading Palestinian human rights organizations and defenders opposing Israeli apartheid escalates Palestinian oppression” and “entrenches the epistemic violence and erasure of decades of Palestinian knowledge production on Israeli apartheid and settler colonialism” (Muhareb et al., 2021, p. 41). One of my interviewees has criticised the contradictory ways through which European governments and women’s organisations supporting the WPS agenda have funded initiatives to promote Palestinian women’s participation “there”, while simultaneously marginalising, silencing and defunding Palestinian citizens in their own countries:

"A migrant women's organisation does not have the same access to funding under the NAP as a similar [European] white organisation because they are bigger, they are established, they have the criteria that they require for receiving funding. And so you

⁷ The organizations listed were Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association (Addameer); Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man (Al-Haq); Bisan Center for Research and Development (Bisan); Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCI-Palestine); the Union of Agricultural Work Committees; and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees (Muhareb et al., 2021).

depend on these organisations. (...). Organisations that call for BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction] (...) do not get funding from the government because of the Israeli lobby, who succeeded in equating these organisations to anti-semitism.” —
Interview 3, 2023

CHAPTER 4

The making of the Palestinian NAP on women, peace and security: between liberal, humanitarian, and justice agendas

This chapter delves into the role of Palestinian civil society organisations (CSOs) in the making of the National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the WPS agenda in Palestine. It situates the Palestinian NAP making process in broader transnational state-building and security processes led by United Nations agencies and some of the international donors who have also sponsored the Oslo process, such as the United States, the European Union, and its member states. I begin by highlighting the significance of the political advocacy work done by Palestinian civil society organisations in the process leading to the development and adoption of the first Palestinian NAP. Then I examine the context and agendas underpinning the content of the two Palestinian NAPs adopted thus far, confronting them with the visions and experiences of civil society organisations on Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda in Palestine.

4.1. Resolution 1325 and NAP making in Palestine

Even though official consultations for the making of the first Palestinian NAP only started in 2012, with the establishment of the Higher National Committee for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 by the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), international pressure to develop a platform for action and a NAP for Palestine can be traced back to 2004, when the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement encouraging the development of NAPs for the implementation of Resolution 1325. According to one of my interviewees, who took part in the WPS advocacy work of civil society at that time, in the beginning,

“Palestinian women felt that because the resolution excludes occupation as a form of conflict, and because there was no accountability (...) within the UN resolution to hold the occupation accountable (...), it wasn't really meeting the aspirations of Palestinian women, and therefore they decided not to engage.” — Interview 5, 2023.

It is important to note that Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000, the same year as the outbreak of the second intifada. Then, in 2004, “there was some pressure, mainly from funding organisations, and UN agencies, about developing a platform of action and a NAP for

Palestine." She further explained how Resolution 1325 had completely taken over the work of Palestinian CSOs until the adoption of the NAP:

"There were two coalitions, one led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and another one led by the civil society. I was part of the civil society coalition and at the time we facilitated discussions and debates about what a NAP should include, and developed an action plan for ourselves on what [NAPs] can do, adding the accountability component but also focusing on protection, prevention, women's participation in negotiations. This was the first NAP. (...). All this time our work was focused on that. (...) Most activities focused on awareness raising, talking about 1325, writing about it, training women in the different places about it." — Interview 5, 2023

Another interviewee, who has worked as a consultant with several Palestinian and international NGOs working on the WPS agenda in Palestine, described the incorporation of Resolution 1325 into the agenda and work of Palestinian CSOs as a top-down process led by international donors and elite NGOs:

"When Resolution 1325 was enacted (...), Palestinian women's and human rights organisations didn't think of it as a very big deal. (...) [they] felt that Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions were modelled on the atrocities that took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda (...). It focused overtly on sexual abuse and sexual violence against women in times of armed conflict (...) that looked at armed hostilities as two sides (...). Basically, the WPS Agenda was not really modelled to fit context of prolonged military occupation. (...). It was only around 2005 that the donors came, and the Palestinian civil society organisations were like, 'we're not sure how this is relevant.' Then they [the donors and CSOs] started (...) all of these talks, and decided (...) [they were] happy to work on this to hold the occupation accountable. And that's when the tensions started. (...). Donors are the ones who set the priorities. They say: 'we want to do this, come and apply.' (...). But you have multiple layers of elitism and top-down construction here. Not just by the donors, but also by the elitist civil society organisations that work on the WPS agenda here [in Palestine]. (...). Donors impose on the elitist organisations what is going to happen, and then the elitist organisations impose it on the grassroots organisations." — Interview 2, 2023

The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the making of the Palestinian NAP has been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Palestine. This has been the case in other parts of the world, too. As discussed in Chapter 1, both the UN Security Council and national governments have put growing emphasis on the need for the participation and inclusion of civil society actors in WPS interventions such as NAP making, especially women's and human rights activists, advocates, and experts, who have contributed more than any other actor to "making 1325 work" through their advocacy, expertise, and implementation roles (Hamilton et al., 2021).

The first civil society initiative that incorporated Resolution 1325 into their work was the International Women's Commission (IWC), established in 2005 by "a group of highly educated and well-connected Palestinian and Israeli women, with the support of international women and UNIFEM [the UN Development Fund for Women]" (Farr, 2011, p. 546). The IWC was committed to ensuring the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by the governments of Israel and Palestine, and to developing a shared Palestinian and Israeli women's position towards "a just and lasting peace." However, much like previous joint Palestinian-Israeli peacebuilding projects discussed in Chapter 3, the initiative ended its mandate in 2010 due to the incompatible political agendas and power differentials between Israeli and Palestinian women. Furthermore, in 2008, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the creation of the Wisal Coalition, a WPS network based in the Gaza Strip and composed of around twenty women's organisations. The network has been working on service provision, training and advocacy with a particular focus on the impact of the humanitarian crisis on Palestinian women's health and gender-based violence (Farr, 2011).

However, the civil society initiative that has been committed to WPS advocacy for the longest time is MIFTAH, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy. It was founded in 1998 by renowned politician Hanan Ashrawi. Since then, MIFTAH has been dedicated to "Palestinian nation-building and empowerment on the basis of the principles of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and participatory governance."⁸ The WPS agenda is one of MIFTAH's areas of intervention, and their work has contributed to the formation of a National Coalition for Resolution 1325 in 2010 and the development of its vision and a strategic and advocacy plan in the subsequent years (MIFTAH, 2017, 2020b). The Pa-

⁸ MIFTAH, <http://www.miftah.org/>

lestinian Women's Coalition for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 (PWC) was established under the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), a network comprised of Palestinian women and human rights organisations and individuals committed to the WPS agenda⁹ (MIFTAH, 2020b). Contrary to the external-oriented, liberal approach of the IWC, the PWC's primary focus is on "the Israeli occupation and the impact of its violations on Palestinian women and girls." As such, it understands the WPS agenda as "an important tool for confronting the occupation to establish a just peace in general, and to achieve the security and peace of Palestinian women in particular" (MIFTAH, 2020b, p. 5).

The advocacy work of the National Coalition has led the Palestinian government to establish a Higher National Committee for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2012, bringing together representatives from government ministries and its gender units, international organisations, and civil society organisations. Subsequently, the Committee, under the leadership of Palestine's MoWA, was nominated as the main actor responsible for developing, implementing, and following-up on the NAP (Palestine MoWA, 2017, p. 8). In addition to the leadership of the Committee, the development and implementation of the NAPs also involved "strategic partnerships" with UN bodies, the National Coalition for Implementing UNSCR 1325, local coalitions, the PLO, and the Palestinian government (Palestine MoWA, 2017).

The development of the first NAP was supported by the Palestine Country Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), under the project "Advancing the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the occupied Palestinian territory", which was funded by the European Union (EU) through its "Peace Building Initiative Project." In particular, UN Women provided the financial and technical assistance to carry out workshops, meetings, and consultations with members of the Committee (Palestine MoWA, 2017, p. 10). Moreover, civil society organisations, especially MIFTAH, have played

⁹ The members of the PWC include: The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), The Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Women Studies Centre (WSC), Filastiniyat, and the Women, Media and Development (TAM). At a later stage, the Coalition was expanded to include the following four institutions in the Gaza Strip: the Women's Affairs Center (WAC), the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA), Center for Women's Legal Research and Consulting (CWLRC), and the Palestinian Developmental Women Studies Association (PDWSA) (MIFTAH, 2020b).

a particularly significant role by carrying out awareness-raising, documentation, and training activities, holding the Palestinian Authority (PA) accountable for commitments made in the NAPs, and ensuring that concrete actions, responsibilities, and funding for implementation were clearly set out in the NAP (MIFTAH, 2020). But these initiatives seemed to have limited impact on Palestinian women's realities on the ground, as one of my interviewees pointed out:

“There is this UN resolution, which is very beautifully written... but also nobody knew what to do with it! Most activities focused on awareness raising, talking about 1325, writing about it, training women in the different places about it. But actually it didn't change any reality for women. It didn't change how they feel. (...) Training on 1325 or WPS was honestly meaningless for many women because they didn't know what to do with this knowledge.” — Interview 5, 2023

These organisations, with their strong connections to international donors and UN agencies, have been able to shape the narratives and priorities of the WPS agenda to a limited extent. According to the these interviewee, who has worked with international NGOs that are involved in WPS advocacy in Palestine and the Middle East, Palestinian women from these elite NGOs have been allowed to share Palestinian women's experiences of violence under the Israeli occupation in WPS-related forums, meetings and conferences at the international. She mentioned that, in 2018, Randa Siniora, General Director of WCLAC and a member of the Higher Committee for Resolution 1325, was the first Palestinian women to speak at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. In her statement, Siniora highlighted “the gendered impact of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, specifically the disproportionate economic, social and political effects on women and girls living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.”¹⁰

The dominance of the NGO-ised global elite in the Palestinian women's movement described in Chapter 3 has had implications for the ways in which the WPS agenda has been framed and advocated for throughout the making of the Palestinian NAP, as I discuss in the next section.

¹⁰ Statement by Ms. Randa Siniora at UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/statement-unsc-wps-open-debate-october-2018/>

4.2. Palestine's National Action Plan

As mentioned above, the development of the 2015 National Strategic Framework for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Palestine MoWA, 2015) and the two Palestinian National Action Plans (NAP) for periods of 2017-2019 (Palestine MoWA, 2017) and 2020-2024 (Palestine MoWA, 2020) resulted from a consultative process led by the Higher National Committee for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, established in 2012 and formed by representatives from government ministries and its gender units, international organisations, and civil society organisations, including members of the National Coalition for Resolution 1325 (Palestine MoWA, 2015).

Adopted for the period between 2017 and 2019, the first NAP is structured around three pillars: 1) Prevention and protection, 2) Accountability, and 3) Participation (Palestine MoWA, 2017, pp. 12-52). The second NAP, adopted for the period between 2020 and 2024, includes a fourth additional pillar on Relief and Recovery, as a response to the protracted humanitarian crisis in Gaza (Palestine MoWA, 2020).

Both the first and second Palestinian NAPs called for protecting women and girls from the impact of occupation and conflict, holding the Israeli occupation accountable, and enhancing the participation of Palestinian women in decision-making. These priorities are reflected in the strategic approach of the NAPs, which draws upon a comprehensive overview of the importance and applicability of Resolution 1325 in Palestine, which accounts for the specific contextual, historical, political, and social factors shaping Palestinian women's concrete experiences and needs. The 2015 National Strategic Framework, for instance, incorporates a "reality analysis" that describes Palestinian women as both political agents and victims-survivors of violence, recognising the historical and political significance of the Palestinian women's movement and their struggles against gender-based violence and violations of human rights under the Israeli occupation (Palestine MoWA, 2015, pp. 13—14).

Thus, one crucial departure from the universalist, liberal approach to WPS is a recognition of Palestinian women's diverse experiences and roles, which includes "refugees and displaced inside or outside the occupied Palestinian territories," those "living in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem (Al-Quds)", "female prisoners whether inside Israeli prisons and released," and women "affected by the [separation] wall and the Israeli siege" (p. 26). Another is the explicit acknowledgement of the political and legal responsibility of international orga-

nisations such as the International Criminal Courts for developing concrete mechanisms to hold Israel accountable for its violations of Palestinian women's rights (p. 14).

The first pillar, combining Prevention and Protection, is aimed at “protecting Palestinian women from the impact of Israeli occupation” and “improving the safety of girls and women, enhancing their physical and mental health, their economic security, and their lives in general” (Palestine MoWA, 2020, p. 5). While prevention demands “policies, programmes and interventions that support Palestinian women’s participation in conflict prevention including in response to the impact of the occupation and all forms of gender-based and sexual violence on their lives”, protection involves “engaging men and boys to promote concepts of positive masculinity and change negative social norms, gender stereotypes and behaviours” and “the provision of comprehensive and coordinated gender-based violence (GBV) services for women and girls affected by conflict” (Palestine MoWA, 2020, p. 21).

Palestinian women experience multiple forms of structural violence directly related to Israeli policies of military occupation. Firstly, the daily realities of settler violence, house demolitions and forced eviction have severe consequences for Palestinian women and their families in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as they are left homeless or in overcrowded and precarious conditions (CAC et al., 2017). Women’s poor living conditions are further heightened through restrictions on movement put in place by the separation wall, Israeli checkpoints, road closures and a permit system that requires all Palestinians from the occupied territories to obtain a special permit in order to enter Israel and East Jerusalem, affecting their right to work, health and family life. Moreover, Palestinian women’s access to basic human needs (such as food, water, electricity, sanitation and health) is further compromised by Israeli policies of blockade and restriction of resources in the Gaza Strip. The denial of access to essential healthcare (including reproductive health services) and the increased responsibilities with unpaid care work have had a significant impact on Palestinian women’s physical and mental health (WCLAC et al, 2018).

Therefore, the first pillar is directly linked to the second pillar of Accountability. This entails “providing opportunities and spaces to hold Israel accountable for its incessant violations of the rights of Palestinian women, particularly those most affected by the occupation policies and practices, and ending the policy of impunity, including via reparation and compensation for women victims” (Palestine MoWA, 2020, p. 5). One of my interviewees, who has been

involved in WPS advocacy in Palestine, has emphasised that the primary focus on accountability has often clashed with donor agendas on WPS:

“in order to adapt it [the WPS agenda] to the Palestinian context, we will prioritise accountability for the occupation. Because we continue to work on other gender equality aspects through other modes of funding (...), but we will use the WPS Agenda to focus exclusively on the occupation. The problem is that you have multiple actors that are involved in the WPS agenda, and it’s a trend, a fetish, for all funding to go in the direction [of prioritising the pillar of participation]. So, donors are insisting on focusing more on participation, Palestinian organizations want to focus more on accountability. (...). The occupation limits everything that has to do with the WPS agenda here: in terms of participation, in terms of protection of violence, in terms of prevention, and in terms of relief. Because of the impunity of the occupation (...) all of these are compromised here. And this is the vision that the civil society has: we have to work on the occupation.” — Interview 2, 2023

In the third pillar, the Palestinian NAP describes Participation as “underlining the fundamental role of Palestinian women and girls at the local, regional and international level” and “ensuring their rights to participate in decision-making in accordance with the legal obligations enshrined, for example, by international human rights instruments and by International Humanitarian Law (IHL)”, which refer to “the protection of civilians under occupation, strengthening women’s participation in all decision-making positions, reinforcing the partnerships with local women’s organizations, and supporting women in reaching senior positions in the United Nations organizations and agencies” (Palestine MoWA, 2020, p. 5). Most of my interviewees have concurred, however, that these initiatives have a very limited impact. One of them importantly remarked that “grassroots organisations don’t get the chance to talk in global forums” and it is mostly “elitist women who are very well connected, who speak English, [that] are able to attend conferences” (Interview 5, 2023).

The fourth pillar, relief and recovery, is perhaps the one that has generated more controversy among Palestinian women’s organisations. Looking at the Palestinian NAP, a keyword search returns no results for the word ‘humanitarian’ in the first Palestinian NAP, compared with 37 results in the second NAP. In the second NAP, these occurrences are mainly associated with its fourth strategic pillar on ‘relief and recovery.’ Yet in contrast to the depoliticising

approach of some international NGOs, the NAP connects ‘humanitarian action, relief and recovery efforts’ with situations most affected by Israel’s occupation practices, especially in Gaza. Specifically, it focuses on “mainstreaming gender in humanitarian planning and response and in relief and recovery efforts particularly addressing the needs of women and girls who suffer directly from the gendered impact of occupation, such as those suffering from displacement, house demolitions, forcible transfers, and military escalations (MoWA, 2020, p. 24).

However, one of my interlocutors expressed her concern with growing attempts to narrow down the WPS agenda around the question of humanitarian relief and reconstruction. According to her, one international organisation has “put the portfolio for the WPS agenda together with the portfolio for humanitarian action”, and now “it is the same person that works on them.” Though maintaining that it has not been the case for most international donors, whose funding has been mainly channelled to the pillar of participation, she notes that channeling international support for an exclusively humanitarian solution not only marginalises the political aspirations of Palestinians and the provisions of UN resolutions, but is also ineffective in the short-term, given the ongoing climate of impunity and lack of accountability for Israel’s violations of international law. As she claims, “Israel demolishes, Israel bombs. Israel does whatever it wants. The donor community comes and pays money to reconstruct here. No accountability to ensure that Israeli violations cease to happen.”

In sum, the findings confirm the problematic association of the global WPS architecture with Western liberal peacebuilding and humanitarian agendas that have contributed to the expansion of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine. Nevertheless, it underscores the multifaceted and ambivalent nature of Palestinian civil society engagements with Resolution 1325, ranging from contestation and distancing to pragmatism and co-optation.

Conclusions

Throughout the thesis, I have sought to critically examine the WPS agenda against the broader geopolitical context in which it has emerged and developed. Delving more deeply into the ways that colonial and racial hierarchies shaping global North-South relations have affected the meaning and practice of WPS, I have sought to confront the critical literature on WPS with Palestinian narratives and experiences with the agenda, searching for parallels, tensions, silences, and alternatives to current ways of knowing and doing WPS.

In the first part of the thesis, I have provided a critical review of the feminist literature on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, emphasising the importance and evolution of postcolonial, decolonial and Southern feminist contributions to the field. I centred my analysis on three scales of WPS implementation: the global (the United Nations), the national (governments), and the local (civil society). My intent when drawing these boundaries was not to reify and reproduce the fixed, artificial meanings that we commonly attach to ideas about ‘the political’, ‘the national’ and ‘the international’ and the (gendered, racialised, and classed) subjects and spaces through which these meanings are enacted. Instead, I sought to understand how each one of these specific scales of political intervention has been interpreted and acted upon in and through the WPS agenda.

The three scales of WPS interventions I have examined in Chapter 1 have been largely constituted through the colonial hierarchies that govern international security discourses and practices. First, at the UN level, the hegemony of liberal feminism in the text of the UN resolutions, and its association with the liberal peacebuilding agendas that triumphed at the end of the Cold War, has resulted in a narrow concern with protecting ‘women in the global South’ and has effectively depoliticised discussion about sexualised violence through the securitisation and instrumentalisation of conflict-related sexual violence in the wake of the war on terror (Pratt, 2013). Second, at the national level, the literature has raised similar concerns about the discourse of the National Action Plans (NAPs) adopted by governments in the global North. These NAPs have been mainly used as tools of foreign policy, targeting contexts of conflict, insecurity and violence “elsewhere”, that is, beyond the borders of nation-states (Shepherd 2016). Moreover, NAP making processes do not take into account the experiences and knowledges of Southern women, further entrenching the dominance of Western, elite women

NGOs in the WPS community. Third, at the local level, it is mostly civil society organisations in the global South, especially women's organisations, who are burdened with the labour associated with WPS advocacy and implementation, which ultimately sustains the reproduction of the agenda in the long term (Hamilton et al., 2021). Some of these organisations had incorporated the WPS agenda in their advocacy work only to meet the criteria of international donor funding, while others have become dependent on funding mechanisms set by international agencies and governments to carry out their work on Resolution 1325. However, organisations working on WPS issues often represent the interests of a global elite of gender experts and disregard the experiences and knowledges of women at the margins of power, such as women from working-class, Indigenous, Black, immigrant and refugee communities.

Despite ongoing efforts to reexamine the WPS agenda from postcolonial, decolonial and intersectional perspectives, these concerns are usually placed in the margins of academic and policy debates, determining the narrow, liberal feminist orientation of interventions to implement Resolution 1325 in different contexts, such as NAPs and the UN resolutions themselves. As Smith and Stavrevska argued, even though a different WPS is possible, "WPS remains an imperfect platform, within a racialised, classist, colonial and patriarchal framework, to currently advocate for or from intersectional experiences that may or may not prioritise what are seen as 'gender' and/or 'women's issues'" (Smith & Stavrevska, 2022, p. 75).

In the second part (Chapters 3 and 4), I have woven these scholarly debates together with the findings of my own empirical research on Palestinian experiences and narratives about the WPS agenda, paying attention to the 'silences, margins and bottom rugs' (Enloe, 2004) that also constitute WPS. I draw on the primary and secondary data I collected and interpreted throughout a review of the literature and interviews with Palestinian women activists who have worked on WPS-related projects. The discussion has located the colonial roots of the UN WPS agenda in Palestine in the ongoing encounters between international donors, national elites and women's organisations, foregrounding the limits and problems associated with WPS implementation in the context of European and Israeli settler/colonial rule, military occupation, and international donor assistance.

In particular, I have argued that a selective concern with women's participation in civil society ended up creating and entrenching hierarchies, divisions and tensions within the Palestinian population, hampering the agenda's emancipatory potential. In particular, the global

silence and denial of the Israeli colonial occupation of Palestine are one of the biggest problems raised by Palestinian CSOs working on WPS issues. Nonetheless, the vision of the WPS agenda advocated by Palestinian women's and human rights organisations such as MIFTAH is one that opposes the depoliticisation and instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda. In the early 2000s, civil society organisations formed a National Coalition to advocate for the implementation of Resolution 1325, and since then they have played a major role in NAP making and national and international advocacy efforts.

However, the social, political, and economic transformations produced by international state-building and peacebuilding interventions and the continuation of Israel's settler-colonial project in Palestine were detrimental to Palestinian women's ability to shape and reappropriate the WPS agenda in ways that would advance rather than jeopardise their political commitment to the broader Palestinian struggle for self-determination, justice, and decolonisation. Among other factors, the geographical and political fragmentation of Palestinians, accelerated by the illegal expansion of Israel's control over the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem; the blockade and indiscriminate violence against Palestinians in Gaza since 2007; the political division between the Fatah and Hamas' governments in the West Bank and Gaza, respectively; the PA's security coordination with Israel and the erosion of its political legitimacy; the transformation of Palestinian civil society into a 'globalised elite' of Palestinian NGOs dependent on international donor funding and divorced from the local population; and the political marginalisation and silencing of critical voices in Palestinian civil society by the PA, Israel, and their Western allies in North America and Europe—where the strongest support and funding for WPS have come from—has heightened Palestinian scepticism and opposition to the PA and the UN and, by extension, to the WPS agenda.

Palestinian experiences and narratives and their invisibility in the WPS agenda have broader implications for our understanding of, and resistance to, the reproduction of global racial hierarchies inscribed in transnational feminist activism and in the WPS agenda that further research could examine in more depth. While Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda does provide an important global platform to advocate for Palestinian women's rights and hold Israeli occupation accountable for its violations of human rights and international law, the impact of these efforts have been quite limited. The Palestinian context of occupation demonstrates how work to advance the WPS by Palestinians is severely limited by structural conditions such as

the maintenance and expansion of the Zionist-settler colonial project in Palestine and Western complicity with it, the failure of the PA to realise Palestinian aspirations of self-determination and statehood, and the dependence of women's civil society organisation on international donor assistance. This shows that, rather than promoting a universally defined agenda for peace-building and conflict resolution, feminist transnational activism and the WPS agenda must be aware of the multiple, intersecting factors that shape women's experiences and needs in different contexts. In Palestine, this means recognising the settler/colonial, imperialist and patriarchal structures against which Palestinian women's activism has operated.

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