

**The United Nations
“Women, Peace and Security”
Agenda 25 Years after Security
Council Resolution 1325 (2000)**

A Utopia that Can Still Change the World

Edited by

Raffaele Cadin, Valentina Zambrano, Luisa Del Turco



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Part II
Multi-dimensional character
of the WPS Agenda

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Continuum of Gender-Based Violence against Women

Sara De Vido *

Summary: 1. Introduction. – 2. The Premise: A Feminist Analysis of Resolution 1325 and Subsequent Resolutions. – 3. The Continuum of Violence as a Lens to Analyse the WPS Resolutions. – 4. Overcoming the Binary Structure Participation/Protection from Violence. – 5. Interpreting the WPS through the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence against women (GBVAW) is no exception in wartime. The “continuum of violence” framework grasps «the complexity of gender-based violence, its structural and socio-economic root causes, and the links between gender-based violence in “war” and “peace”»¹. Conflicts exacerbate – rather than create *ex novo* – pre-existing patterns of discrimination rooted in societies. During any kind of conflict, women and girls, especially those situated at the intersection of multiple grounds of discrimination, are constantly and disproportionately subjected to sexual, physical and psychological abuses². Sexual violence, including rape, is one form of GBVAW that women experience not only during conflicts but also before and after them, determining a continuum of experiences whose root causes must be properly understood to provide effective responses³. Survivors face enormous difficulties in reintegration into their community of

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¹ There is a «natural bias towards constructing and maintaining an artificial war/peace paradigm»: C. CHINKIN, J. NEENAN, *International Law and the Continuum of Gender-Based Violence*, in *LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series* (online), 2017; see also C. COCKBURN, *The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace*, in W. GILES (ed.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, Oakland, 2004, p. 12 ff.

² According to the latest UNSG Report on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, 15 July 2025, S/2025/389, «In 2024, proliferating and escalating conflicts were marked by widespread conflict-related sexual violence, amid record levels of displacement and increased militarization. Twenty-five years after the adoption by the Security Council of its resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, conflict-related sexual violence continues to primarily affect women and girls».

³ Women’s tribunals have contributed to amplifying the voices of victims of violence who had previously remained unheard, during and after conflicts. See G. SIMM, *Peoples’ Tribunals, Women’s Courts*

origin and are often left without access to justice or reparations, with little or no access to several support services, including reproductive health care. The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyse the resolutions of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda – beginning with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (2000)⁴ – from a feminist perspective, focusing on one of its pillars: the protection of women from gender-based violence⁵. Using the concept of *continuum of violence* developed by Liz Kelly in *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988)⁶, this chapter highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the WPS Agenda with regard to its provisions on GBVAW, examining whether and to what extent the continuum of violence has been incorporated into the preamble, the text, or both. While acknowledging the improbability of adopting a new WPS resolution due to a widespread backlash against women’s rights worldwide, the chapter advocates for disrupting the protection/participation binary through a systematic interpretation of the WPS resolutions. This is achieved by referencing the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979⁷, and the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)⁸, adopted in 2011, to reflect on the multiple and intersectional experiences of women in conflict and post-conflict settings.

2. The Premise: A Feminist Analysis of Resolution 1325 and Subsequent Resolutions

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 (2000) was advocated by women’s associations, through the UN Development Fund for Women, as well as by a group of States⁹, and marked a major breakthrough from a classic State-oriented approach to a more human-oriented perspective in international law¹⁰. It undeniably represented a major step forward

and *International Crimes of Sexual Violence*, in A. BYRNES, G. SIMM (eds), *Peoples’ Tribunals and International Law*, Cambridge, 2018, p. 61 ff.

⁴ UNSCR 1325 (2000), 31. October 2000, S/RES/1325(2000).

⁵ The pillars are: women’s participation in peace and security governance; the adoption of gendered approaches to the prevention of conflict; the protection of women from gender-based violence; and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives across relief and rehabilitation measures.

⁶ L. KELLY, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, Minneapolis, 1988.

⁷ On the Convention, see P. SCHULZ, R. HALPERIN-KADDARI, B. RUDOLF, M.A. FREEMAN (eds), *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol. A Commentary*², Oxford, 2022.

⁸ On the Istanbul Convention, see extensively, S. DE VIDO, M. FRULLI (eds), *Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. A Commentary on the Istanbul Convention*, Cheltenham, 2023.

⁹ S. NARAGHI ANDERLINI, *Civil Society is Leader in Adoption 1325 Resolution*, in S.E. DAVIES, J. TRUE (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, Oxford, 2019, p. 38 ff.

¹⁰ C. CHINKIN, *Adoption of 1325 Resolution*, in S.E. DAVIES, J. TRUE, *The Oxford Handbook*, cit., p. 26 ff.

in bringing the realities of conflict for women to the attention of the UNSC. UNSCR 1325 (2000) promoted gender mainstreaming across all aspects of conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and addressed «some of the concerns about the Security Council’s legitimacy raised earlier by feminists»¹¹. For the first time, the UNSC «formally recognize[d] women not merely as participants but also as *indispensable* participants in conflict resolution and peace negotiations, opening new opportunities for women’s entry into these traditionally “male” spaces»¹². However, the resolution has faced numerous implementation challenges¹³, and, at times, has been invoked as “feminist pretext” by «Western powers [...] to present-day political realities, as they perceive them, of “new” wars, “failed states” and “terror”»¹⁴. The resolution was indeed used «to wage war, not to prevent it»¹⁵. This contrasts with the outcome of the Hague International Congress of Women of 1915 – which is, indeed, never mentioned in the preambles of UNSC WPS Agenda resolutions – whose report stressed, at a time when the peaceful resolution of disputes had yet to be consolidated as international custom, the need for equal participation of women, the promotion of peace, universal disarmament, and the prevention of the adverse effects of war on women¹⁶. UNSCR 1325 only vaguely mentioned the equal participation of women in the preamble and did not include it in the operative paragraphs; it limited disarmament to the role of former combatants and shifted the focus from preventing war – which was at the core of feminist struggle – to «making war safer for women». Dianne Otto argued that the «larger goal of making resort to armed force impossible has been lost in the panic about sexual violence and the focus of *jus in bello*»¹⁷. The point that emerged from the 1915 International Congress of Women was to prevent *any* kind of war, not to render war “safer” (if that were ever possible?) for women. Furthermore, as Gina Heathcote stressed, the UNSC’s persistent «identification of women in post-conflict and transitional communities as sexually vulnerable, rather than as active community participants, fails to disrupt out-of-date understandings of

¹¹ D. OTTO, *The Security Council’s Alliance of Gender Legitimacy: The Symbolic Capital of Resolution 1325*, in H. CHARLESWORTH, J.-M. COICAUD (eds), *Fault Lines of International Legitimacy*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 239 ff., p. 258.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 259. See also T.L. TRYGGESTAD, *Trick or Treat? The UN and Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security*, in *Global Governance*, 2009, p. 539 ff.

¹³ F. RUBY, *Security Council Resolution 1325: A Tool for Conflict Prevention?*, in G. HEATHCOTE, D. OTTO (eds), *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality and Collective Security*, London, 2014, p. 173 ff.; R. MANJOO, *Women, Peace and Security – Negotiating in Women’s Best Interests*, in *Global Policy*, 2016, p. 267 ff., p. 269.

¹⁴ D. OTTO, *Beyond Stories of Victory and Danger: Resisting Feminism’s Amenability to Serving Security Council Politics*, in G. HEATHCOTE, D. OTTO, *Rethinking*, cit., p. 157 ff., p. 161.

¹⁵ F. RUBY, *Security Council Resolution*, cit., p. 179 with specific regard to Iraq.

¹⁶ Report of the International Congress of Women: The Hague – The Netherlands, April 28th to May 1st, 1915 (online <https://archive.org/details/internatcongrewom00interich/page/n1/mode/2up>).

¹⁷ D. OTTO, *Women, Peace and Security: A Critical Analysis of the Security Council’s Vision*, in *LSE Working Paper Series* (online), 2017; D. OTTO, *A Sign of ‘Weakness’? Disrupting Gender Certainties in the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325*, in *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law*, 2006, p. 113 ff.

post-conflict spaces, of gender and of sexuality»¹⁸. The focus on sexual violence in conflict, while extremely important, perpetuates the idea of women as needing protection and neglects other forms of violence perpetrated before, during, and after conflict: «for women conflict violence continues beyond the signing of a peace agreement»¹⁹. After a conflict, it is impossible to “go back to normal”, because “normal” for many women means facing constant discrimination based on gender and other intersecting factors. Moreover, military force is included in the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions «as a potential mechanism for halting widespread and systematic sexual violence despite the history of feminist scholarship highlighting the need for preventative strategies, the social and cultural causes of violence against women, and the role military force plays in perpetuating negative gender relations that create risks to women within communities»²⁰.

Since UNSCR 1325 (2000), nine resolutions have been adopted: four primarily focused on advancing the pillar of women’s participation – namely 1889 (2009), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2493 (2019)²¹ – and five mainly addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV): 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), and 2467 (2019)²².

3. The Continuum of Violence as a Lens to Analyse the WPS Resolutions

In *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988), the feminist sociologist Liz Kelly, through interviews with 60 women in the US, elaborated the concept of “continuum of violence” to describe the «extent of sexual violence» and the «range of men’s behaviours that women experience as abusive»²³. The idea of continuum does not relate to the level of “seriousness” of the forms of sexual violence, but to its prevalence, meaning «there are forms of sexual violence which most women experience in their lives and which they are

¹⁸ G. HEATHCOTE, *Robust Peacekeeping, Gender and the Protection of Civilians*, in H. CHARLESWORTH, J. FARRALL (eds), *Strengthening the Rule of Law through the UN Security Council*, London, 2016, p. 150 ff., p. 157.

¹⁹ F. NÍ AOLÁIN, N. VALJI, *Scholarly Debates and Contested Meanings of WPS*, in S.E. DAVIES, J. TRUE, *The Oxford*, cit., p. 53 ff., p. 56. On the “oversimplification” of sexual violence in «resolutions, as well as in the international criminal responses to sexual violence that the Security Council resolutions call for» see K. ENGLE, *The Grip of Sexual Violence: Reading UN Security Council Resolutions on Human Security*, in G. HEATHCOTE, D. OTTO (eds), *Rethinking*, p. 23 ff., p. 24.

²⁰ G. HEATHCOTE, *Feminist Perspectives on the Law on the Use of Force*, in M. WELLER (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Use of Force in International Law*, Oxford, 2015, p. 114 ff., p. 128.

²¹ UNSCR 1889 (2009), 5. October 2009, S/RES/1889(2009); UNSCR 2122 (2013), 18. October 2013, S/RES/2122(2013); UNSCR 2242(2015), 13. October 2015, S/RES/2242(2015); UNSCR 2493 (2019), 29. October 2019, S/RES/2493(2019).

²² UNSCR 1820 (2008), 19. June 2008, S/RES/1820(2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009), 30. September 2009, S/RES/1888 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010), 16. December 2010, S/RES/1960(2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013), 24. June 2013, S/RES/2106(2013); UNSCR 2467 (2019), 23. April 2019, S/RES/2467(2019).

²³ L. KELLY, *Surviving*, cit., pp. 4-5.

more likely to experience in multiple occasions»²⁴. The forms of sexual violence women experience cannot be simply encompassed within the term “rape”, as it is commonly defined in criminal law; rather, they define the dimension of abuse and the intrusiveness into one’s life. Sexual harassment, for example, is widely experienced by women but is seldom recognized as sexual violence, despite the life-long emotional impact on those subjected to it. Another important aspect of Kelly’s research is that in the majority of studies of sexual violence, «minimal attention has been paid to how women define abuse and violence»²⁵ and how they “survive” it. Although Liz Kelly did not specifically address violence during armed conflicts, her research is pivotal in demonstrating that violence cannot be described as an exception or as an unexpected occurrence, but must be deemed as part of women’s lives in all societies, both in times of peace and in times of war.

War and peace do not represent a dichotomy. They are closely interrelated, as wars exacerbate unequal power relations already rooted in societal dynamics. As one author argued, «to *sustain* peace we must address the harmful gendered identities, ideologies, and social dynamics that support violence in every society»²⁶. Post-conflict settings – rarely considered by transitional justice mechanisms, for example – also constitute sites of violence. Displacement, economic and social reconstruction, aid, justice, and reconciliation are contexts in which gender power shapes «the dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena»²⁷. With this in mind, it is possible to understand that dealing with CRSV against women does not trivialise the sexual violence experience suffered by men-identifying as men – sexual violence against men is also present and widespread – but rather highlights the root causes of violence that persist during war, targeting women because of their gender and placing them in subordinate positions compared to men. Women do not simply survive sexual violence in conflict by avoiding death; survival also entails “emotional survival”, namely «the extent to which women are able to reconstruct their lives so that the experience of sexual violence does not have an overwhelming and continuing negative impact on their life»²⁸. In many cases, women are “alive” but emotionally dead, and the level of reparation and compensation must take this into account. Studies have also shown that the consequences of war disproportionately affect women and children, with women’s mortality rates being higher than men’s. Women’s physical security is further threatened in refugee camps, with increased displacement being one of the enduring consequences of conflict²⁹.

The WPS Agenda has only partially taken into account the continuum of violence as described above. Surely, the WPS Agenda has importantly acknowledged the phenomenon of CRSV and its disproportionate impact on women and girls. Naming such phenomena is

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁶ J. TRUE, *Continuums of Violence and Peace: A Feminist Perspective*, in *Ethics & International Affairs*, p. 85 ff.

²⁷ C. COCKBURN, *The Continuum*, cit.

²⁸ L. KELLY, *Surviving*, cit., p. 163.

²⁹ J. TRUE, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*, New York, 2012, p. 136.

the first step toward recognition and action. As Dale Spender bluntly observed: «In order to live in the world, we must name it. Names are essential for the construction of reality for without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, an event, a feeling»³⁰. Nevertheless, UNSCR 1325 (2000) does not explicitly acknowledge the continuum of violence. It only (though importantly) expresses concern that «civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation». The UNSC also calls on all parties to armed conflict to «take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict»³¹. It further emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls. Despite the recognition that CRSV is not the only form of violence disproportionately suffered by women during armed conflicts, the resolution depicts women primarily as the “vulnerable” subject in conflict situations and fails to establish a framework that accounts for the continuum of violence across both wartime and peacetime.

UNSCR 1820 (2008) reiterates in its preamble the condemnation of all sexual and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflict, in particular women and children, expresses deep concern for the continuation of such acts, and recalls the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The operative paragraphs are highly detailed but mainly focused on protection. The resolution stresses that sexual violence can be used as a tactic of war and may impede the restoration of international peace and security³². It identifies several protective measures, such as enforcing appropriate military disciplinary measures and upholding the principle of command responsibility, training troops on the categorical prohibition of all forms of sexual violence against civilians, debunking myths that fuel sexual violence, vetting armed and security forces to consider past actions of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and evacuating women and children under imminent threat of sexual violence to safety³³. The resolution also paves the way for a system of targeted sanctions against parties to situations of armed conflict who commit rape and other forms of sexual violence and requests the Secretary-General (UNSG) and UN agencies to develop mechanisms for providing protection from violence in and around UN-managed refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, as well as in all disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes, and in justice and security sector reform efforts assisted by the United Nations³⁴. Despite its limited scope, particularly in comparison to UNSCR 1325

³⁰ D. SPENDER, *Man-Made Language*, New York, 1980.

³¹ UNSCR 1325, para. 10.

³² UNSCR 1820, para. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 10.

(2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008) «permitted the practice that have been, arguably, essential for achieving a broader engagement on the Security Council on matters pertaining to the WPS in recent years»³⁵. The continuum of violence is indirectly acknowledged in the resolution's call for the eradication of stereotypes that fuel sexual violence and in its measures for protecting women and children in refugee and IDP camps.

In UNSCR 1888 (2009), the UN SC builds on the previous resolution and emphasizes the importance of access to justice and the rights of the victims³⁶. It also requests that the UNSG appoint a Special Representative to «provide coherent and strategic leadership, to work effectively to strengthen existing United Nations coordination mechanisms, and to engage in advocacy efforts, [...] in order to address [...] sexual violence in armed conflict, while promoting cooperation and coordination of efforts among all relevant stakeholders, primarily through the inter-agency initiative “United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict”»³⁷. The continuum of violence becomes evident when the UNSC encourages States to «increase access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance and socio-economic reintegration services for victims of sexual violence, in particular in rural areas»³⁸, thereby highlighting a situation that extends beyond the immediate conflict. The UNSC also demands that parties to armed conflict implement disciplinary measures to command and control responsibilities – a provision that is further reinforced in UNSCR 1960 (2010)³⁹. The resolution reiterates many of the points included in previous acts, from acknowledging that preventing and responding to acts of sexual violence contributes to the maintenance of international peace and security, to expressing “deep concern” over the systematic and widespread violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict⁴⁰. The text also encourages the UNSG to include in his annual report information on parties to the conflict that are «credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for acts of rape or other forms of sexual violence»⁴¹ and to continue implementing the policy of zero tolerance regarding sexual exploitation and abuse by the UN peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel⁴².

The language of the WPS resolutions gradually began to shift in 2013, with Resolution 2106 recognizing the responsibility of States in «addressing the root causes of sexual violence in armed conflict» and «challenging the myths that sexual violence in armed conflict is a cultural phenomenon or an inevitable consequence of war or a lesser crime»⁴³. In this sense, the continuum of violence – even though limited here to sexual violence – is indirectly acknowledged as part of a much broader phenomenon that extends beyond

³⁵ See S. DAVIES, J. TRUE, *Women, Peace and Security. A Transformative Agenda?*, in S. DAVIES, J. TRUE (eds), *The Oxford*, cit., p. 1 ff., p. 7.

³⁶ UNSCR 1888, Preamble.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 13.

³⁹ UNSCR 1960, para. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 1 and preamble.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para. 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, para. 16.

⁴³ UNSCR 2106, Preamble.

the conduct of hostilities. Sexual violence in post-conflict situations is also recognized in the resolution as a phenomenon that requires monitoring⁴⁴. An important aspect of the resolution is the acknowledgement of the significance of providing «timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence». In this respect, Resolution 2106 urges UN entities and donors to provide «non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence, taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities»⁴⁵. This is particularly relevant to highlighting how the consequences of sexual violence during conflict continues into post-conflict settings.

It is, however, only with UNSCR 2467 (2019) that an explicit reference to the continuum of violence appears, albeit only in the preamble. This acknowledgment does not seem to have practical consequences in the operative paragraphs of the resolution, for example, in terms of incorporating women's experiences that «have varied greatly depending upon such factors as national identity, race, age, class, economic circumstances, urban or rural location, family situation, age, employment and health»⁴⁶. Notably, there is no direct reference to secondary victimisation, although the resolution refers to the need for «removing [...] corroboration requirements that discriminate against victims as witnesses and complainants, exclusion or discrediting of victims' testimony by law enforcement procedure»⁴⁷. The resolution reiterates that women and girls disproportionately experience human rights violations in conflict and post-conflict settings and remain underrepresented in many formal processes and bodies involved in the maintenance of peace and security. A preventive function is played by the application of targeted sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict⁴⁸, with the designation of such individuals falling under the mandate of the UN's existing Sanctions Committees, which are urged to include experts on gender issues among their members⁴⁹. Disarmament is also recognized as playing a crucial role in the prevention of violence: the resolution encourages Member States to include «gender analysis and training into national disarmament»⁵⁰. In terms of protection, the resolution innovatively acknowledges the specific needs of women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in armed conflicts, as well as, for the first time, the needs of children born of sexual violence in conflict. It also recognizes violence committed against men and boys⁵¹.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 5 and 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 19.

⁴⁶ C. CHINKIN, H. CHARLESWORTH, *The Boundaries of International Law*, Manchester, 2000 and new edition 2022, pp. 251-252.

⁴⁷ UNSCR 2467, paras. 14, 15 and 17.

⁴⁸ See, in that respect, the analysis by S. HUVÉ, *The Use of UN Sanctions to Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, in *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security* (online), 2018.

⁴⁹ UNSCR 2467, paras. 10-11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, para. 28.

4. Overcoming the Binary Structure Participation/Protection from Violence

Despite the legitimate doubts about the capacity of a UN SC resolution – emanating from a typically “male” body – to address feminist concerns, the WPS Agenda has proven to be a starting point for subsequent resolutions, such as those incorporating CRSV into sanctions regimes (Congo and Somalia, for example)⁵² and those related to the maintenance of peace and security⁵³. It should also be noted that while WPS Agenda has surely articulated a set of expectations, it has never generated a comprehensive gender equality regime, except – according to some scholars – within the anti-sexual violence framework, which is considered the most effectively implemented aspect⁵⁴. Chinkin argued that, even though WPS resolutions might not have a binding legal status, certain elements of the agenda have attained the status of customary international law, particularly the prohibition of discrimination based on sex and the prohibition of gender-based and sexual violence against women⁵⁵. However, the separation between participation and protection from CRSV, between the «normative advancement of women’s participation» on one hand, and «their protection from related threats and risks» on the other⁵⁶, remains prominent. It is first evident in the focus of resolutions: five of them more centred on CRSV and the others on participation, but also in the language used. In UNSCR 1820 (2008), there had been a first attempt to connect the two aspects: in the preamble, the UNSC expresses concern about «the persistent obstacles and challenges to women’s participation and full involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts as a result of violence, intimidation and discrimination, which erode women’s capacity and legitimacy to participate in post-conflict public life». This binary structure mirrors a dichotomy «between victimhood and its imagined opposite, agency»⁵⁷. UNSCR 1889, a “participation resolution”, tried to balance the two pillars, noting that «women in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict situations continue to be often considered as victims and not as actors in addressing and resolving situations of armed conflict and stressing the need to focus not only on protection of women but also on their empowerment in peacebuilding». As interestingly argued, the WPS Agenda has «relied on and become constructed around an agent-victim binarised narrative, i.e., its provisions situate women either as leaders, whose agency is of instrumental use to peace

⁵² L. HULTMAN, A. MUVUMBA SELLSTRÖM, *WPS and Protection of Civilians*, in S. DAVIES, J. TRUE (eds), *The Oxford*, cit., p. 598 ff., p. 602.

⁵³ See, for example, S/RES/2788 (2025) which does not openly mention Resolution 1325 but reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding.

⁵⁴ P. KIRBY, L. SHEPHERD, *Women, Peace, and Security: Mapping the (Re)Production of a Policy Ecosystem*, in *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2020, p. 1 ff., p. 5.

⁵⁵ C. CHINKIN, *Women, Peace and Security and International Law*, Cambridge, 2022, pp. 66-67.

⁵⁶ C. TURNER, A. SWAIN, *Aligning Participation and Protection in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, in *International Comparative Law Quarterly*, 2023, p. 477 ff.

⁵⁷ S. COOK, *The ‘Woman-in-Conflict’ at the UN Security Council: A Subject of Practice*, in *International Affairs*, 2016, p. 353 ff., p. 354.

and security processes, or as victims, in need of paternalist protection»⁵⁸. This conceptualization of women as a monolith, positioned either as victims or agents⁵⁹, does not reflect the lived reality of women, especially those at the intersection of multiple grounds of discrimination. The recognition of the interlinkages between the two pillars, even if not sufficient to dismantle the binarism, came with the two 2019 resolutions: UNSCR 2467 states that «women’s protection and participation are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing», and the following resolution, UNSCR 2493, more focused on participation and adopted later in the same year, encouraged «safe and enabling environments» to mitigate risks to women in leadership, as well as female human rights defenders, across a range of areas⁶⁰. Several issues must be considered to overcome the binary structure of the agenda. First, it is important to acknowledge the «protection risks related to participation», which occur when women face «further risk by attributing them responsibility for their and other women’s protection»⁶¹. While women’s participation in UN missions is fundamental, it must not create additional risks of sexual abuse (including sexual harassment), which remain a reality if the root causes of GBVAW are not properly addressed. Second, it is essential to recognize the «participation risks related to protection», which arise when women are considered solely as victims, incapable of exercising agency over their own lives. The wording of the resolutions has also contributed to a racialized vision of women in need of protection, typically depicting powerless women of the Global South⁶². One example of participation risk is the missed opportunity to include the right to sexual and reproductive health in UNSCR 2467, owing to objections from negotiating States, concerned about indirect references to the right to abortion and the recognition of women’s autonomy and self-determination. Even though feminist scholars have looked at the positive side of the resolution⁶³, it is undeniable that protecting women without enabling them to make informed and autonomous choices fails to advance gender equality and effective participation⁶⁴. We concur with two scholars who stress the importance of building the connection between participation and protection by understanding the «intersecting complexities of sexism, racism and hegemonies in geopolitics» and acknowledging that «the system in which the

⁵⁸ C. TURNER, A. SWAIN, *Aligning*, cit., p. 484.

⁵⁹ «The Resolutions assume that most women speak for all women and, further, equate action with agency»: L.J. SHEPHERD *Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond*, in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2011, p. 504 ff., p. 510.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

⁶² R. KAPUR, *The Tragedy of Victimization Rhetoric: Resurrecting the “Native” Subject in International/Post-Colonial Feminist Legal Politics*, in *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 2002, p. 1 ff., p. 10.

⁶³ S. DAVIES, J. TRUE, *Pitfalls, Policy, and Promise of the UN’s Approach to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the New Resolution 2467*, in *Blog Peace Research Institute Oslo* (online), 2019; C. CHINKIN, M. REES, *Commentary on Security Council Resolution 2467: Continued State Obligation and Civil Society Action on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, in *LSE Blog* (online), 2019.

⁶⁴ S. DE VIDO, *Violence against Women’s Health through the Law of the UN Security Council: A Critical International Feminist Law Analysis of Resolutions 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019) within the WPS Agenda*, in *Questions of International Law, Zoom-in*, 2020, p. 3 ff.

participation-protection nexus is advanced is one of systemic oppression, exclusion and power inequalities»⁶⁵. Immediate responses must be accompanied by long-term strategies to «tackle the root causes and the conditions that create these levels of risk for women in the first place»⁶⁶.

5. Interpreting the WPS through the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention

Twenty-five years have passed since the adoption of Resolution 1325, and despite several important steps forward, the language of the resolutions have rarely translated into concrete and effective action, either at the international or national level. A new WPS resolution is also far from being feasible, considering the backlash against women's rights that has intensified in recent years, especially in 2025. States are unlikely to agree on a resolution addressing "gender" and women's self-determination. What can be done, however, is to use pivotal instruments in force to interpret the WPS resolutions, thereby strengthening their potential while bridging the gap between participation and protection. The CEDAW and the more regionally focused Istanbul Convention come immediately to mind. As for the CEDAW, the Committee established by the Convention acknowledged in its General Recommendation No 30 (2013) that «all the areas of concern addressed in those resolutions find expression in the substantive provisions of the Convention» and that, therefore, «their implementation must be premised on a model of substantive equality and cover all the rights enshrined in the Convention»⁶⁷. Much more can be achieved by situating the implementation of the Agenda «into the broader framework of the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol»⁶⁸. This entails, for example, working on anti-discrimination measures as a means to address both participation and protection pillars of the WPS Agenda. The lack of women's participation and the persistence of CRSV have their root causes in discrimination against women on the basis of gender. It also implies that the mechanism of individual communications, within its own limits, can be used to address States' failure to respond to CRSV in armed conflict and to implement effective national action plans. Regarding the Istanbul Convention, its application within the framework of the WPS Agenda remains underexplored and deserves further consideration. The potential, however, is enormous, given that this legal instrument applies both in times of peace and in times of war⁶⁹. One example is already found in UNSCR 2467, which acknowledged GBVAW as a form of persecution for the purpose of

⁶⁵ C. TURNER, A. SWAIN, *Aligning*, cit., p. 502.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30, *Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*, 1. November 2013, CEDAW/C/GC/30, para. 26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Article 2(3). See, in that respect, M. FRULLI, *Article 2*, in S. DE VIDO, M. FRULLI (eds), *Preventing*, cit., p. 95 ff.

recognizing refugee status⁷⁰. This provision aligns with the Istanbul Convention (Article 60).

In sum, although impossible to break through the ceiling of a still predominantly masculine body such as the UNSC, the WPS Agenda continues to have much to offer, especially when interpreted in light of existing legal instruments that impose specific obligations for ratifying States.

Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the resolutions of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda through the lens of provisions aimed at preventing and combating gender-based violence against women. Drawing on Liz Kelly's concept of *continuum of violence* developed in *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988), the chapter emphasises both the strengths and weaknesses of the WPS framework, stressing its predominant focus on repression and its recurrent portrayal of women primarily as victims. While acknowledging the impossibility of a new WPS resolution, due to a dangerous gender backlash on women's rights in the world, the chapter advocates for a disruption of the traditional protection/participation binary. It calls for a systematic interpretation of the existing WPS resolutions in conjunction with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Such an approach, it argues, allow the WPS Agenda to reflect the multiple and intersectional experiences of women in conflict and post-conflict settings.

⁷⁰ UNSCR 2467, para. 31.