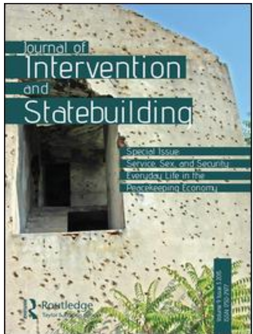

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Capitalising on UNSCR 1325: The Construction of Best Practices for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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ABSTRACT
This article explores a narrative of peacebuilding best practice: the national efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Nepal. We demonstrate how the contested realities of post-conflict gender politics are skilfully transformed into internationally transferable policy knowledge. We argue that in order to construct a peacebuilding best practice, policy entrepreneurs draw on their social capital to make claims about policy as simultaneously local and context-specific as well as global and universally applicable. The credibility of the claims is based on the extent to which they can be presented to international policy audiences in formats suitable for their consumption.

KEYWORDS
Gender; Nepal; Bourdieu; best practice; social capital; local; international; policy

Introduction

The national efforts to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in Nepal have been considered a notable success. The country's National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the WPS agenda in particular has been presented as a global best practice which other conflict-affected and 'fragile' contexts around the world should learn from and strive to replicate (e.g. UN Women 2015). This narrative of policy success stands in marked contrast to the lived experiences of people affected by the civil war and its aftermath, who have not seen benefits from the claimed success of the WPS agenda (Yadav 2020b). Moreover, UNSCR 1325 has not lent itself well to post-conflict contestation over issues of women's rights and gender equality. To understand what is at the root of this contradiction, we have explored the construction of this international best practice, and demonstrate how the complex and dynamic realities of gender politics in post-conflict transitions are skilfully transformed by policy entrepreneurs into universally applicable, easily digested narratives for international policy audiences. We argue that the actors involved in the implementation of the WPS agenda in Nepal have constructed a credible narrative of best practice by deploying both international capital and the capital of proximity as active members of the global WPS community.

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We understand best practice policies as 'specific sets of practices presented as leading to improved performance or greater policy success' (Papanastasiou 2019, 1) derived from specific contexts of policy implementation. In the toolbox of the policy entrepreneur, best practices combine universality and general applicability with their background in specific local contexts and experiences. There is an implication that several practices have been compared and the most successful one identified, which is then proposed for implementation in different contexts through transferable policy solutions. Some have argued, in fact, that the promise of best practices is 'a major narrative of international policy making' (2). In the context of global peace and security policy, best practices have been criticised for being interventionist tools that do not fully capture the complexity of different conflict-affected contexts (Parashar 2019) and that mask the political nature of policy choices and implementation practices through their claim to neutrality and expertise (Brown 2015). In this paper, we seek to understand the 'promise of best practices' through an analysis of how policy entrepreneurs make their claims of policy success credible and with these claims, propose best practices for the global WPS community. Understanding 'exactly how best practice claims of integrating both situated practices and transferable principles are created and negotiated' (Papanastasiou 2019, 3) can bring important clarity to how peace and security policy agendas, such as the WPS agenda, evolve, move and diffuse globally.

After the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, described by many as ground-breaking, in 2000 to recognise the gendered impacts of war on women and the importance of their participation in efforts to negotiate and build peace, the 'WPS agenda' has diffused throughout international institutions and UN member states. The National Action Plan (NAP) quickly became a strategic choice for individual countries to demonstrate their commitments towards the agenda internationally (Jacevic 2019; True 2016). Eighty-six countries (45% of UN member states) have adopted at least one NAP as of August 2020, and several more had pledged to do so in time for the agenda's 20th anniversary in October 2020. Member states regularly report on their progress in adopting WPS NAPs at annual Security Council Open Debates to signal a commitment to addressing the gendered impacts of war. As another sign of the importance of NAPs for the WPS agenda, the Global Study of the first 15 years of the WPS agenda (UN Women 2015) devoted a chapter to developing high-quality NAPs – effectively considered synonymous with member state action on WPS.

The past two decades have seen the emergence of a global WPS policy community which brings together activists, non-governmental organisations, researchers, policy consultants and civil servants, who contribute to NAP advocacy, design and implementation. The membership to this global community provides WPS policy entrepreneurs with access to social capital which comes with a set of power and privileges that each member enjoys to varying degrees and in different forms: for instance, access to funding, job and consultancy opportunities, camaraderie, professional identity and status. The WPS policy entrepreneurs strengthen their relationships through participating in various national and international networks, meetings, projects and conferences, which provide an opportunity to showcase national achievements, innovations and best practices.

Nepal launched its National Action Plan for implementing the WPS agenda in February 2011 as the first country to do so in South Asia. The country's experiences in drafting and

implementing the plan has since been meticulously documented and disseminated among the global WPS community (e.g. Saathi 2011; Saferworld 2012; Search for Common Ground 2016) and the policy entrepreneurs active in shaping the process have described their work at numerous events globally. Many observers consider Nepal's NAP experience to have been a successful process to be replicated internationally, based on its participatory nature, the strong involvement of civil society organisations and close adherence to international best practices in results-based management (e.g. Björkdahl and Mannegren Selimovic 2019; Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014; Trojanowska, Lee-Koo, and Johnson 2018; UN Women 2015). While the Nepal NAP is often referred to as a 'best practice NAP' in its overall approach, we can see that in particular the Nepali authorities' openness to work closely with civil society organisations and involve 'conflict-affected women' in the policy process through local consultations have been deemed as particular practices that earned the NAP its 'best practice' prefix.

In contrast to the narrative of best practice celebrated by the global WPS policy community, the WPS NAP has had a low profile in Nepali politics, including in politics to include gender equitable provisions into the Constitution, in the design of quota provisions for elections or in the still unresolved debates about transitional justice (Yadav 2019). Likewise, many of the contested questions of the post-conflict political transition have at best been marginal for the WPS planning process. The process of drafting a new constitution to reform the formerly centralised and exclusionary state system, an important structural cause of the Maoist movement and its popularity, was fraught by the claims for inclusion of various groups marginalised due to their ethnicity, region or caste, as well as the backlash to the changes that were seen as too sudden by many in the elite. This contestation over access to resources and decision-making power have been reflected in Nepal's diverse women's movement, many of whom feel excluded within a movement led by a capital-based, socio-economically advantaged and culturally tightly-knit group of elite women. However, for the WPS NAP planning process, a restricted group of women leaders with sufficient social and cultural capital to access the corridors of power in both the Nepali state apparatus and the various organisations of the international community has enabled a smooth process and a set of messages that has resonated well with the WPS agenda.

It is this contrast between the internationally celebrated profile of a best practice and the reality of national politics that spurred our interest in examining how WPS policy entrepreneurs have been able to draw on a strong mix of international capital and capital of proximity to not only localise, or vernacularise (Engle Merry 2006), the UNSCR 1325 agenda in Nepal but also to describe Nepal as a best practice case in terms that the global interpretive community built around the WPS agenda can make sense of. We argue that the ability of policy entrepreneurs to claim authority over both the local context as well as the universal principles required for resonance in other contexts is crucial for establishing a specific experience as a best practice.

In tracing the construction of Nepal's National Action Plan on WPS as an internationally accepted and emulated best practice case[1], we have made several contributions to further understanding how policy ideas travel globally and how policy entrepreneurs, active in (trans)national civil society organisations make claims of authority over the 'local' and 'global'. We have shown how policy entrepreneurs deploy both their international capital and their capital of proximity (Daho, Duclos, and Jouhanneau 2019) to

shape policy narratives into best practices for international consumption and to establish their own status in the global WPS community. In doing so, we offer a new way of thinking about why and how member states adopt 1325 NAPs. Many studies seeking to understand the evolution and impacts of global peacebuilding policy, including the WPS agenda, have focused either on the process of shaping of norms and frameworks at the international level (Basu 2016a; Cook 2016; Gibbings 2011; True and Wiener 2019) or on their impact and interaction with the local (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013; George 2018; McLeod 2015). Here we have chosen to interrogate the missing middle: to study the policy entrepreneurs that work transnationally to construct interpretive communities to support preferred policy agendas and make continuous efforts to maintain their own membership and authority within these policy communities.

Policy entrepreneurs, interpretive communities and social capital

In this analysis, our focus is on the work of WPS policy entrepreneurs who balance on the interface of global frameworks and local context working to promote the WPS agenda in national policy making and building their legitimacy as a member of the global WPS community through knowledge production around best practices. Lavee and Cohen (2019) characterise policy entrepreneurs as 'energetic actors who work with others in and around policymaking venues, leveraging resources to promote and generate a favoured policy change [and] who exploit opportunities to influence policy outcomes – without having the resources required to achieve this goal alone' (477). The concept of policy entrepreneur brings attention to dynamism, strategic focus, ability to leverage resources and willingness to work with others which are all crucial attributes of the members of the global WPS community that we have observed in our data. They also display traits of translators (Engle Merry 2006) and brokers (Mosse 2004). As demonstrated by Engle Merry (2006), translators and brokers 'translate up and down. They reframe local grievances by portraying them as human rights violations. They translate transnational ideas and practices down as ways of grappling with particular local problems' (42).

In our study of policy entrepreneurs and their interactions within the global WPS community, we have drawn substantially on David Mosse's (2004) theorisation of the policy – practice relationship to understand narratives of policy success, which are fundamental for any best practice to arise. For Mosse, the role of policy is to mobilise and maintain political support. To do so, policy needs to stabilise a hegemonic interpretation of events to legitimate practice (rather than orientate it). Successful policy requires the construction of a convincing story, aimed upwards to legitimise the spending of resources and to bring together diverse, often incompatible interests. However, a compelling story in its own right is not enough. Policy entrepreneurs also need a community around them, a network of people – senior managers, donors, officials, consultants – who view the world in a similar way and in whose interest it is to support the particular policy narrative. This group of people and their organisations form an interpretive community that can stabilise a hegemonic interpretation of events and as such claim success for the policy. It follows that initiatives are 'successful' when 'they sustain policy models offering a significant interpretation of events' (Mosse 2004, 657). Conversely, failure is not the failure to implement the plan but a 'failure of interpretation'. Projects can be 'failed by wider networks of support and validation' (658).

To explore the process of stabilising narratives of success within interpretive communities, we have drawn on Bourdieu's notion of capital. For Bourdieu, capital represents a power over the field at a given time (Bourdieu 1985, 196). Capital is accumulated by individuals over time through their past work, including their membership of a certain group (s) and it has the capacity to produce profit for themself (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu divides capital into three broad categories: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Each of these types of capital presents itself in both material and embodied forms. They are also interconnected and influence each other (Bourdieu 1985; 1986). Although policy actors, who are involved in constructing best practice narratives, use all these types of capital when needed, for the purpose of this paper, we have focused mainly on social capital. We explored how the WPS policy entrepreneurs exercise their social capital not only to construct best practices but also in the process help legitimise their membership of a global interpretive community.

For Bourdieu, social capital is

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to … membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu 1986, 21)

The extent to which an agent possesses social capital depends on the size and the nature of the network as well as their ability to exercise their own capital (Bourdieu 1986, 21). In other words, the advocates of the WPS agenda need to utilise their networks, both locally and internationally, to establish themselves as legitimate actors within the WPS field.

In this paper, we have used two types of capital introduced by Daho, Duclos, and Jouhanneau (2019) as constitutive of the peacebuilding field. Actors in this professional field incorporate both (i) capital of proximity that is derived from their access to the conflict-affected 'local' and (ii) international capital that relies on various connections to the 'international community' to position themselves and their programmes favourably. Local and international in this context are characterised by 'inherent slippage' (McLeod 2015). Rather than being seen as markers of (geographic) origin or nationality, we understand them as types of capital that actors engaged in peacebuilding policy processes can draw upon as they 'constantly reposition themselves vis-a-vis "the local" and "the global"' (Kappler 2015, 876).

International capital, which 'can be mobilised in specific social relations' (Daho, Duclos, and Jouhanneau 2019, 252), supports policy actors' career progression, access to funding, abilities to influence policy narratives and other goals. Sources of international capital include 'mobility (geographical and between jobs and positions); higher education and degrees from Western universities; strong command of the English language and of new public management dialects; residency in certain neighbourhoods; and a strong claim to "impartiality" (252). WPS policy actors mobilise their international capital through membership in a global community of WPS advocates – maintained through multi-country projects, membership of UN organisations (locally and internationally), and participation in international meetings, conferences and networks specialised to promote the WPS agenda. As part of performing their membership to this global WPS community, policy entrepreneurs may present themselves as the authoritative voice of 'local' people. To maintain their membership, they present themselves as experts, keep

themselves up-to-date with the latest developments in the Security Council and conduct research and validate their arguments and give advice on good practices for developing policies and implementing National Action Plans.

The capital of proximity can be mobilised by both expatriate and 'local' policy actors, by 'claiming a local knowledge or expertise, being able to navigate security challenges and to identify allies among domestic political elites' (Daho, Duclos, and Jouhanneau 2019, 252). In the WPS field, the capital of proximity can be mobilised through claims of knowledge and contacts among conflict-affected women, an ability to mobilise their participation through various project activities and access to the national government and policy makers. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security based in New York, is responsible for inviting a 'woman-in-conflict' to speak at the Security Council each year in October, a rare contact between the global policy-making forum and an individual woman representing the 'local' (Cook 2016; Gibbings 2011). Being able to make claims about being 'local' 'becomes a political resource as actors who are "most local" act as gatekeepers to communities and to the political legitimisation of intervention projects' (Kappler 2015, 882; also Martin de Almagro 2019). The capital of proximity allows policy entrepreneurs to maintain their authenticity in front of the international community, whereas international capital provides legitimacy for interactions with national governments.

The work of making successful policy requires the flow of ideas, contacts and power in all directions, not simply in a linear, unidirectional localisation of 'global' ideas. While policy entrepreneurs in the global WPS community translate the WPS agenda to suit local contexts, Sally Engle Merry reminds us that 'the source of global ideas and institutions is usually another locality that has developed an idea or practice that is translated into a form that circulates globally and is then transplanted into another locality' (Engle Merry 2006, 39). The best practice narrative acts as a mechanism for such global circulation of ideas. Policy entrepreneurs narrate best practice cases that are credible, intelligible and thus knowable by their policy community peers.

Civil war, post-conflict transition and peacebuilding in Nepal

Nepal has experienced a significant social and political transformation since the 1990s (Yadav 2016). Having witnessed the only successful Maoist insurgency in the twenty-first century, a popular uprising to oust a centuries-old monarchy, the incorporation of the erstwhile rebels into a multiparty democracy, a political awakening of disadvantaged regional, ethnic and caste groups, Nepal has gone through a process of transitioning from a Hindu monarchy into a secular, federal, republic in the past two decades (Thapa and Sharma 2009). Ethnic and cultural diversity, combined with religious and geographical differences, make Nepal a unique society with complex nuances, which are often invisible to outsiders. The social hierarchies are maintained through a combination of social and cultural capital, such as caste and ethnicity, class, gender, religion, geographical region and so forth. People's experience of war and peace are mediated through these intersecting hierarchies. Therefore, the ten-year civil war and ethnic conflicts after the peace agreement impacted people differently.

After the establishment of democratic government in 1990, which overthrew the monarchical system, people had many expectations of the government (Yadav 2020a).

However, due to the struggle over power between the political leaders and unstable government, people lost hope about the newly established democratic government (Yadav 2016). In the meantime, the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) announced its armed movement in 1996 against the government, called the 'the People's War'. With their agenda of social transformation, the movement became popular within a short period of time and spread from the rural Western Hills throughout the country. It became particularly popular among women and people from marginalised caste and ethnic groups. Around 30% of the Maoist combatants were women (Aguirre and Pietropaoli 2008; Yadav 2018). The People's War lasted for ten years, during which time over 200,000 people were displaced, over 13,000 people were killed and nearly 3,000 people disappeared (IDMC 2006; Yadav 2016). Women and girls faced sexual violence from both sides (Human Rights Watch 2014). In addition to these direct impacts, the country suffered from a range of indirect impacts of conflict and women in particular were severely impacted due to their gender roles and gendered social expectations. For instance, the wives of missing people continue living in limbo. On the one hand, they still do not know the whereabouts of their loved ones, on the other hand, they still have to fulfil the social expectation of being wives. Likewise, women ex-combatants have met with other challenges in post-conflict Nepal (Luna 2019).

Despite negative consequences of the civil war, the immediate post-conflict period (after the 2006 peace agreement between the Maoists and the parliamentary parties) saw unprecedented political transformations in Nepali history, behind which the Maoists and marginalised ethnic, regional and caste groups were the prime movers. The interim constitution adopted in 2007 was the most progressive in Nepal's history because it ensured the rights and the proportional representation of women and marginalised groups. As a result, the first Constituent Assembly (CA) election, held in 2008, saw a historical participation of women due to the 33% quota (Yadav 2020a). The Madhesh uprising which started in 2007 demanded equal rights and proportionate representation for people living in the Southern plains region, causing further displacement. The first CA did not deliver the promised constitution due to the struggle over power between the key political parties. The second CA elections were held in 2013 to finalise the constitution-making process. Women's representation in the second CA, at 30%, was below the guaranteed quota. Amidst the dispute over the rights of marginalised groups, the government endorsed the new controversial Constitution in September 2015, in the aftermath of the earthquake which killed 9,000 people and left over three million people homeless. The new Constitution was a push back for women, due to new provisions in the Constitution, such as the new citizenship bill that discriminates based on gender. With the new Constitution, Nepal became a federal state with 7 provinces. The dissatisfied ethnic groups, in particular Madhesi groups, started protesting against the new Constitution. The protest lasted for six months, causing blockades, deaths and injury. However, the government pushed its agenda and announced local elections in 2017, which had not taken place in 27 years. It was a historic election for women, who secured 41% of the seats in the local government (The Asia Foundation 2017).

Aid donors have had a strong presence in Nepal since the 1950s. As the country does not have a colonial past, observers have argued that development – *bikas* – constitutes Nepal's primary relationship with the rest of the world (Pigg 1992). And the story of development, 'seems to begin with foreign aid. It is as if the need for development was

discovered by foreigners – who were mostly oblivious to the country's previous history and transformations' (Donini and Sharma 2014, 119). Miklian, Lidén, and Kolås (2011) have sarcastically termed Nepal an 'ideal' country for aid agencies 'with its forthcoming government, high rates of poverty, extensive networks of local institutions, welcoming populace and not least its "permanent complex emergency" status' (286). Based squarely in the Kathmandu valley, aid donors and international organisations were slow to understand the success of the Maoist movement in relatively remote parts of the country and initially favoured 'law and order' solutions by strengthening the existing state capacities in contrast to the fundamental state restructuring called for by the rebels (Rasaratnam and Malagodi 2012). Since the peace agreement, the international organisations have sought to apply a blue-print of 'liberal peacebuilding' to post-conflict politics, offering technocratic and international expertise-based approaches to security sector reform, reintegration of former combatants, reform of political parties and institutions, and the promotion of social inclusion and gender equality (Gordon 2018; Westendorf 2018).

Nepal's National Action Plan as a WPS best practice

Nepal has been in the spotlight in the peacebuilding community for its implementation of the UNSCR1325 on Women, Peace and Security since 2009, with a narrative of best practice largely narrated to, and among, international policy audiences. A 'hybrid club' of policy entrepreneurs (Martin de Almagro 2018) worked together to create a Nepal NAP, by drawing on both the capital of proximity and international capital to build the legitimacy of the policy agenda and at the same time narrate a story that is easily digested by international audiences as an innovative best practice case.[2] This included leaders of some Kathmandu-based women's organisations (NGOs) as well as project managers and policy experts in INGOs and the UN system, who already had previous contacts from other initiatives.

Nepal became the first South Asian country to adopt a WPS NAP in 2011 (MoPR 2011). Although Nepal had been in the middle of the civil war in 2000 when the UNSCR 1325 was adopted, the Resolution was not widely known to people during the conflict years, discussions around UNSCR1325 starting in earnest only in 2007. A leading women's rights activist in Nepal recounted her first encounter with the WPS Agenda:

> I, myself, who has worked in the forefront with women survivors of sexual violence and conflict-affected women for so long, came to know about the existence of 1325 [UNSCR 1325] only in 2004 … After reviewing the resolution, I realized that it was a very important tool for us … I translated it into Nepali and organized an event towards the end of 2004 but no one knew about it until then.[3]

Nepali actors, however, quickly caught on and since the country adopted its WPS NAP in 2011, there has been a high level of interest in international policy-making circles in their experience. The 2015 *Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325* (UN Women 2015) heralded Nepal as one of the exemplar cases in national implementation, 'ahead of the curve'[4] in terms of consultation, localisation and funding format. One organisation involved in implementing the WPS agenda in Nepal describes the Nepal NAP as a 'global best practice […] drafted through a transparent, inclusive and participatory process with close involvement of conflict victims, civil society organisations, UN agencies and

development partners' (Search for Common Ground 2016, 8). Similarly, many international policy mapping projects and briefing papers have picked Nepal as an example of a best practice NAP, although with varying ideas of which aspects of the process constitute specific best practices. Analysis by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014) claims that the Nepal NAP was 'developed out of one of the most consultative processes', 'includes one of the most comprehensive background sections' and 'an equally comprehensive action plan'. The Routledge Handbook on Women, Peace and Security also raises Nepal as an example of a NAP that 'was developed in an inclusive, ongoing process with strong local grounding in [civil society organisations] (CSOs)' (Björkdahl and Mannegren Selimovic 2019). Although the accounts vary in their identification of specific practices in the Nepali NAP process, the themes of consultations, civil society involvement and 'localisation' are recurring themes, as we will outline below.

How does one then successfully frame a policy process as highly locally owned, consulted and adapted and as a best practice that can be lifted from the Nepal experience and replicated elsewhere? We argue that the narrators of the Nepal experience have been able to wrap their experiences into a globally relevant best practice by deploying both international capital and the capital of proximity in appropriate ratios. After discussing each of the types of capital separately, we will discuss the implications that this process has around constructions of acceptable agency for WPS.

The capital of proximity

The NAP has been deemed to be a key tool for localising the WPS agenda to UN member states. While the NAP is a tool for national level implementation of an international agenda, its perceived success depends on its ability to reach the 'authentic' local in villages, districts and towns where the conflict-affected woman, the central but elusive subject of the WPS agenda, can be found. The local comes up in several ways during different phases of the Nepal NAP, particularly in the extensive consultations organised in district headquarters across the country, civil society's decisive role in driving the process forward and the localisation initiatives taking place in the implementation phase.

The consultations for drafting the NAP are perhaps the most cited best practice from Nepal. After a process that would later be cited as a central best practice, civil society actors, in collaboration with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction and the donor Peace Support Working Group, organised consultation workshops across Nepal, 'to ensure a participatory process for wider ownership' (Saathi 2011, 5). Fifty-two meetings and workshops were held over a period of three months in 2010, reaching over 3000 participants in two-thirds of Nepal's districts. These consultations have become an important part of the narrative of successful WPS policy in Nepal. Capital-based NGO leaders and their local counterparts from smaller women's organisations and networks collected 1500 action items that would later be incorporated into the NAP log-frame.[5] The national-level women's civil society organisations and networks were seen to be key in facilitating access to women in the local, particularly 'their ability to facilitate participation by women to identify their social, economic and other development needs provided the basis for consultations on the NAP' (UN Women 2015). Others argue that such far reaching consultations, 'driven by civil society', were beneficial for the quality of the NAP,

translating 'into the high specificity of the plan's implementation matrix' (Trojanowska, Lee-Koo, and Johnson 2018).

A related component of a 'best practice NAP' is the strong involvement of Kathmandu-based civil society organisations in drafting of the plan, with 'government, civil society and external development partners [as] equal stakeholders right from the initial process to the end'.[6] UN Women (2015), for example, explained the reasons behind Nepal's 'successful participatory and consultative approach' as the collaboration between donor agencies and civil society organisations 'who had long-standing trust and good relationships with women and the wider community at the local level'. In this narrative, civil society actors have the central agency and there is little mention of specific actions taken by the government, whether in facilitating consultations with 'local women' or in building collaborative relationships with donors or civil society.

The (perceived) access of the capital-based civil society organisations to communities across the country was in marked contrast with many of the other key actors in the NAP process, such as the newly established gender unit at the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) or the Peace and Security team at UN Women, neither of which had a direct presence outside the capital. The role of NGOs working on women's rights was seen as central throughout the process, from consultations to monitoring and evaluation, for their access to information about women's needs and experiences at the local level. This was both a logistical advantage vis-à-vis the capital-based donor agencies and government departments as well as a relational one, as women's organisations were seen as more able to build trust in order to talk to women about sensitive topics, such as war-time trauma or sexual violence (Saferworld 2012).

Finally, the local remains an important object of intervention during NAP implementation, particularly in the development of a policy 'innovation' called localisation. In the early years of NAP implementation, Nepal became a focus country for a Localization programme by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP 2013), which organised localisation workshops at the local level, training-of-trainers workshops as well as localisation guidelines. A publicised component in the Nepal programme was the drafting of the Localization Guidelines, which were distributed to local governments to guide them in making decisions in support of implementing UNSCR 1325. For its role in the Localization programme, Nepal again became the centre of international best practice exchanges. In particular, an international conference was organised in Kathmandu in 2018[7], at which GNWP partners from across the Global South attended to learn from the Nepal experience in localising the 1325 NAP. Hosting such an event allowed policy entrepreneurs working in Nepal to deploy the capital of proximity that they had built through building approaches to localisation for the benefit of raising international capital.

The localisation narrative portrayed by the NAP process, while useful for building capital of proximity, relies on a spatially distinct and static conception of the local. The local is somewhere out there, difficult to access due to Nepal's extreme topography and diverse ethno-linguistic make-up, distances which are bridged by women's civil society organisations with networks that span the country and with affinity to the woman 'on the ground'. The narrative that takes consultation workshops and project implementation out into the villages and districts as the only way to reach the authentic women of 1325 is silent on the considerable transformations, political, social and economic, that have thoroughly shaken up what could also be considered to be local

Nepal. For example, the large-scale migration taking place during and after the conflict from all regions of Nepal into the Kathmandu valley as well as outside the country challenges the idea of a static local.

Not only are there more people living in the Kathmandu valley than ever, there are also more women represented at different levels of political decision-making. Political institutions themselves have devolved, with the provinces becoming the main locus of political decision-making on a range of issues. As the WPS NAP was being drafted, the former warring party, the CPN (Maoist) had become the largest party in the post-peace agreement Constituent Assembly election, and the politically highly aware ex-combatants were being integrated into society, many of them women. The interim constitution (2007) had been very progressive in terms of women's rights, with a 33% political quota for women.[8] As a result, women's participation increased from 5% to 33% in national level politics (Yadav 2020a). The elected women came from a range of ethnic, caste and educational backgrounds, reflecting the general tendency towards a diverse, inclusive assembly. Although the second Constituent Assembly 2013 saw a slight drop in women's participation, women politicians were able to secure 41% of seats in local level elections in 2017.

As the previously highly centralised and exclusionary state institutions opened up throughout the post-conflict transition, particularly in the first Constitutional Assembly elected in 2008, the 'local', diverse Nepal became to be represented in democratic institutions in ways that had not been seen before. The conservative backlash to a diverse and inclusive Assembly built up over the coming years, resulting in the inability of the CA to deliver a new Constitution during its tenure. It is notable that the account of the WPS NAP development as well as the text of the plan itself makes little mention of this unprecedented opening of political influence for women of all kinds, particularly from marginalised caste, ethnic and regional backgrounds.

In a reading that considers the spatial upheavals and the movement of bodies and ideas during and after the conflict as a defining feature Nepal's recent history, the local did not wait to be consulted but rather occupied formal institutions of power as well as the towns and the cities that had previously been defined by exclusion based on gender, caste and ethnicity. Such a reading that would give 'the local' more agency and dynamism does not fit well with the WPS narrative that relies considerably on the capital of proximity, i.e. the policy entrepreneur's ability to provide access to the hard-to-reach, voiceless conflict-affected woman, for a participatory and consultative policy process.

International capital

While being able to build legitimacy through their access to the local conflict-affected woman, WPS policy entrepreneurs are also effective in deploying international capital. To make claims to membership of the global WPS community, policy entrepreneurs must describe their experiences in terms that are easily recognised by their peers internationally and appeal to the liberal, universal values that are deemed to be associated with the international sphere. Policy entrepreneurs draw upon their international networks and linguistic skills for a collaborative telling of the WPS policy narrative. Elite women in capital-based CSOs are well versed in results-based management, which is required

by donors for project funding but is also considered to be a central component of a good practice NAP (Lyytikäinen and Jauhola 2020).

Furthermore, the discourse of women's rights and gender equality fit well within the universalist discourse promoted by the WPS agenda (Gibbings 2011) that denies a politics of difference. This leaves the policy entrepreneurs vulnerable to charges of elitism and excludes those without sufficient international capital from the policy community. As related by a young Dalit rights activist, those without sufficient international capital lack a language in which to speak to donors, a language that would frame grievances in universal terms, stripped of contestation and history:

> In embassy meetings, you only meet Brahim-Chettri women. […] We have worked for 100 years with the dominant caste, now it's the time that they should work with us. […] If I am in front of you, you can see me. Chettri-Bahun women are in front of the state, of the donors, the media. We [Dalits] have only one judge, one government lawyer. We truly want substantive representation everywhere in the state. Embassies want the yes-person. People are happy with appreciation. They don't want to listen about negative things. We people haven't created yet the language, the language that donors will understand. Brahmins are the people who know how to talk, what to talk, when to talk … sophisticated … They don't want to go through the pain of talking to people with a different language.

Moreover, to describe a best practice, experiences as well as claims to policy success must be articulated in terms that ensure a good fit with the global WPS agenda and thus are easily recognised by peers in the global WPS community. This requires ironing out complexity in accounts of post-conflict transition and following the generalisation about women, conflict and violence that informs the global WPS agenda. In the case of Nepal, this has resulted in narratives that portray a unidimensional picture of women's participation in post-conflict politics, downplaying the role of other identities and the complexity of conflict and insecurity, both before and after the formal peace agreement. For example, a leading WPS advocate in Nepal describes the exclusion of women from decision-making as an important rationale behind drafting the WPS NAP in an interview for the US-based Institute for Inclusive Security:

> … in spite of women being the key agents and having actively advocated for peace even during the time of the conflict they have not been included, particularly in the decision-making positions for peacebuilding, of all the other mechanisms that have been set up for peacebuilding.[9]

The focus on both women's potential agency as peacebuilders and their exclusion from decision-making reflects international WPS policy narrative, particularly the 'participation pillar', more closely than the dynamism of Nepal's recent political transformations. The Maoist conflict had offered a stark alternative to established gender narratives both in their rhetoric as well as practices: in their demands for equality between the sexes as well as their ability to recruit considerable numbers of women into their ranks throughout the country. The CPN-M stated from the outset of the insurgency 'that gender transformation is part and parcel of their larger programme for radical economic, political and social transformation' (Tamang 2009, 73–74).

In order to fit with the template of an international best practice, the WPS NAP also builds on a definition of internationally-accepted conflict, which in the context of Nepal has been narrow and exclusionary. The WPS NAP focuses specifically on the Maoist

insurgency and its aftermath, not the dozens of ethnic conflicts that erupted after the peace agreement in 2006, resulting in hundreds of deaths and the displacement of thousands. It is these numerous 'unofficial' conflicts that have brought donor attention to *janajati* (indigenous), caste-based *dalit* and regional *madhesi* grievances and encouraged women from marginalised backgrounds to become 'vocal about their resentment towards Bahun and Chhetri women claiming to speak for them as 'Nepali women'' (Tamang 2009, 71). For many of them, the WPS narrative has appeared to be 'conflict-blind' at best, elitist and exclusionary at worst. The WPS best practice narrative depends on a denial of the 'politics of difference' (63) and its importance for women from marginalised caste, ethnic and regional backgrounds.

Who writes 1325?[10]

As becomes clear from the above discussion, many women's experiences have been excluded from the NAP, in spite of an alleged localised and participatory process. In this final section, we explore in more detail the mechanisms that led to the privileging of some actors while excluding others. In our examination of the use of both international capital as well as the capital of proximity in the construction of the Nepal NAP as a WPS best practice, women civil society leaders, especially NGOs working on women's rights, emerge as the actors able to make the most convincing claims of being simultaneously local and global, and thus are at the centre of the narrative of best practice. The established, capital-based women's organisations, and their peers in international NGOs and networks, are well placed in Nepal's peacebuilding political economy to access 'local communities' as well as the elite corridors of power in Kathmandu. Civil society also holds an important place in the WPS discourse more broadly and civil society organisations tend to be preferred partners for many funding organisations (Björkdahl and Mannegren Selimovic 2019; Hamilton et al. 2021).

Across our material, we see indications that civil society actors, both Nepali and international, were better able to field a combination of international capital and capital of proximity than the Nepali government. Although the government provided support for the development of the National Action Plan, the non-state actors (I/NGOs and international donor organisations) in many ways took the lead, including developing a log-frame-based NAP, projectising the implementation activities and carrying out regular monitoring and evaluation activities (Saathi 2011). This approach was more in line with governance practices of projects run by an NGO than the ways in which interventions are designed and implemented by government ministries. Although the NAP has been touted as a member-state mechanism in the international WPS literature, the Nepali state contributes to the best practice narrative primarily through its absence. For one interviewee in an international agency, a government ministry was simply one of the project partners to whom specific 'capacity building activities at the district level' were 'contracted to'.[11] For others, the state is commended for making space for action by civil society actors and other WPS experts. At the local level, the local state institutions are deemed in need of reform and capacity building, for example through the localisation guidelines (e.g. GNWP 2013). The absence of the state may have helped in shaping the best practice narrative and allowed the global to interact with the local, via civil society elites on both sides, without the interference of 'troublesome' authorities or politics.

As NGOs present themselves as civil society, it helps them frame their role in terms of the values of participation, accountability and consensus and allows for framing social change as manageable and trackable projects. This leaves out more contested aspects of the post-conflict transition that donors and the national elites may be less comfortable with supporting or engaging with. Indeed, the NAP process was notable in the way a small number of Kathmandu-based organisations, with access to international community and funding, were involved in the NAP development and the implementation process. Excluded from the WPS field were those deemed too political, e.g. too closely tied to conflict dynamics, such as organisations run by ex-combatants. NGOs outside Kathmandu, even those working directly with conflict affected women, were only invited to participate, if at all, through the format of consultations. An ex-combatant respondent, who was a member of an organisation established to support women ex-combatants related in an interview:

> This organisation was established to support women ex-combatants. We went to ask for funding from all these organisations who are working to improve the lives of women impacted by conflict. We are the victims because some of us suffered sexual violence during the war, and we have a first-hand experience of war. However, we don't get any funding. When we ask for money, they ask us to submit a proposal. We did several times, but our proposal never seems to meet their standard.

She also mentioned that 'we are seen as political activists, not as victims of conflict or a civil society organisation. Because of our affiliation with the Maoist party, they are scared that they might be blamed for supporting a political cause'.[12] For many, the WPS agenda did not hold much relevance beyond its potential to facilitate access to project funding. One of those who were not involved in the NAP making, even though they were involved in supporting the victims of conflict said, 'UNSCR 1325 is a useful instrument but it has become a money-making business for some NGOs. They worked within their own groups. We are not interested'.[13] These organisations, and many others, may have been working with women on issues of peace and security but were unable to make their claims in internationally intelligible terms. They were imbued with too much capital of proximity, too context-specific in their work.

The excess dose of capital of proximity also means proximity to issues of identity and contestation beyond women's rights, around which the WPS agenda and its policy entrepreneurs tend to be uncomfortable. In Nepal's contested post-conflict transitions, it has typically been the elite-based political parties and NGOs, including women's organisations, that have sought to defend the status quo by appealing to the values of democracy and human rights, national unity and social cohesion (Lawoti 2014; Sharma 2012). Among leaders of the women's movement, the appeals to 'universal values' to counter the politics of difference in the post conflict era reflect well the narratives of the WPS community, which celebrated the Nepal NAP as one its best practice achievements. The WPS narrative draws on (civil society) women as embodiment of universal values of peace, justice and equality (Gibbings 2011; Martin de Almagro 2018), an image which does not go well with the idea that women also have caste, ethnic and regional affiliations that may be the basis of exclusion and violence, but also political mobilisation and solidarity. An essentialist conception of women as primarily excluded according to their gender identity and mobilised to work together towards 'peace and security' is more

compelling to an international policy audience that looks for universal stories and best practices. In the case of Nepal, this interest in easily digested narratives has overlooked the politics of difference that drew upon context-specific power hierarchies of caste, ethnicity, religion and region, including within the women's movement.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how a narrative about best practice is constructed through the exercise of particular forms of international and local capital that inform policy development. We argued that for the construction of best practices, the combination of the local and the international is key. Neither international capital nor the capital of proximity on their own is sufficient. Moreover, the division of actors into 'international' and 'local' is only useful to a point. Rather we should look at these processes of localisation and internationalisation that all actors, regardless of their citizenship and organisation, engage in. In the case of the Nepal 1325 NAP, we found both Nepali and international policy entrepreneurs to be successful and visible actors in the process, but only when they could legitimately represent themselves as international and local to sufficient degrees. We have also demonstrated that the narratives of policy success do not necessarily need to correspond to a verifiable policy impact on the ground to be compelling.

In particular, non-state actors – whether labelled CSOs, NGOs or networks – seem best able to draw on processes of localisation and internationalisation simultaneously. Civil society organisations, or women's organisations more specifically, are able to embody the universal values of rights, democracy and justice and at the same time show close links to the local, speaking for the local in a language that the international can understand. We have argued, however, that such a good fit with what the global WPS community is looking for in localisation of the agenda comes with a problematically narrow focus that ignores a diversity of identities, conflicts, insecurities and actors. Such formulaic narratives of WPS shape strongly how the policy community understands questions of gender and post-conflict politics. With a concept of gender that is neither intersectional nor relational, the WPS agenda misses major political transformations that do not fall within neat categories of women's participation or protection nor follow linear progression of project management templates.

Notes

1. We build our analysis on a data set that includes policy and programme documents produced by international institutions, NGOs and the Nepal Government as well as qualitative interviews conducted by the authors individually between 2016 and 2018.
2. See Yadav 2020b for a detailed analysis of the process involved in the development of the first NAP.
3. Interview by PY, July 2016.
4. 'Bandana Rana (Nepal) – On the Development of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 for Nepal', video on the Inclusive Security Youtube channel, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvcO_lBRiJg&t=177s on 27 May 2020.
5. The logframe (or Logical Framework) is a project planning and management tool that is widely used in development aid projects. It has also become a recommended tool for governments who wish to adopt a 'results-based' WPS NAP.

6. 'Bandana Rana (Nepal) – On the Development of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 for Nepal', video on the Inclusive Security Youtube channel, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvcO_lBRiJg&t=177s on 27 May 2020.
7. 'From Best Practice Example to a Standard Practice: Conference on the Localization of UNSCR 1325 and Supporting Resolutions', news article accessed on 27 May 2020 at https://gnwp.org/localization_conference/.
8. However, the Maoists did receive stark criticism from women activists for fielding an all-male talks team during the 2003 ceasefire. There were also reports of class/caste/ethnic hierarchies among the Maoists, including Maoist women.
9. 'Bandana Rana (Nepal) – On the Development of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 for Nepal', video on the Inclusive Security Youtube channel, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvcO_lBRiJg&t=177s on 27 May 2020.
10. Title inspired by Basu (2016b).
11. Interview with ML, October 2016.
12. Interview with PY, December 2017.
13. Interview with ML, June 2016.

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