**Disrupting colonial continuities:**

**Who is important enough for the EU to seek legitimacy from?**

With this article, I critically analyse the audiences that the European Union targets in its attempts to legitimise its governing of the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS agenda). With the help of feminist and post-colonial theories, I explore who is the EU seeking legitimacy from and to what degree are these legitimation processes based on colonial assumptions?

I argue that the selection of audiences reflects and potentially reinforces underlying power structures such as colonial continuities in legitimation processes. To demonstrate the potential colonial continuities of the EU’s regional governance in the global arena, I analyse the legitimation attempts of the EU during the annual open debate in the UN Security Council on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The UN Security Council, as an arena of legitimation, offers a variety of legitimation audiences inside and outside the UN SC, including former colonial and colonised audiences. Furthermore, the WPS agenda helps shed light on the continuous colonial assumptions governing gender equality by Global North institutions, such as the EU. Focusing on the audiences that regional governance institutions choose to address thus provides us with additional insights into the role of these layers and their relationship. Therefore, inquiring into the selections made by the EU as a legitimation agent offers a different entry point of post-colonial research in legitimation research and disruption of epistemological assumptions around EU and European studies.

**EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTION IN LEGITIMATION RESEARCH**

In International Relations, political actors aim to maintain or reinforce their power (Morse and Keohane 2014; Zelli 2018). Therefore, in principle, rule and authority are in need of legitimation. Nurturing this need, political actors undergo a permanent attempt to stimulate and nurse the beliefs in legitimacy (Zürn 2018, 2012), which means legitimacy is generated through legitimation processes (ibid. 2012). Legitimation is thus an ‘activity which can be observed’ (Barker 2001:24), for example, in public statements or diplomatic exchanges. In studying power structures and colonial continuities, it is essential to also look at the delegitimation process, where political actors, for example, condemn a powerful state or revoke support from it in international institutions (Walt 2005). However, this part of legitimation research focuses on how Global North actors condemn a Global South actor, particularly when it comes to democracy deficits and human rights violations. One reason for that focus is based on the assumptions that (de-)legitimation processes usually refer to a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions- Critically analysing Zürn’s definition that legitimation processes are ‘strategic attempts to justify the existing power and authority relations embodied in the institutions of global governance (2012: 42), it raises the question of to what colonial continuities regarding power relations influence degree legitimation processes. Theories on global political legitimacy outside the mainstream framework belong, for example, to a fragmented ‘pluralist’ tradition of normative political thought (see Macdonald and Macdonald 2019). Moreover, Ba’s research (2013) argues that regional organisations in the Global South, like ASEAN, need to legitimate themselves both internally towards their own membership but also externally, in particular towards powerful Western states and organisations. Another example of critical theories is the work of Louise Chappell. This research explores the legitimacy of gender justice at the International Criminal Court (2016) by using a feminist theoretical framework. Although the legitimation research is rich in literature (Rittberger and Philipp Schroeder 2016; Scholte and Tallberg 2018), post-colonial and/or feminist approaches seem not to have entered the mainstream knowledge production.

The need for feminist and post-colonial legitimation research

Feminist and post-colonial research is helpful for critically analysing the legitimation studies on the EU because it allows going beyond Eurocentric approaches of the method, methodology and epistemology. It helps map out what legitimation research is missing out on due to the fact that knowledge is historically being pushed to the margins or even destroyed? Bringing another entry point to how EU and European research is conducted, marginalised knowledge production by feminist and post-colonial scholars presents an opportunity to fill the research gaps of legitimation research.

Before discussing the essential arguments of feminist epistemology, it is necessary to ensure that the definition of method and methodology is explained. This is necessary as method and methodology are sometimes not separated sharp enough. The research method refers to the way of gathering evidence. This includes listening to informants or observing behaviour (Harding 1987: 2). Methodology refers to how research does or should proceed (ibid. 1987: 3). I identify as crucial to disrupting the legitimation research in EU studies by applying feminist epistemologies that help shed light on how legitimation research proceeds. Hence, epistemological issues certainly have vital implications for how general theoretical structures can and should be applied to disciplines and for the choice of research methods (ibid.). According to Sandra Harding, traditional epistemologies systematically exclude the possibility that women could be agents of knowledge. The voice of science is a masculine one whose history is written from only the point of men (of the dominant class and race). I argue that in traditional epistemologies, not only women are excluded from being agents of knowledge, but also every other group of knowledge agents that do not belong to the dominant group are being marginalised or even silenced. This phenomenon also applies to Black European and EU Studies, which contributes to decolonising how knowledge is produced, collected, and applied in academia (Nimako, Kwame 2019). For example, the work of Anton Wilhelm Amo from the 18th century is suspected to be destroyed because it dealt with the legal status of Black people in Europe (De jure Maurorum in Europa). He was the first Black philosopher at a German University and arrived as an enslaved in Germany from Ghana (see Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg). The case of Wilhelm Anton Amo demonstrates the long history of Black Theories being put to the margin, even are destroyed, because theories and methods are framed as not scientific enough. These colonial continuities in knowledge production raise the epistemological questions: What tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge?

What kind of things can be known, and which aspects are being (intentionally or unintentionally) left out? In legitimation research in EU and European Studies, power relations and maintaining political power is crucial to understanding how political actors are seeking legitimacy from whom and how. The mutual constitution of legitimacy-claiming and legitimacy-granting practices is thus always shaped by intricate political and power relations (Bernstein 2011, 2018; Clark 2005: 254).However, some historical events that clearly shaped the EU and Europe as powerful geopolitical actors are often left out (see El-Tayeb 2008; Fanon 1961). One example is the so-called Congo Conference from 1884 to 1885 is one example. Following the invitation of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, representatives of European states, the United States of America, and the Ottoman Empire came together to negotiate the division of the Global South into colonies (see Reichstagsprotokolle, 1884/85). The conference did not initiate colonialism, but it was a significant event to legitimise and formalise colonialisation as a process (see Die Dekoloniale Berliner Afrika Konferenz). When it comes to European Studies, the conference is rarely taking into account the construction of Europe as a political and economic power. As a result, today, the relationship between the EU, as a former colonial power, and the Global South, consisting of colonised countries, is faced with colonial continuities in theory and practice (see Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018).

To disrupt these colonial continuities, feminist and post-colonial methods, methodologies and epistemologies offer a possibility to widen the perspective of how knowledge about Europe/the EU is being produced. An example of how post-colonial feminist epistemologies help disrupt dominant assumptions in legitimation research is Soumita Basu’s work on putting the Global South into the centre of WPS governance. Basu emphasises that it is essential to highlight the roots and branches of UNSCR 1325 that lie outside the UN SC, including in the Global South, in order to give legitimacy to the WPS agenda’ (Basu 2016: 365). Considering legitimation processes that go beyond governmental structures thus could help to elaborate the idea of how bottom-up approaches find their way into the official implementation of the WPS agenda. As a result, post-colonial feminist theories offer an opportunity for researchers to question the dominant understanding of who a knowledge producer can be and where to look for them. For example, the methodology of Feminist Institutionalism offers a theoretical framework built on the assumption that institutions (in)formal rules, norms, conventions, and connections are shaped by social constructs (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010; Thomson 2019), such as gender and race. With regard to the legitimation attempts of political actors, Feminist Institutionalism thus sheds light on the manner in which regional organisations design their WPS policies and how they legitimate the regional characteristics of such. In terms of methods, the post-colonial and feminist canon goes beyond the stir adding Black women as interview partners or only coding statements by using ‘race-related’ paragraphs. It is about applying a feminist lens when it comes to producing, translating, interpreting, and analysing data. ‘Methods not only specify ways of identifying whose insights and experiences we should draw upon, but also give an account of the steps we take to the potential for reading our epistemological perspective into our observations’ (Ackerly and True 2020: 155).

As this research focuses on the WPS agenda, which is based on feminist thinking, the eurocentrism in Feminism cannot be put aside. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 'Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism'(1991) and ‘Under Western Eyes (1988) belong to the post-colonial canon that has highly impacted the Feminist Theory of International Politics. Theories authored in the West bear the authority of the West (Mohanty 1988). African scholars such as Amina Mama and Hakima Abbas (2015), Sylvia Tamale (2020) and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi (1997) destabilised the solid foundation on which the Eurocentric term ‘gender’ was constituted. They highlighted the importance of appreciating the multiple explorations of the dynamic concept and its cultural specificity. One consequence of Western centring theories in Feminism has led to the perpetuation of othering Global South feminist theories. The Global South is considered 'politically immature and 'underdeveloped' (Mohanty 1988) and would therefore not be capable of theorising feminist ideas? In practice, this colonial continuity has led to feminist theories being mainly about integrating marginalised groups into an exclusionary system, not about reforming the exclusionary system and representing the interests of marginalised groups in the long term (Amos und Parmar 1984; Yuval-Davis N. 2006). This epistemological violence is also mirrored that feminist theories from scholars from the Global South hardly make it into the academic EU discourse. If those theories succeed to be discussed, it is usually because academics in the Global North, with origins in the Global South, have a greater chance to present those theories to the dominating audience, which is eurocentric. This raises the question of whose knowledge about European Studies is identified as legitimate? Whose feminist beliefs count in the current gender discourse? Which methods of knowledge are perceived as adequate?

**THE EUROPEAN UNION SEEKING LEGITIMACY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE**

The European Union is a regional organisation embedded in global governance structures such as the United Nations (UN). With the UN, the EU shares core values and principles and a strong commitment to multilateralism (Zamfir and Fardel 2020). In line with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Security Council reacts to threats to peace or acts of aggression by calling for peaceful settlement or imposing sanctions or even authorising the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security. In general, the UN SC is an arena of legitimation with (in)formal rules and procedures in an institutional setting of global governance. These rules form the institutional setting and impact how different agents use a legitimation arena. One example of how the formal rules of the UN SC as a legitimation arena shape the way legitimation agents behave is the order of who is being addressed directly at the beginning of the statements. For example, it is common for the current representative of the country that is chairing the UN SC meeting is to be addressed in the first paragraph of a statement.

The EU in the UN Security Council

As a regional organisation, it relies on its member states to negotiate its positions with the rest of the UN SC. In general, the responsibilities of EU member states are clearly stated in article 34 of the Treaty on European Union: ‘Member States represented on the UN Security Council should coordinate their positions, defend the positions and interests of the Union, and inform the other Member States and the High Representative.’ It is worth mentioning that BREXIT impacts the power balance in the UN SC. At the moment, France is the only EU Member State to have a permanent seat on the UN SC. To maintain and enlarge its political power within the UN, the EU uses different legitimation strategies. In is need of legitimation, it undergoes a permanent attempt to stimulate and nurse beliefs in legitimacy (Zürn 2018, 2012). This attempt is a process that refers to a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. For example, the EU understands itself as a gatekeeper of human rights. Therefore, the EU’s attempts to stimulate and nurse the beliefs in legitimacy are traditionally linked to human rights. In short, the EU applies legitimation processes to generate legitimacy. Influenced by historically shaped power relations, the EU's political power deficit varies from political thematic fields. Looking at the EU as a legitimate Human Rights actor, the EU’s legitimacy deficit is rather low. Consequently, their power deficit is rather low compared to other regional actors. Despite the EU’s low power deficit regarding promoting human rights externally, the European Union has to put strategies in place to legitimise its political power as a goalkeeper of human rights. Hence, legitimation and delegitimation are decisive for developing legitimacy beliefs’ (Zürn 2018: 68). One event where the EU applies legitimation strategies to maintain its political power in the UN System is the Annual Open Debate on WPS in the UN SC. For this purpose, the UN SC is defined as an arena of legitimation where the EU seeks legitimacy through using legitimation processes. I argue that the institutional setting of the UN SC is highly hierarchical and influences which audiences are identified as worthy of seeking legitimacy from and which are not. When talking about legitimacy and power, it cannot be neglected that the institutional setting of the UN SC provides a certain imbalance of power and therefore has an impact on who is seeking legitimacy from who. The legitimation arena is shaped so that the UN SC consists of member states with different privileges, such as veto rights. The UN SC is divided into the P5, the permanent members, the ten non-permanent members, and those member states that don't belong to either one of those groups such as multilateral organisations, like the EU, or observer states such as the Vatican. Taking a closer look at the grouping of member states and their representation, the so-called P5 is named first: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Although Europe is represented with two permanent seats, no country in Latin America and the Caribbean, the African continent, the Pacific Islands or South East Asia is represented. Despite the two seats of European countries, the EU has called for a seat in the UN SC. The colonial continuities are evident in the shire representation in the P5. Someone can argue that his colonial continuity in the institutional setting of the UN SC does no longer have an impact on how legitimation agents seek legitimacy because the rotating Presidency of the Council could be identified as an attempt to create variety in the UN SC’ representation aiming to counter underlying power structures. The rotation of the chair thus represents a chance for less influential member states to shape the WPS agenda. One example is the passing of the first resolution of the WPS agenda. During its presidency in 2000, Namibia brought together other council members to promote UN SCR 1325. With resolution 1325 in 2000, the UN SC has integrated gender security into its work. It was the first resolution of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and covered four pillars: Prevention, Protection, Participation and, Relief and Recovery. Until today, the SC has adopted ten resolutions forming an international policy framework that gives 'gender legitimacy' to the expansionary mandate of the SC in the new millennium (Diane Otto 2004). The members advocating included the delegations from former colonial powers and colonised countries such as Bangladesh, Jamaica, Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. This example could be interpreted as an excellent example of how the rotation principle results in cooperation among member states through a rotating representation. It also shows how formal rules in the UN SC as a legitimation arena function as a tool to ensure diplomatic norms and values all member states agreed on. Furthermore, it allows member states that are less involved to be engaged with certain policy areas. However, Global South member states’ vital role in 2000 for the global WPS agenda is often left out. On 8 March 2000, Bangladesh's Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury linked gender inequality and international insecurity. In retrospect, Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury's remark on International Women's Day was groundbreaking. It was the first time at the SC that gender, peace and security were addressed in that manner by a member state. Later in 2000, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations organised a workshop on gender and peacekeeping, which Namibia hosted. This workshop was fundamental for the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on gender mainstreaming gender in peace-keeping operations. Regularly, Bineta Diop, the African Union's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, delivers statements in the UN SC annual debate on WPS. This misconception of the Global South's role in advancing and legitimating the WPS agenda is based on colonial continuities in international politics (Parashar, 2018). To successfully push back the pushbacks, colonial continuities within legitimation processes need to be recognised, disrupted, and finally to overcome. Therefore, it is essential to study the EU's regional governance in the global arena with a post-colonial approach because ‘the regional (meso) dimensions [are] often ignored in favour of global or national level analysis’ (Haastrup 2018: 222). Taking all these power imbalances into account, this research takes a closer look at the EU’s attempts to seek legitimacy in the UN SC, using the annual debate on WPS as a case to explore to what degree the EU has overcome colonial continuities during legitimation processes.

**The Annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security**

Today, the European Union understands itself as a global gatekeeper of human rights and identifies gender equality as a key priority. This development can be defined as an outstanding achievement compared to Europe’s long history as a colonial aggressor or benefitting from the political economy of colonialism. It is a fact that the majority of the EU's member states are former colonial powers or have at least been involved in the political economy of colonialism ([Bhambra](https://foreignpolicy.com/author/gurminder-k-bhambra/), Bouka, Persaud, Rutzibwa, et al. 2020). Like Germany, Italy, and Portugal, European countries systematically organised mass killings and eradication of Peoples from the Pacific, across Africa to the Americas. Considering this change, the EU’s mission to be a gatekeeper of human rights can be labelled as a positive change. Nevertheless, how political powers come and maintain their power matters. For the EU, this means its colonial history matters for all policy areas, including the WPS agenda. It is crucial to understand how the WPS agenda is being institutionalised within the EU structures themselves to map the various forms of colonial continuities in the EU's governance.

‘Just as Women, Peace and Security represents a global agenda, the EU has pursued global partnerships and collaborations on Women, Peace and Security.’ (Mara Marinaki, European External Action Service, Former Principal Advisor on Gender and on Women Peace and Security/UNSC Resolution 1325, 2017)

Due to its significant political and financial capital, the EU is a crucial WPS actor. It counts as one of the WPS actors continuously advocating the(ir) agenda in the UN SC and beyond. Although the EU is a regional organisation, its WPS policies and programmes are implemented, for example, through its EU delegations across the world. The EU adopted its Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security as its gender regime for WPS in 2008. The Comprehensive Approach to 1325 is a detailed document laying out how the WPS agenda should be integrated into the EU's external action, including a set of benchmarks. However, the text was drafted in general terms and 'failed to specify what exactly was meant by a gender perspective, how it should be accomplished and who would be responsible for its implementation' (Almqvist 2021). Ten years later, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted the first-ever Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and welcomed the EU Strategic Approach to WPS (2018). The Strategic Approach aims to reaffirm the holistic implementation of the WPS agenda and recognises gender equality and women's empowerment as a prerequisite for dealing with the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. **In 2015, EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and UNSCR 1325** was created. In 2021, the title and mandate changed with a new representative, the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity. To support the EU’s efforts to realise the WPS agenda, the informal task force on WPS was established in 2009 to accelerate the exchange between EU institutions, member states, and civil society. **Although the EU faces** institutional obstacles to performing a role as a gender actor in external affairs (Desmidt 2021; Guerrina and Wright 2016),the EU is vocal in criticising the lacking gender perspective and demanding the WPS implementation (Thomas Mayr-Harting, Former Head of the Permanent Mission of the EU to the United Nations 2011). To fully understand where the EU anchors the WPS agenda within its institutions, it is also worth looking into other gender regimes of the EU. This includes the [Gender Equal Opportunities Strategy](https://eurotradeunion.eu/documents/WGgender.pdf) 2018-2023 and the GAPs. The Gender Action Plan ([GAP](https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-gender/wiki/eu-gender-action-plan-2016-2020)) provides the framework for the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the EU member states in their approach to gender equality through external action. Furthermore, the **EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy also refers to gender equality. The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy mentions the need to strengthen women's participation in foreign policy-making and** mainstream gender issues in all EU activities. Using gendered institutions and gender regimes as concepts is helpful to overcome failures of the past 'to analyse gendered power within European institutions, and regarding the power that the EU projects beyond its borders' (Davis 2018: 6). To understand EU's how assumptions on gender shape the institutional structure can lead to a better understanding of the nature and effects of the EU's power, and how that power is acquired, maintained, exercised, and resisted' (ibid.) Hence, Feminist Institutionalists argue that it is not a question of whether institutions are gendered; they are studying to what extent and how. (Acker 1990; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010). This research identifies the EU as a gendered institution and the WPS agenda as a gender regime. Therefore, how the EU as an institution is gendered is mirrored in its use of narratives, symbols, and language to legitimise itself. In 2017, gendered figures of speech found their way into former President Jean-Claude Juncker's statement. He characterised permanent structured cooperation in defence (PESCO) as ‘the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty (European Commission 2017). But also, official documents are crucial to understanding how the EU is gendered and how it defines gender. For example, Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union states that ‘equality between women and men’ is a founding value of the EU (European Union 2012a: Art. 2).

**Colonial continuities in the EU’s WPS agenda**

Compared to other regional organisations like the African Union, the League of Arab States, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union is one of the few regional organisations that positions itself to implement the WPS agenda beyond its borders. Other regional organisations in the Global South mainly focus on implementing the WPS agenda in their region. This self-understanding as a global actor that can promote WPS within its own borders and beyond has positive implications. In particular, civil society organisations state that working with the EU results in better protection from their governments or gives them at least the benefit of being legitimate actors. But it cannot be ignored that the EU’s self-understanding as a global actor is influenced by Europe's imperial attempts from the 15th to systematically bring civilisation to the 'New World' and ‘help other peoples’. Taking the colonial history of EU member states into account, it is necessary that ‘we critically engage with the ways in which this applies to the EU’ (Haastrup 2018: 222) to understand and explain ‘how security institutions adopt new global gender norms demands’ (ibid.). For example, the title of Basu's article ‘The Global South writes 1325, too’ from 2018 reveals two significant aspects that are crucial to understanding the potential risks of colonial continuities in WPS governance. Not only is the Global South in general portrayed as a site of implementation, but the Global South also is not identified as a site of knowledge production for the global agenda. The eurocentrism becomes clear when Global North theories on Governance and Feminism are assumed to be suitable for the Global South. However, Global South theories are considered unsuitable for Governance and Feminism in the Global North. Post-colonial critique of WPS provides an entry point for critically thinking about the intentions and prioritisation of WPS in their governance structures. The risk of institutionalising the WPS agenda has led to the assumption that ‘successful implementation of the WPS resolutions requires these to be seen as legitimate policy instruments’ (Basu 2016: 365). Some scholars even define the WPS agenda as ‘an imperialist policy mechanism designed to exercise control over the less powerful actors in world politics (2016: 363). One of the strongest criticisms is that WPS governance is not only about saving women but also about saving feminism itself (Parashar 2018). One major criticism of WPS governance is that the Global South is solely identified as a site of implementation, not as a site of knowledge production (Mukalazi and Varma 2020). One reason is that WPS actors generally emphasise the importance of grassroots movements and local approaches for implementation. This highlights, rooted in the feminist peace movement, that the high contribution of grassroots movements on the ground is one of the cornerstones of advancing the WPS. However, this feminist practice of putting grassroots movements at the core was falsely translated into formal governance structures that grassroots movements are solely context-specific implementers, not global knowledge producers. This identification of the Global South as exclusively a place of practice neglects the multi-faceted participation in the Global South (Basu 2016: 363). It stands to reason that the majority of contemporary armed conflicts are located in the Global South, and therefore, the immediate response needs to be reflected in WPS implementation. Although the fact is accurate, it does not mean that Global North WPS actors need to solely identify the Global South as a site of implementation. Official documents by the EU on WPS strongly indicate that the EU identifies strongly focuses on Foreign Policy when it comes to WPS and legitimises its WPS governance through that. The EU’s attempt to mainly identify the Global South as a site of implementation has implications for colonial continuities in funding structures. Due to global and historical funding structures, the Global North is the primary donor, and Global South is the donation recipient. For example, the EU and its member states are funding the WPS project through its delegations, the Commission or the External Action Service on the African continent. However, the EU and its member states do not receive any funding from the African Union or its member states. One reason for this imbalance in financial structure is that the AU is chronically underfunded. It seems impossible to imagine African countries sponsoring WPS policies in Europe. This power imbalance presents two problems. The first problem is that the Global North actors' funding is tied to their own political agenda and WPS priorities. This means that the funding for Global South actors is often connected to the Global North's political agenda. Nicola Pratt even speaks of fetishisation and victimisation of the Global South by the Global North. In her opinion, ‘1325 reproduces the racialised–sexualised and gendered hierarchies of colonialism' (2013). Another example was the rise of WPS projects in fighting violent extremism and terrorism triggered by the US-initiated War on Terror'. Consequently, Global South actors can only, to a certain extent, realise their own WPS agenda (see Qadeem 2019). The second problem tied to the Global North's position as the primary donor is that the assumption is widespread that the Global North is the site of WPS designing for Global South’s WPS agenda. The argument partly for the intense focus on External Action is that the WPS agenda is embedded in governmental bodies linked to foreign policies such as development, diplomacy, or defense. One of these institutional anchoring consequences is that WPS is misframed as an issue outside the EU borders (Laura Davis, 2018). This misframing has led to Global North actors seldomly distributing funding under the WPS umbrella to migrant and refugee organisations within their own borders or prioritising gender-sensitive policies for far-right extremism. The focus on the external promotion of WPS has therefore left domestic policies and programmes underfunded. It is worth mentioning that the EU has opened up to internal funding for military structures in recent years. This shift could indicate that the EU as an institution understood that it could only be accepted as a legitimate WPS actor if its structures reflect the WPS policies the EU is promoting externally. This approach is not EU specific. Under the umbrella of gender mainstreaming, military interventions, and peace-keeping missions support, for example, all-female formed police units to realise the participation pillar of the WPS agenda by ensuring equal access to work opportunities in the Security Sector, e. g. by India, Bangladesh, or Samoa (Dharmapuri 2013: 6). Post-colonial scholars argue that the adding-women approach aligns with a neo-liberal understanding of gender equality. Additionally, it contradicts the initial idea of 1325, which is grounded in demilitarisation and disarmament. They see the risk of WPS being instrumentalised for militarisation. For example, this instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda is visible using the reference to 1325 in the preamble of UN SC 1483 from May 2003 on Iraq:

‘[It] can be seen as positive in that it legitimises advocates' demand for women's rightful inclusion in the reconstruction and nation-building process in Iraq. But you could also see it in another way – that 1325 is being used as a tool to justify military occupation on behalf of 'liberating' women.' (Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2004: 138)

**The Annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security**

In general, the EU follows certain rules and procedures to legitimise its power as a WPS actor during the Annual Open Debate. As a theoretical framework, this research draws on the work done by Bexell Jönsson and Stappert (2021). While legitimation is often, in large parts, depicted as a direct relationship between institutions and their audiences, asking which groups institutional actors choose to target allows for an analysis of the prevalence—and consequences—of targeting legitimation audiences indirectly (ibid). That is why targeted legitimation audiences are defined as the sets of actors that a global governance institution explicitly acknowledges as an audience it intends to address in its efforts to legitimise itself (ibid). For this research, their concept of critical audiences and intermediary legitimation audiences plays a significant role. Critical audiences are generally seen as key targeted audiences, as commonly reflected in articles starting with a statement that global governance institutions have become more politicised and therefore engage increasingly in legitimation. Bexell et al.’s concept of intermediary legitimation audiences highlights the possibility that legitimation may be filtered through several layers of audiences, as global governance institutions may address one audience with the aim that this audience would, in turn, convince another group of the institution’s legitimacy. Intermediary legitimation audiences are attractive targets because they hold the potential to multiply the number of audiences reached. Focusing on the audiences that global governance institutions actually choose to address thus provides us with additional insights into the role of these layers and their relationship.

Since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000, the UN has organised an open debate to discuss the global WPS agenda in the UN Security Council. The Secretary-General submits a report with analysis, updates, and recommendations before the debate. Different stakeholders deliver their statements during the debate to present their pledges and achievements and voice their demands. The briefers usually include the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UN Women, representatives of other UN agencies, civil society representatives and regional organisations. The annual debate is often used by stakeholders as a window of opportunity to pass new WPS resolutions. However, this is not a necessary result. The SC can choose to take action on these recommendations by adopting a resolution, a presidential statement or a press release. While the Council has turned those (feminist) ideas to its own purposes, their continuing contestability creates opportunities for further feminist engagement (Otto 2015). It, therefore, offers a suitable arena where WPS actors can stimulate and nurse the beliefs in legitimacy. However, like many other gender regimes and policies, the WPS agenda faces pushbacks supported by tremendous financial means by anti-gender movements (CFFP 2021). This pushback can be observed when P5 states are watering down progressive language for UN SC resolutions (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2019). In the case of WPS, Russia and China have traditionally fulfilled the role of opposing progressive feminist ideas. This assumption has been turned upside-down with the US’ Trump administration from 2017 to 2021. The feminist activist Madeleine Rees pointed out in her comment on Resolution 2467 from April 2019 that ‘the Trump administration is obstructive and retrogressive on gender and women’s reproductive rights in all places at all times’ (2019). The US’s strong reservations on safe abortion made it clear that socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions are not being set into stone. This pushback is defined as a process of delegitimating. To counter pushbacks, this research contributes to a critical reflection of how political actors (re-) legitimate the WPS agenda in global arenas with legitimation strategies during specific events. In October, one of these specific events is the annual debate on WPS in the global arena, the UN Security Council.

**The EU’s legitimation audiences**

The fact that the EU is not a member of the UN SC; it only participates as an invitee of the UN SC presidency impacts its role as a legitimacy-seeking actor during the Annual Open Debate. For example, the EU does not officially participate in the actual decision-making process. This makes it easier for the EU to act as a very principled actor, supporting the EU WPS agenda both in ideational terms and in institutional times by stressing and enhancing the role of the second UN agencies or the Special Representative and third civil society that regularly engages with the UN (Barbé 2016). Given that the UN Security Council is a platform outside of the EU, it is easy to assume that the EU only uses this sort of legitimation arena to reach external legitimation audiences embedded in the UN system, e. g. the UN SC itself, the UN Secretary-General or UN Women. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that the EU also targets internal legitimation audiences to seek legitimacy for its WPS policies inside the EU itself. Hence, the annual debate is made public through written protocols and live streams; it has the potential to reach a broader, not intentionally targeted audience. One way to study targeted legitimation audiences is by analysing the institution’s written and oral communication, ranging from annual reports and press releases to information published on an institution’s websites and social media accounts. Within its written or oral communication, institutions may outline explicitly which audiences this material is intended for. Indeed, annual reports’ descriptions of the audiences that the institution has reached out to in its activities may constitute an act of legitimation. With increasing online documents, regional governance institutions often include specific sections on their websites explicitly dedicated to different audiences. These activities may themselves constitute an act of legitimation. For this research, the oral statements by the EU and representatives of the EU are analysed. Additionally, 25 semi-structured interviews with UN, EU and civil society experts were conducted from October 2021 to April 2022. The aim of using expert interviews for data collection was to get insights on informal practices, norms, and rules which influence the why and how legitimation audiences are selected by the EU. Speeches delivered by institutions’ representatives inherently specify their audiences, as they are necessarily always intended for, the very last, the physically present audience. The EU speeches were made publicly available in written form on different websites. To ensure the validity, reliability, and availability of the data, various sources from a feminist NGO (the Research Centre of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), a US-based think tank (UN Security Council Report collection of UN documents), the UN Digital Library and the EU itself are identified as reliable. The statements include the period from 2000 until 2021. This period is based on the fact that the first resolution of the WPS was adopted in 2000. The statements were analysed using the software programme ATLAS.ti, qualitative data analysis and research software.

Feminist methods of discourse analysis are suitable for this research because they link concepts together in a set of relationships that are underpinned by power relationships that support the institutionalisation of ideas in texts or avowedly political discourse. Namely, Hansen’s concept of intertextuality for a discourse and frame analysis is applied. It captures the way texts draw upon other texts to establish legitimacy and authority for their constructions of identity and considers the field of political debate, which contains the WPS discourse (2013). Hansen’s concept of intertextuality is of particular interest for this research because it assumes that texts implicitly invoke other texts due to the dominance of certain discourses, texts, and language norms. This means the meaning of one text is dependent on that of another.

‘Rather than seeing new texts as depending on older ones, one should therefore see the two as interacting in an exchange where one text gains legitimacy from quoting and the other gains legitimacy from being quoted.’ (Hansen 2013: 51)

The objective of applying feminist approaches thus is to disrupt what is set as given in legitimation research by mapping the eurocentric understanding of the EU’s legitimation attempts of its WPS governance. To analyse the interactive process by which the EU with its WPS agenda encounters specific discursive opportunities in the form of institutionalised texts during the Annual Open Debate, the following codes were created for categorising the legitimation audiences and afterwards analysed:

Category 1 refers to the legitimation addressees and is related to the question of which target groups are addressed directly and indirectly, as well as not intentionally. Therefore, category 1 is essential to find out which actors are identified as (un)important for WPS legitimacy. Although the UN SC is a legitimation arena driven by state actors, it can be assumed that civil society is one of the primary legitimation audiences because the WPS agenda originated in civil society.

Category 2 refers to the interconnection to other institutional frameworks. This includes the question of which resolution is referred to in the statements and which other international framework the European Union refers to. This category was selected in order to map to what degree the (lacking) interconnections with other WPS actors influence the selection of legitimation audiences.

Category 3 is dedicated to finding out whether and which Global North and Global South actors are being addressed. This category aims to provide more insights into whether there is a geopolitical focus of the EU’s legitimation audiences, or whether there is even a power imbalance created between different regions, and whether marginalised actors are being othered.

In the fourth category, the position of the legitimation audience is studied. This goes in line with the assumption that audiences are addressed in the beginning, are singled out, or are addressed in the end and have a certain priority. Furthermore, the result refers to the frequency of mentioning the legitimation audiences as well as the continuity of the mentions over the period of 20 years.

**Results**

Given that the institutional setting of the UN Security Council as a legitimation arena is built on power imbalances and the EU is composed of former colonial powers, the EU risks reinforcing power imbalances within its selection of legitimation audiences. By selecting which audiences to address the EU is exercising the power of (non-)recognition because this selection elevates the status of the beliefs and norms of certain groups, potentially to the disadvantage of others.

The Annual Open Debate is a reoccurring event that allows the EU to prepare their selection of legitimation audiences in advance. As a result, the selection of legitimation audiences is rarely done spontaneously or ad hoc. This fact impacts the selection of audiences by the way that there is a certain continuity. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a sign of the EU’s stable relationship with its legitimation audiences, such as the member-state driven alliance ‘Group of Friends’. On the other hand, this continuity bears the risk of overlooking intermediary legitimation audiences that convince another group of the EU’s WPS governance legitimacy. In particular, less powerful Global South actors tend to be overlooked, e.g. Costa Rica. This result clearly shows that the institutional setting that sets the timing of when and why legitimation audiences are being addressed plays a role.

The data collection also proved insights that the selection of legitimation audiences is influenced by who is delivering the statement. Between 2000 and 2002, the EU’s rotatory president spoke on behalf of the entire EU. From 20003 until 2009, the EU addressed the participants in the debate and was represented by the rotatory presidency. The rotatory presidency led EU member states to address rather UN entities than the EU itself with criticism.

‘Does this explain why only a few Security Council resolutions pay attention to gender concerns? Is it a lack of understanding? Is it a lack of political will? I believe it might be both, and I believe 1325 teaches us an important lesson in this receipt.’ (Former Ambassador Jan Van den Berg from the Netherlands, on behalf of the EU, 2004)

Since 2010 the EU has been represented in debates by the delegation of the EU at the UN, from 2015 on by the Principal Advisor on Gender and on Women Peace and Security/UNSC Resolution 1325, and since 2021 by the EU’s Ambassador for Gender and Diversity. This process of institutionalising the WPS agenda by a Principal Advisor or Ambassador had an impact on which audiences were being addressed. This is linked to diplomatic protocols and informal rules during high-level political debates in the UN SC. However, the institutionalisation is increasing used to target its own entities with self-criticism.

‘Gender equality and full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment are core values and political priorities for the European Union and its Member States. Their realisation requires dedicated actions and programmes on the ground and systematic mainstreaming in our own institutions, as well as in those of third countries.’ (Stella Ronner Grubačić, EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, 2021)

Furthermore, there are two main results of exploring the EU’s selection of who is identified as important enough to seek legitimacy from. First, there is a change over time regarding which audience the EU identifies as significant to seek legitimacy from. Analysing the EU statements has shown an increase in addressing civil society, a legitimation audience belonging to the non-members of the UN Security Council. Therefore, civil society can be named a major legitimation audience for the EU. There is an increasing awareness of bottom-up and local approaches. Putting the knowledge of civil society into focus could be read as an indicator of applying feminist and post-colonial approaches.

‘The European Union believes that it is critical to move from marginalisation to action. Women at both grassroots and national levels provide important insights and analysis to the consolidation of peace and we urge the Security Council to increasingly invite and utilise these voices.’ (Former Minister of Defense Elisabeth Rehn from Finland, on behalf of the European Union, 2006)

However, the majority of the interview partners working with local and grassroots movements in and outside Europe mentioned that they do not follow the EU’s statement in the UN SC at all because it is ‘too diplomatic’ or ‘does not have any impact on their daily work on the ground’ (Interviewee H). To what degree does the EU selects civil society groups as legitimation audience because they are solely implementers or also knowledge producers could not be clearly provided by the given data set and needs further in-depth data collection of the ongoing expert interviews. Second, the results clearly show that the EU traditionally uses its financial contribution to legitimise its WPS governance and therefore addresses two types of audiences in that regard: audiences that receive EU funding and audience that the EU is encouraging to increase WPS funding. This includes strategic partners, such as AU and UN entities that are already more likely to share a common understanding and common goals of governing the WPS agenda. Therefore, addressing its strategic partners that contribute equally or benefit from those financial contributions is a way for how the EU maintains and reinforces its power as a WPS actor.

On top of its long-standing, active and continuous commitment, the European Union intends to do even more. We pledge to assume substantial financial commitments, to thoroughly mainstream gender and to include gender-specific actions in all European Union financial instruments, and to allocate more than €100 million over the next seven years to gender equality and women and girls' empowerment projects.’ Mara Marinaki, European External Action Service, Former Principal Advisor on Gender and on Women Peace and Security/UNSC Resolution 1325, 2015).

Taking into account that, in particular, Global South WPS actors, state and non-state actors, highly rely on the EU’s financial contributions, this legitimation process extremely reinforces dependencies embedded in colonial continuities. At the same time, a significant amount of interview partners from civil society stated that there should be stronger financial pledges.

One central point stated by almost all civil society interview partners is that the EU mainly defines the WPS as an agenda for external policies and therefore reinforces colonial practices of ‘Othering’ and ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’. In addition to that, the focus would always lie on the excluded to become empowered, never on exclusive systems to reform and to meet the interests of the excluded. These assumptions influence the EU’s understanding of governing WPS and which audiences the EU selects to legitimise it.

The data also provides information about which audiences are not being addressed. This result is likely because the UN SC is a legitimation arena driven by member states and not their citizens. However, EU citizens could belong to the unintended group of legitimation audiences. A wider audience, including EU citizens, is being reached by increasing the availability of statements and fact-based social media communication. This might not be an intended target group with regard to legitimation. However, the increasing transparent online communication of the EU’s involvement during the Annual Open debate could be interpreted as a legitimation attempt based on the EU’s democratic understanding of transparency. Given that this information is in several languages accessible, it has the potential to offer more online interactions with social movements and marginalised groups that do not have the means to advocate their demands in person. Although this legitimation audience is outside the UN SC and has no direct influence on governing the WPS agenda, it is worth mentioning that the selection of legitimation audiences is far from pre-set and stable. The selection is also influenced by current politics and constructed by and through the audiences’ interaction with the WPS governance institution that seeks to present itself as legitimate.

**Limitations**

The overall goal of this research is to contribute to a post-colonial canon of legitimation research and therefore draws on several post-colonial theories. Nevertheless, it is also influenced by non-critical theories as their criticism is used as a departure point. Thus, further theories from the post-colonial canon should be elaborated on for further research. For example, the concept of post-colonial globality by Himadeep Muppidi (2004) could be helpful in framing the EU as a legitimacy-seeking actor and focusing on productive power and the reproduction of colonial orders.

Another limitation presents itself by the question of to what degree the UN Security Council legitimacy deficit itself has an impact on how the EU selects its legitimation audiences to legitimise its WPS governance. It cannot be ignored the UN Security Council also deals with its own legitimacy deficit (Binder and Heupel 2015). Consequently, this also could impact the future legitimation processes of the WPS annual debate. On the one side, the WPS agenda could suffer under the UN SC's deficit. On the other side, the uniqueness of the WPS's institutional setting could be why it does not suffer significantly. As the UN SC is not the only legitimation arena, and the annual debate on WPS is not the only event where the EU seeks legitimacy for its WPS. The EU parliament or the commission as legitimation arenas for WPS could be examined as well. For further research, other EU statements and documents could be analysed, which could lead to a bigger data set.

**CONCLUSION**

The critical analysis of colonial continuities is necessary because legitimacy-demanding and legitimacy-giving practices are always shaped by complex, political power relations. This paper not only provides insights on which legitimation audiences the European Union selects in order to legitimise its WPS governance. In addition to that, it offers an entry point to critical reflect on legitimation practices from a post-colonial and feminist standpoint. Hence, it is key to understand that the selection of the EU’s legitimation audiences has (un)intended consequences on whether and how colonial continuities are reinforced by the EU consisting of former colonial powers. The major result is that the EU’s WPS legitimation temporary result of ongoing processes which are changing over time. Therefore, the selection of audiences is influenced by the geopolitical power structures in global governance. As a result, colonial continuities are embedded in the EU’s legitimation attempts regarding legitimising its understanding of what WPS means, its role as a WPS actor in the global arena, and how its internal structures are adjusted.

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