



# Gender Mainstreaming and (Re)constructing Hegemony

*Exploring Hegemonic Claims in the liberal engendering of War*

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the intersection of gender mainstreaming and hegemonic power structures within the context of peace and security. Further, it is argued that gender mainstreaming can be understood using the Gramscian concept of hegemony and that, while advancing in intersectional claims, mainstreaming strategies (re)produce essentialist notions of gender and lack the capability for transformative potential in zones of conflict due to the epistemic violence inherent in the hegemonic discourse of liberal peace and security strategies. Going further this thesis argues that while gender mainstreaming discourse that engenders conflict shifted, liberal conceptions of gender equality are still centered. At the same time, through the logic of hegemony, marginalized and local perspectives are selectively silenced through the delimitations and need interpretations set by the policy discourse. This is illustrated by analyzing the two most recent U.S. WPS Strategies, *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, Security 2013* and *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security 2023*. In line with previous literature, it is argued that the given policy discourse can be seen as a continuation of embedded feminism as conceptualized by Krista Hunt as liberal hegemonic claims get (re)constructed by the strategies through the subversion/subordination of subaltern feminisms. The thesis explores these issues utilizing a modified version of Bachi's "What's the Problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach, revealing how gender mainstreaming can be seen as a (re)production of liberal hegemonic claims through the logic of governance. By examining the correlation of liberal hegemony and gender mainstreaming in peace and security, the thesis gives insights into the logic of liberal governance and problematizes the pursuit of feminist goals in global governance frameworks.

**Keywords:** gender mainstreaming; hegemony; liberal hegemony; embedded feminism; critical theory; Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Context**

In the fields of IR and PACS roles of women in war and the gendering of conflict have become substantial subjects of scholarly debate and extensive research at least since the 80s with the establishment of feminist security studies (Goldstein, 2004, p. 1; Wibben, 2021). At the same time, many feminist activists and NGOs were engaging with peace coinciding with the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), which in combination can be seen as having led to an increase of policies, approaches, and strategies thematizing gender being introduced that substantially changed the political landscape (Wibben, 2021). Gendered policies, approaches, and strategies have since then become an integral part of a wide array of political spheres, something that is articulated especially by the strategy of gender mainstreaming, a term first introduced by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1994 and later articulated as a strategy by the United Nations Economic and Social Council and then ratified by the UN General Assembly (ECOSOC, 1999).

Gender mainstreaming according to these first definitions, is a broad-reaching approach that aims to integrate gender into “policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres” (ECOSOC, 1999, p. 24) with the goal of achieving gender equality (ECOSOC, 1999). It has since then become an “international phenomenon”(Walby, 2005, p. 453), encompassing a plethora of political arenas and fields, being implemented in the education sector, NGOs, nation-states as well as international organizations as “a process that seeks to advance gender equality by revising all mainstream policy arenas” (Walby, 2005, p. 454).

Since gender mainstreaming is defined so broadly as to areas it can be applied to, it is possible to define a wide array of gender mainstreaming practices in current discourses, movements, and decisions. However, the most important site of gender mainstreaming in practice has always been Foreign Policy and Development (Daly, 2005a) as this is not only where the approach originates but also where it has gained considerable traction through UN Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in 2000 and today known as WPS (Women, Peace and Security) “aimed at mainstreaming a ‘gender perspective’ into matters of conflict and peacebuilding” (Pratt, 2013a, p. 772).

This was seen as a milestone by liberal feminist activists, who had been lobbying for its implementation as it was seen as a radical step towards highlighting women's role in conflict prevention as well as human rights concerns specifically affecting women and was seen to have the potential to shape the whole field of peace and security (Wibben, 2021: 23). Since then WPS strategies have been widely introduced in all fields of international and national policy-making and have become an integral part of foreign policy focusing on peacekeeping, conflict resolution and the human rights of women making them particularly relevant for the field of PACS.

From the beginning however, and following the trajectory of earlier criticisms of gendered discourse, gender mainstreaming approaches have been criticized by post- and decolonial, as well as feminist academics with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq leading to the first large-scale discussions problematizing Gender Mainstreaming and especially Resolution 1325 and WPS strategies from a feminist vantage point (Chenoy, 2004; Cooke, 2002; Mohanty et al., 2008; Pratt, 2013; Rygiel and Hunt, 2016; Shepherd, 2022; Thomson, 2022; von der Lippe, 2012). Central to this were positions asserting that gender mainstreaming served to mainstream a Western version of gender and that the approaches conceptualizations of gender constituted a form of gender essentialism failing to address intersectionality (Azarmandi, 2018a; Lyle-Gonga, 2013; Maschietto, 2020; Milward et al., 2015; Staudt, 2017; S Walby, 2005). The background of the wars also led to further analysis of colonial legacies in gender and gendered approaches to foreign policy and discourse, with claims asserting that the gendered discourse of the time worked according to the colonial logic of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Cooke, 2002, p. 485) most notably through the use of gendered argumentation by the Bush administration during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Hunt, 2016).

During the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003, Women and gender issues were at the core of justifications for the military interventions (Rygiel, 2016). The Bush Administration argued that the American interventions during the so-called 'war on terror' would free women in the Middle East from gender oppression with a framing here exemplified by a quote from Laura Bush who expressed that: "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Rygiel and Hunt, 2016, p. 2). This strategy was met with resistance by a majority of feminist

organizations asserting their pacifist conviction and accusing the conservative Bush administration of hypocrisy for advocating for women's rights abroad while taking them away at home (Rygiel, 2016). However, some influential liberal feminist organizations like the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) also “mobilized women across the continent in support of a military intervention abroad – for the sake of women's rights” (Brunner, 2016, p. 375). To conceptualize this practice of co-opting feminist activism and discourses, and in reference to the term embedded journalism, which was also established during the Iraq war to describe the practice of war correspondents being attached to military units, Kristia Hunt coined the term “embedded feminism” (Hunt, 2016, p. 52). She defined embedded feminism “as the incorporation of feminist discourse and feminist activists into political projects that claim to serve the interests of women but ultimately subordinate and/or subvert that goal” (Hunt, 2016, p. 52).

Subordination of feminism has also been seen as the reason for the failure of gender mainstreaming approaches as “the transformative aim of gender mainstreaming is lost by trying to make the approach more palatable in order to be taken on by development organizations and governments” (Milward, Mukhopadhyay and Wong, 2015, p. 75) with feminists doubting that international organizations and nation states are capable of bringing about the transformative change needed to reach gender equality as they fail to incorporate intersectional forms of oppression into the discourse and bring about the radical structural transformation many feminists see as necessary to achieve gender equality (Staudt, 2017). But, in recent years many gender mainstreaming approaches like the *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security 2023 (U.S. SNAPWPS 2023)* have seemingly become more diverse and have placed focus on marginalized groups and the incorporation of local perspectives, “expanding from a strictly heteronormative setting of liberal white feminism to a more diverse, color-inclusive, and queer understanding of gender relations and sexuality” (Brunner, 2016, p. 379). As Brunner argues, from a critical perspective, this has “opened up multiple sites of complicity for gender-sensitive, feminist and queer commitment” (Brunner, 2016, p. 385). However, the internationalization of gendered discourse also means that in comparison to the so-called war on terror, “we have to reconsider the many variations of gendered and sexualized epistemic violence in the

light of a multifaceted discourse on gender and sexuality in debates of international politics today” (Brunner, 2016, p. 385).

A revision integrating previous theory on the relevant concepts of gender equality and gender mainstreaming into the two most recent U.S. WPS Strategies as hegemonic sites can therefore provide new insights into the contemporary functioning of gendered policy discourses and their connections to conflicts.

## **1.2 Research Problem, Questions, Aims**

As mentioned previously, gender mainstreaming is not an uncontested practice. The relationship between the global north and global south is still argued to be one of power imbalance in favor of the Global North/West<sup>1</sup>. Based on this assumption any production of the global south by the global north needs to be problematized and contextualized. This becomes especially relevant in conflicts and their representation in discourse, as historically Western-dominated discourses have served as justification for colonialism and military interventions embedding rights discourses showing how “norms constitute powerful ordering mechanisms of international politics that are enabled and sustained by particular forms of knowledge” (Epstein, 2017, p. 23).

Since the Bush era the U.S. Administration has seemingly moved away from nation-state led military action to “reassert American ‘intellectual and moral leadership’” (Pass, 2019, p. 186) by focusing on cooperation with international organizations such as NATO, EU and the UN as well as local partners emphasizing a strategy of championing liberal values in conflict resolution and other peace and security issues, as sustainable strategies to reach peace. This is accompanied by a shift in the language of gender mainstreaming policies where “the long-running Woman Question has been supplemented by a set of variously articulated ‘queer questions’”(Rao, 2014, p. 199) so that “rights claims on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity occupy an increasingly prominent place in international politics”(Rao, 2014, p. 199). Furthermore, feminist ideas from outside the liberal feminist spectrum, such as Indigenous and queer feminisms are being increasingly included in policies, resulting in

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<sup>1</sup> I want to recognize that global North/South and West/non-West are contested terms, as they are generalized and geographically inaccurate to capture the complex nature of the world. They are, as suggested by Mohanty, used as a metaphorical rather than geographical distinction (Mohanty, 2003b)

a more intersectional framing of gender mainstreaming strategies in recent years (Brunner, 2016).

While this means that the lived effects of more recent and intersectional gender mainstreaming policies can not be observed yet, by looking at the problematizations found in contemporary gender mainstreaming approaches in the realms of peace and security previous research and theoretical claims can be explored utilizing the idea of hegemony to investigate in what way knowledge production is exercised. Given the problem context, the research presented in this thesis will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the main problematizations of gender inequality articulated in the U.S. WPS Strategies, and how are they framed as security issues?
2. How can gender mainstreaming be explored as (re)producing liberal hegemonic claims in peace and security discourses?

Through these research questions, this thesis aims to critically explore contemporary gender mainstreaming approaches in the realm of peace and security and to analyze how the policy discourse subverts/subordinates women's rights by incorporating them into hegemonic claims. This will be done by conducting a policy analysis of the two most recent U.S. WPS Strategies - *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, Security 2019 (U.S. SWPS)* and *United States Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security 2023 (U.S. SNAPWPS 2023)* modifying Carol Bacchi's WPR (What's the problem represented to be ? ) to better facilitate the investigation of hegemonic claims in the texts (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Finally, this thesis aims to help theory advancement, by utilizing the findings of the analysis to explore how the concept of hegemony can be used to understand gender mainstreaming in contemporary governance practice.

Furthermore, since the meaning of the practice of gender mainstreaming is contested, to avoid confusion I want to clarify that at this stage of the research, gender mainstreaming - leaning on the dominant UN definition - will be generally defined as the process of including a gendered analysis in any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels. This includes a gendered analysis in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and



inequality is not perpetuated, with the end goal of gender mainstreaming being gender equality (ECOSOC, 1999) (4th World Conference on Women, 1996).

### **1.3 Research objectives, scope, and delimitations**

By analyzing the problematizations put forward by two contemporary WPS Strategies using theoretical insights in previous academic literature to investigate hegemonic claims, the research objectives of this thesis are to analyze how gender equality is framed by the U.S. WPS strategies, to critically assess the use of gendered discourses in the documents and to explore the (re)production of hegemonic claims in contemporary gender mainstreaming focusing on the dimension of subordination/subversion.

Focussing the analysis on two U.S. Gender mainstreaming policies, specifically the 2019 and 2023 Women, Peace and Security Strategies, this thesis aims to explore the conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming critically using the concepts of hegemony and embedded feminism by looking at the two contemporary gender mainstreaming strategies. Therefore, the research focuses on the three core concepts hegemony, gender mainstreaming, and embedded feminism. Due to the theoretical focus of the thesis, this thesis will not present a full policy analysis following all the steps of Bacchi's WPR approach. Instead, this research focuses on applying hegemonic analysis in a contemporary context to contribute to further research on contemporary hegemony and an understanding of how power structures can be analyzed through the concept of hegemony. Furthermore, the scope of this thesis is to trace power structures in the text and place them in a broader context investigating implications rather than examining actual lived effects of the strategies the possibility of which is delimited by the fairly recent release of both WPS strategies and the broad scope of possible action implied in them

## **1.4 Structure**

This thesis began by introducing gender mainstreaming and gendered discourse in the form of embedded feminism connecting them to PACS by highlighting conflict as a core area and locating both concepts in their historical contexts. The next section will provide an overview of existing literature in the subject area, with the literature review being structured along the core concepts informing the research questions: *gender mainstreaming*, *embedded feminism*, and *(liberal) hegemony*. Next, in the Method section, the epistemological and hermeneutic position of the thesis and the theoretical framework used in the analysis as well as the selected material will be presented. Here the author will also present the research design and reflect on the choice of method and material. This is followed by an analysis of contemporary gender mainstreaming using the framework presented in the method section. I will explore liberal hegemonic claims in western gendered discourse in the form of gender mainstreaming as framed in the U.S. WPS Strategies and problematize possibilities of *subordination/subversion* of women's rights and feminisms in gender mainstreaming (re)producing liberal hegemonic claims through the logic of consent and subordination/subversion. The concluding section will summarize the findings of the thesis and give projections for possible further research of hegemonic claims in contemporary governance practice.

## **2.Literature Review**

In order to situate this thesis in existing scholarly research, this section will give an overview of previous literature exploring different perspectives on gendered discourse and hegemony. I will also position the thesis in the field of PACS, as the literature outlined will provide insight into relevant areas of gendered discourse in Peace and Conflict Studies. Based on the concepts informed by the research questions and screening of the literature, the first part of this chapter will give an overview of literature concerning gendered discourse in peace and security issues mainly looking at gender mainstreaming as well as embedded feminism and how it has been used and conceptualized. This first section of the chapter will have a focus on the themes of gender equality and the role of women in peace and security-related operations and institutions as these are particularly relevant to the topic of the thesis. Next, I will

discuss the concept of hegemony, focussing on the application of the Gramscian concept of hegemony in a global context as well as liberal hegemony.

## **2.1 Gender Mainstreaming**

Since the endorsement of Gender Mainstreaming by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women as first defined in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* gender mainstreaming has become widely used to describe the goal and strategy of mainstreaming gender into all “spheres of society” (4th World Conference on Women, 1996) with a focus of implementation in economy and policy. Following this in the 1997 *Report of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)* the UN established the most widely recognized definition of Gender Mainstreaming, which shows commitment to incorporating gender analysis into societal issues (Shash and Forden, 2016; Clisby and Enderstein, 2017). The ECOSOC Report defines that:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC, 1999, p. 24)

The UN also presents more areas of mainstreaming gender calling for institutionalization and putting emphasis on the importance of implementation in political spaces and PACS-relevant areas such as humanitarian aid, conflict prevention and resolution, and peace and security issues declaring gender as a core component of security and peace (ECOSOC, 1999, p. 25; Pratt, 2013a). And it can be argued that from the plethora of gender mainstreaming approaches, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the resulting National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) introduced in many nation-states have had the most impact on the field of peace and security and have been celebrated as a huge success by feminist acquitting them the ability to “construct alternative conceptions of international security” (Pratt, 2013a, p. 772; Wibben, 2021)

However, since gender mainstreaming and then WPS strategies were introduced they have been heavily discussed and criticized by academics and feminist activists (Daly, 2005a; Pratt, 2013a; Shepherd, 2016; Kreft, 2017). While there are many points of criticism by academics that will be explored in the following, the core of

the arguments can be summarized into two problematizations. The first one is that gender mainstreaming strategies do currently achieve their formulated goals/serve the wrong ends due to how they are executed, as well as the unwillingness/unableness of actors to enact the needed change; while the second assumption is that gender mainstreaming strategies do not work in general/serve the wrong ends due to the structure of the international system as a whole (Daly, 2005a; Mohanty, Pratt and Riley, 2008; Shepherd, 2016). One of the criticisms is that while Gender Mainstreaming can be seen as an all-encompassing strategy for achieving gender equality across social and political strata, it is mainly exercised as a top-down strategy by actors such as governments and international organizations as Lee-Gosselin et al., and others have pointed out (Lee-Gosselin, Briere and Ann, 2013). This is problematized as it means that “mainstreaming requires policy-makers who are not gender experts to introduce a gender perspective into all policies” (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013, p. 297). In line with this, Mujika Chao and Zirion Landaluze (Chao and Landaluze, 2021) argue that translateral organizations and nation-states need to be questioned when it comes to their potential as allies in the struggle for gender equality as they categorize their structures as hierarchical, masculinized spaces that apply gender mainstreaming approaches through a logic of ‘add women and stir’, meaning equality in numbers with women occupying half of the positions while the “existing male norm remains the standard” (Walby, 2005, p. 455). Sylvia Walby investigates this further and labels this approach “equality-as-sameness” (Walby, 2005, p. 455) and asserts that gender mainstreaming can be divided into two more categories, each with different projections concerning aims and strategies to implement the concept (Daly, 2005a). The three categories are informed by feminist analysis of different meanings of gender equality through sameness/difference relations and can be formulated as either gender-as-sameness, gender-as-difference, or gender-transformation (Daly, 2005a; Walby, 2005; Rees, 2006; Thomson, 2022). Gender-as-sameness and gender-as-difference aim to integrate gendered approaches into existing frameworks in policy and institutions, while transformative approaches have the goal of transforming the institutional and societal mainstream through agenda setting to challenge patriarchal norms and hegemonies and can therefore be defined as approaches with a revolutionary aim (Daly, 2005a; Walby, 2005; Staudt, 2017). Transformativeness is claimed by most to all documents describing

gender-mainstreaming strategies, however, scholars point out that they fail to follow up on transformative claims lacking the capacity or will to implement transformative gender mainstreaming (Daly, 2005a; Milward, Mukhopadhyay and Wong, 2015; Clisby and Enderstein, 2017; Staudt, 2017). The lack of transformativity is also asserted due to consequential implementation methods of gender mainstreaming being comprehended because the term lacks clarity and has been defined as an empty signifier, acting as a discursive strategy in the realm of liberal feminism delimiting the frame of feminist action and co-opting feminism (Daly, 2005a; Shepherd, 2016).

Extending this argument, Heidi Hudson asserts that gender mainstreaming approaches in peace and security fail to overcome gender binaries and are not conscious of the way they themselves (re)produce gender, by for example, simplistically connecting the presence of women in peace processes etc. to a better chance of peace (Hudson, 2012). She argues that despite claims to incorporate a broad and intersectional approach transcending gender categories essentialist notions of gender, policies fail to define reasons for diverse patterns of marginalization instead focussing on the category 'woman' reproducing essentialist notions of gender. Along the same line, Griffin critically engaging with the concept of governance writes that:

The drafting of governance measures, the outcomes of governance evaluations and the further interventions these legitimate and reproduce, take shape in an environment always already structured by pre-existing, gendered and racialised expectations of what bodies in the Global South (and North) are, do and (should) respond to. There is an inescapable tension between wanting to increase the amount of 'gender' on the political radar of governance strategy and policy-making, and understanding how little governance actors and agencies understand their core work (and own views) as gendered and racialised (as in being shaped by pre-existing gendered, racialised norms, assumptions and practices). (Griffin, 2022, p. 205)

Pratt adds that a failure to understand the racialized and gendered normative foundation of liberal 'governance feminism' is due to the inherent delimitations of the institutions that 'governance feminism' functions in due to the gendered and racialized structure of political institutions that continually reinforce existing power structures (Pratt, 2013a). This reinforcing of existent power structures by certain branches of feminism can be seen as functioning through the articulation of hegemonic claims and needs interpretation as Fraser, Mohanty et al. and Pratt have pointed out (Mohanty, 2003a; Fraser, 2013; Pratt, 2013a). Mohanty argues that to understand how gender is used to reinforce power structures, it is crucial to "link questions of subjectivity, agency and

identity with those of political economy and the state” (Mohanty, 2003b, p. 521) and asserts the need for scholarship to ”retheorize the gendered aspects of the refigured relations of the state, the market and civil society” (Mohanty, 2003b, p. 521)

The use of feminism and feminist activists to reinforce existing power structures and the intersection of civil society and the state through discourse is where Hunt places the concept of *embedded feminism* (Hunt, 2016).

## **2.2 Embedded feminism**

To explain further, the term ‘embedded feminism’ is a fairly recent one that can be traced back to Kristia Hunt, who established it in 2006 inspired by the concept of ‘embedded journalism’ to push for a feminist understanding of the Bush administration’s political strategy during the ‘war on terror of incorporating women’s rights into the discursive war effort. Hunt defines “embedded feminism as the incorporation of feminist discourse and feminist activists into political projects that claim to serve the interests of women but ultimately subordinate and/or subvert that goal” (Hunt, 2016, p. 53). Furthermore, Hunt asserts that feminism becomes embedded into the discourse through incorporation, appropriation/co-optation, subordination, and subversion of feminist and gender equality issues and positions (Hunt, 2016).

Incorporation is simply described as including the “struggle for women’s rights” (Hunt, 2016, p. 53) into a political project with the claim that the result of the success of the political project will lead to women’s emancipation. Appropriations or co-optation can then be understood as a misrepresentation of the interests of feminists and women either in general or of the group that is claimed to be represented by the discourse, as Bertha von der Lippe defines it, “co-optation [...] illustrates how the meanings of the original concepts are absorbed and neutralized to fit into prevailing political priorities and discourses” (von der Lippe, 2012, p. 21). Subordination is the practice of giving women’s rights a secondary status compared to what is perceived or portrayed to be the primary struggle. Therefore, embedded feminism describes the practice of mainstreaming feminist organizations and arguments to gain support and provide justification for interventions and military action as extemporized by the Bush Administration in the so-called War on Terror. Usually, as Heidi Hudson argues,

embedded feminism also reinforces gender binaries by providing only “instrumentalist interpretations of women’s agency” (Hudson, 2012, p. 1).

Despite the origins of the term in the particular situation of the so-called war on terror, Hunt conceptualizes embedded feminism as a practice of colonialist and nationalist endeavors throughout history liberal norms portrayed as liberalizing and democratizing countries and peoples used to moralize interventions and the rule of liberal justice (Hunt, 2016). In congruence with this several scholars describe how colonial powers embedded women’s rights into the colonial discourse silencing (Spivak and Young, 1991; Cooke, 2002; Mohanty, 2003b; Robinson and Tormey, 2009; Jabri, 2012). As Dhawan describes from a postcolonial feminist standpoint, colonial practices of embedded feminism are seen as articulated by how:

imperialism instrumentalized “the woman’s question” to legitimize “rescue narratives” of “saving the brown woman from the brown man” (à la Spivak). The “status of women” became a marker of the inferiority of the colonized nation. The key maneuver was to construct the “repressed” native female as an alibi to justify the imposition of the “modernizing,” “liberating” and “pro-aggressive” regime of empire, a process that also consolidated imperial Europe’s self-image as civilizationally superior. The native woman as a “victim” of her culture becomes an object to be saved by the colonizing powers. (Dhawan, 2012, pp. 51–52)

Hunt and others define embedded feminism in the 21st century as continuing this imperial othering, with a new imperial mode of functioning that “is no longer marked by colonial occupation but by the neoliberal agenda of ‘democratizing and liberalizing countries and economies based on the assumption that this is the only path to global peace, prosperity and security” (Rygiel and Hunt, 2016, p. 12) arguing that not only do western discourses “equate gender equality with Western liberal democracies” (Ibid.12) in the same way that imperialist powers portrayed themselves as a civilized and progressive counterpart to the colonial other, but also enemy images, imperial gender essentialism, racism, and orientalism get reproduced by how men and women are portrayed in the discourse (Hudson, 2012; Žarkov, 2014; Brunner, 2020). This is explained by most of the literature as happening through the colonial civilizational logic of “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak,

2003, p. 56), a phrase famously put forward by Gayatri Spivak. However, different scholars also argue that through the embedding of feminism in the discourse and more women being in the army, the phrase can be extended to ‘white woman saving brown women from brown men’(Cooke, 2002; Brunner, 2016, 2020; Cook, 2016). For example, Hunt sees white men “saving brown women” (Hunt, 2016, p. 62) as logic that also occurs in embedded feminism. In contrast, Brunner puts forward that embedded feminism describes the specific use of ‘saving brown women’ by white women/feminists, and that if white men want to ‘save brown women’ this would be defined as patriarchal genderism (Brunner, 2016). However, she fails to elaborate further on how this definition might be challenged if white men use feminism explicitly; or, how the definitions of these and the other concepts she puts forward, namely “transnational sexism” (Brunner, 2016, p. 371), “homonationalism” (ibid.) and “queer imperialism” (ibid.) can be differentiated as gendered discourses can be seen as intersecting with multiple of these concepts at the same time. This white saviorism – to name a more contemporary term describing this dynamic – has the result of demonizing non-white men and non-Western cultures and states while championing the West as civilized and liberal. (Malak and Salem, 2015; Rygiel and Hunt, 2016). The discourse also frames women in the non-west as needing to be saved by the West, and portray a gender-essentialist understanding of women where women are often portrayed as being submissive and without agency and therefore “cannot represent themselves but must be represented” (Spivak, 2003). Mohanty, Pratt, and Riley put forward that this understanding of gender dynamics “militarizes women for imperial goals”(Mohanty, 2003a, p. 6; Mohanty, Pratt and Riley, 2008) and propose counter-questions for critical analysis of the workings of embedded feminism such as “What multiple meanings are embedded in the phrase ‘women’s liberation’?” (Ibid.). Nancy Fraser makes a more general argument that feminism has turned into “an empty signifier of good” (Fraser, 2013, p. 248) due to feminist discourse and movement becoming more and more separate, feminism is increasingly becoming embedded and subverted by actors for their political gain. Discourse analysis is the central method in most of these works, with a main focus on analyzing political statements made by NGOs, Women’s rights organizations, and politicians.



As already mentioned, the so-called war on terror provides the historical background for the term embedded feminism and has therefore also been the center of research on embedded feminism (Hunt, 2016). This is attributed to the Bush administration's heavy use of gendered language in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the support of the U.S. armies' actions in the Middle East by several notable feminist organizations (Hunt, 2016; Thomson, 2022). Scholars highlight women's complicity in the wars on two levels, on one hand through women's participation as combatants in the US military which according to Hunt served to support the portrayal of the U.S. as a champion of liberal values, and on the other hand through legitimizing support by feminist organizations celebrating the Bush administration's military actions as liberating women in the Middle East (Mohanty, 2003a; Hudson, 2012; Hunt, 2016; Rygiel and Hunt, 2016). Davis points out that (add that this process is hegemonic)

### **2.3 Hegemony**

Hegemony is a concept put forward by the Marxist Antonio Gramsci in relation to Marx's understanding of the superstructure, meaning the societal structures such as culture, institutions, media, etc. that are not directly related to material production and labor (Nealon and Searls Giroux, 2011). Gramsci, deterring from classical Marxism by declaring that positions of power could not simply be explained by material conditions, evolved the Marxist concept of the superstructure into the concept of hegemony which describes the production and reproduction of a dominant ideology in a society occurs through "the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society" (Cox, 1983, p. 164). Hegemony can be described as "*the organization of consent*" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 32) where without using violent means the hegemonic power is able to establish the 'common sense' of a society. This 'common sense' organizes society and stabilizes power relations and delimits what can be said, thought, and imagined as "[t]hrough the production of meaning, power relations can become naturalised and so much part of common-sense that they cannot be questioned" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 23), which according to Nancy Fraser is where "hegemony points to the intersection of power, inequality and discourse" (Hudson, 2012, p. 444). Hegemonic power as Gundula Ludwig describes it can be understood as productive since the societal consensus on a 'common sense' is not established through coercion but rather through constant negotiation and compromises with non-dominant and antagonistic

social groups and their needs as “those who are consenting must somehow be truly convinced that the interests of the dominant group are those of society at large, that the hegemonic group stands for a proper social order in which all men [*sic!*] are justly looked after” (Ludwig, 2009, p. 96).

However, this does not mean that hegemonic powers do not need to exercise violence, rather according to Gramsci it precisely functions through a balanced “combination of force and consent” (Pass, 2019, p. 37).

### **2.3.1 Hegemony and World Order**

Surpassing its classical Marxist background, Hegemony has since then gained influence in especially international relations theory, with neo-Gramscian academics such as Robert Cox shaping ideas about the nature of the international system and the expression of hegemony on a global scale/world hegemony (Cox, 1983). According to Cox, a world hegemony would be “expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries” (Cox, 1983, p. 172) with international organizations playing an important role as they subordinate counter-hegemonies ideas, set rules which are beneficial to the world hegemony and legitimize hegemonic ideology and norms(Cox, 1983).

Further, Jonathan Pass argues that culture, norms, and ideology only have political relevance if they are integrated into hegemonic claims and power structures which turns them into “instruments of domination” (Pass, 2019, p. 55). He applies the concept of world order to the contemporary political landscape using it to describe the state of power relations between nation-states that define the framing of peace and security issues (Pass, 2019). A state’s power within this world order can then be understood by taking into account its territorial power, its economic strength, its military capabilities, and “the ideological position a country has in the world, in being a representative of progressive forces in history” (Pass, 2019, p. 42).

### **2.3.2 Liberal Hegemony**

Concerning peace and security discourse, critical scholars have been interested in liberal hegemony, which is conceptualized as the hegemony of liberal values, norms, and understandings. Hudson argues that “the way in which gender is framed in security

discourses and peace operations is symptomatic of the hegemonic way in which the dominant liberal peace discourses and practices are naturalized and institutionalized” (Hudson, 2012, p. 443), a position also put forward by many other decolonial scholars (Clisby and Enderstein, 2017; Dhawan, 2012; Mohanty et al., 2008; Pratt, 2013a). Concurrently, Nikita Dhawan says that when hegemonic norms and values are asserted, they “determine what can be read, heard and understood as intelligible and legible” (Dhawan, 2012, p. 47), subjects that don’t fit into this normative framework are silenced and denied recognition and agency. The impossibility of participating and speaking outside of the margins of liberal norms, ideas, and ideals is then called normative violence or epistemic violence both describing violence that is produced discursively (Dhawan, 2012).

Joe Wills emphasizes hegemony does not mean that the hegemonial status quo is uncontested since “hegemony is achieved not through the imposition of a coherent and unified doctrine on social reality but rather through an ongoing process of contestation that involves incorporating subaltern concerns into the hegemonic discursive framework” (Wills, 2014: 18). Contestation and Appropriation of subversive/potential counter-hegemonic ideas is part of the hegemonic struggle, and Wills argues that liberal hegemony subordinates/subverts political struggles and discourses, especially concerning rights, can be appropriated, recast, and incorporated into prevailing power structures in ways that undermine their subversive potential (Wills, 2014). Hegemonic discourse according to Herschinger forms the meaning of concepts and identities, however, the meanings are not definite but contextually dependent. The current discursive conceptualization according to her is based on linguistic signifiers representing the problematization at hand and on “specific, partially fixed constructions of Self and Other” (Herschinger, 2012, p. 72), that have the power to delimit and articulate acceptable and legitimate measures and actions. Hegemonic discourse is therefore seen as producing and reproducing normative frames that inform and are informed by material reality. In relation to the previous chapters of this literature review, Hegemony is analyzed when looking at the liberal norms underlying the concepts of gender mainstreaming and embedded feminism. Dhawan and Wills point out that rights discourses have a high chance of becoming co-opted to legitimize power structures when they become part of laws, treaties, and agreements that not only

delimit them through democratic structures but also allow actors to often use them according to their own aims (Dhawan, 2012; Wills, 2014). Furthermore, the notion of fundamental liberal norms such as human rights, freedom, liberty, etc. is also criticized by pointing to the genealogy of these values in colonial power structures, arguing that these norms have served as a justification to uphold these power structures and should therefore not be used uncritically as their conceptualization depends on their use (Cooke, 2002; Spivak, 2003; Herschinger, 2012; Wills, 2014; Brunner, 2016, 2020).

Seeing the underlying assumptions informing the definition of gender in gender mainstreaming approaches, Roberta H. Maschietto argues that there is a need to thoroughly explore dimensions of power and violence underlying the strategies impact on the subjects affected by the discourse and policies implemented (Maschietto, 2020). This is also reflected by other scholars calling for an analysis of power and agency in claims of mainstreaming (Lyle-Gonga, 2013; Clisby and Enderstein, 2017; Staudt, 2017; Parashar, Tickner and True, 2018; Brunner, 2020; Maschietto, 2020). Postcolonial feminists argue that gender mainstreaming has to be understood as a manifestation of Western hegemonic power reinstating the binary of “Western liberal/non-liberal other” (Maschietto, 2020, p. 3). Similarly, Mohanty et al. argue that these “unequal power relations” are produced by “discourses of ‘freedom’ and ‘liberation’ [...] raised by an imperial, neoliberal state, by embedded media, and by complicit feminisms” (Mohanty, Pratt and Riley, 2008, p. 5)

Drawing on Foucauldian power/knowledge analysis, Mohanty argues that there is a tendency of western-feminism to codify feminism as inherently Western, framing anti-feminist sentiments and inequality as non-western, not only ignoring gender-based discrimination in Western societies, especially with the current political shift to the right in many western states but also reproducing colonial othering (Mohanty, 2003b). To understand the dimensions of power and agency she suggests a framework combining critical discourse and materialist analysis to include both “political economy and culture” (Mohanty, 2003b, p. 509) to make visible “discursive power” as well as “material complexity” (Mohanty, 2003b, p. 509 p.). Other feminist scholars also describe a Foucauldian understanding of power, with power not only as oppressive but also as productive and disseminating knowledge systems, highlighting the discursive construction of power and challenging essentialist notions of

identity (Lewis and Mills, 2003). According to them the construct of “Westernness is the sign of western hegemony” (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p. 179) and a product of discourse othering the non-west (Azarmandi, 2018a; Moore-Gilbert, 1997b; Spivak and Harasym, 1990).

### **3. Method**

This chapter will elaborate on how the analysis will be conducted. This means the research design and framework as well as the method employed will be explained. The ontological and epistemological positions will be described, and the material used will be presented. Also, the strengths and weaknesses of the method of analysis and the material will be evaluated.

#### **3.1 Methodology**

As deduced from the literature, attention to power structures and knowledge production in policy discourse needs to be taken into account in order to analyze how gender mainstreaming functions within Western hegemony. Therefore, the epistemological stance of this thesis is grounded in critical theory and employs a postpositivist-critical research paradigm as critical research aims to “reveal power relationships and structures” (McGregor, 2018, p. 84) which is well suited for analyzing hegemonic claims. Furthermore, critical methodology “links systemic analysis (e.g., political economy, the state) with cultural analysis” (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 280) and therefore provides a sufficient methodological framework to analyze intersections of liberal hegemony and gender mainstreaming as “a critical analysis of society guided by a reconstruction of normative principles” (Strydom, 2011: 162) seeking to understand “identity formation” (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 166) and its “social and cultural reproduction” (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 223) is facilitated. The research focuses on critically deconstructing knowledge production in policies and views structures and discourse as constitutive of each other, as they interlock with each other in the production of meaning (Rygiel and Hunt, 2016).

Focusing on the interpretation of discourses in conjunction with structure, this thesis was conducted in a qualitative, normative manner, as this enables the author to critically question the use of relevant concepts as defined in the literature review, in the material

and understand their discursive and societal impact. While critical methodology transcends the classical qualitative/empirical methodological division, normative positioning is seen as given in any research as the researcher as a product of society always has underlying assumptions and biases (Morrow and Brown, 1994). However, in contrast to constructivism critical theory does not view the entirety of the social world as constructed but instead emphasizes the interaction between structure and construction (Morrow and Brown, 1994).

Asserting that policies need to be understood as discourses in themselves, the analysis looked at how identities and social relations were constructed by the 2019 and 2023 U.S. WPS strategies. As gender mainstreaming discourses are inherently gendered, the discourse was analyzed critically from a feminist perspective meaning a “political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse” (Lazar, 2007, p. 144).

### **3.2 Method of analysis**

Now that the epistemological foundation of the thesis has been clarified, this section is going to present the methodological framework that was used in the analysis. The method of this thesis was informed by the research traditions outlined in the literature review. This thesis chose to answer the research questions “*What are the main problematizations of gender inequality articulated in the U.S.*

*WPS Strategies, and how are they framed as security issues?*” and “*How can gender mainstreaming be explored as (re)producing liberal hegemonic claims in peace and security discourses?*” using an analytical framework inspired by Bacchi’s WPR approach modified to facilitate an analysis of hegemonic claims. Bacchi’s WPR approach provides a useful tool for critically analyzing hegemonial structures reproduced by policies as it, inspired by Foucault, emphasizes the productive capabilities of power exercised through discourses (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). It seeks to explain how “through the production of ‘problems’ governmental practices contribute to the production of ‘subjects’, ‘objects’, and ‘places’” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 14), proposing an analytic implementation critically exploring “the conceptual premises underpinning problem representations, tracing their genealogy, reflecting on the practices that sustain them and considering their effects” (Bacchi and Goodwin,

2016, p. 17). Based on the congruence of this approach regarding the production of subjects through government practices with the theoretical background on hegemony and gendered discourse as outlined by the literature review, a framework inspired by Bacchi's WPR approach was outlined to allow for a conceptual analysis of gender mainstreaming in relation to liberal hegemony. Furthermore, Bacchi's problematization of contestation and the non-fixity of subjects goes in line with an understanding of hegemony that conceptualizes hegemonic practices as practices of "an ongoing contestation that involves incorporating subaltern concerns into the hegemonic discursive framework" as formulated by Wills (Wills, 2014, p. 18; Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Asserting that Policies need to be understood as discourses in themselves, the analysis looked at how identities and social relations were constructed by the material. As gender mainstreaming discourses are inherently gendered, the discourse was analyzed critically from a feminist perspective meaning a "political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse" (Lazar, 2007, p. 144).

In *Poststructural Policy Analysis – A Guide to Practice*, Bacchi proposes seven steps of analysis for the WPR framework:

- Question 1: What's the problem (e.g., of "gender inequality", "drug use/abuse", "economic development", "global warming", "childhood obesity", "irregular migration", etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
- Question 2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem" (problem representation)?
- Question 3: How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
- Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?
- Question 5: What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
- Question 6: How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
- Step 7: Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 20)

This thesis modified these questions into a framework that facilitates the research questions, this means that the analysis mainly used Questions 1,2,3 and 5 from Bacchi's WPR framework. Due to the scope of the research and to best facilitate the research questions, Question 4, 6 and 7 have not been applied in the analysis. The analysis therefore followed the outlined steps:

- 1. What's the problem represented to be?: Following Bacchi's suggestion by working backwards from the proposed solutions, this first step of the analysis

presented the material by looking at “what is targeted for change” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 19) in the policies, which means both direct problem formulations as well as ‘answers’ or ‘solutions’ presented by the policies as these also encompass problem representations at their core by formulating desired outcomes that by implication signal a current lack that needs to be addressed that is then understood as a problematization (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016).

- 2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” (problem representation)?: The purpose of the second question, as outlined by Bacchi is to focus on how the problematizations can be read within the context of knowledge production (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). This means critically examining the underlying assumptions and ways of thinking inherent in the presented problem formulations as well as understanding the “particular usages of concepts and their purposes” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016).
- 3. Discursive effects, Subjectification effects, Lived effects: This third step of the analysis leans on Question 5 of Bacchi’s WPR approach, it evaluates the problematizations by investigating their implications as discursive effects and on subjectification as well as lived reality through the lens of hegemony, which leads to a specific focus on the organization of consent and so-called truth-claims (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016; Pass, 2019).
- 4. Discussion: This last step of the analysis will discuss the findings of Questions 1-3 with the theories outlined in the literature review.

### **3.3 Choice of Material and Source Criticism**

Two policies were chosen for the analysis, both are official documents issued by the U.S. government. The Documents selected are both easily accessible online and publicly available. The two documents selected are the *United States Strategy on Women, Peace and Security 2019* as well as the *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023*. They were selected for the reasons that they are the two most recent U.S. policies thematizing gender in the field of Peace and Security and that the U.S. SWPS 2019 was the first WPS strategy introduced in the U.S.. Furthermore, the material was selected due to its high comparability with existing



literature, as the materials allow both a comparison to previous WPS strategies and due to being released by the U.S. government to embedded feminism, which has mostly thematized in an American context. Also, the author's cultural expertise and familiarity with the language facilitated the selection of material.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 What's the problem represented to be? / how is gender equality/gender mainstreaming framed in the policies?

This section of the analysis will present the problems presented by the United States Strategy on Women, Peace and Security 2019 (SWPS 2019) and the U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023 (U.S. Government, 2019; United States Government, 2023). This is, in line with Bacchi, realized by looking at "what is targeted for change" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 19) which means both direct problem formulations as well as 'answers' or 'solutions' presented by the policies as these also encompass problem representations at their core by formulating desired outcomes that by implication signal a current lack that needs to be addressed (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016).

Following this understanding, several problem representations can be found in the policies. Both policies acknowledge the overarching problem of lack of gender equality particularly in situations of "instability, corruption, and conflict" (United States Government, 2023, p. 3) and the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective into peace and security issues as core issues to address whereby the implementation of the strategies projects "women's political empowerment and equality as the end state" (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 5) in their introductions (U.S. Government, 2019; United States Government, 2023).

The introductions therefore establish the core problem as a lack of gender equality in Peace and Security related issues, which is then further problematized by the policies through presenting lines of effort. While the U.S. SWPS 2019 presents four lines of effort the U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 presents five that include the ones formulated in 2019 and are described as follows:

- LOE 1: **Participation** – Seek and support the preparation and meaningful participation of women and girls in civic and political leadership, in informal and formal decision-making processes, and in institutions related to peace and security.

- LOE 2: **Protection** – Promote the protection of the human rights of women and girls, and prevent and respond to all forms of GBV across the continuum of peace, conflict, and crisis contexts, including conflict-related sexual violence.
- LOE 3: **Relief, Response, and Recovery** – Prioritize gender-responsive policies and programs to support the safety, participation, and leadership of women and girls in U.S. government responses to conflict, crises, and disasters, and provide safe, equitable access to humanitarian assistance.
- LOE 4: **Integration and Institutionalization** – Integrate WPS principles across U.S. policies and programs to strengthen the institutionalization of comprehensive gender analyses and improve gender equality outcomes.
- LOE 5: **Partnerships** – Encourage partners to mainstream WPS principles across policies and strategies and strengthen capacity to improve gender equality in processes and institutions connected to peace and security decision-making<sup>2</sup>. (United States Government, 2023, p. 4)

The proposed lines of effort allow for a deduction of inherent problem representations that are understood to inform the core problems of gender inequality in peace and security when seen to articulate a ‘lack’ in the current state of things through proposing strategies to resolve this ‘lack’. Hence, we can formulate insufficient participation of women and girls in positions of power in the political, institutional, and social spheres; insufficient protection of the human rights of women and girls in the realm of peace and security; insufficient gender awareness in U.S. government responses and lacking institutionalization of WPS principles; as well as inadequate implementation of WPS principles by U.S. partners leading to a lack of gender equality in peace and security related processes as sub-problematizations in the Lines of Effort.

These core problems in the WPS Strategies lines of effort are then further elaborated in the documents giving reasons as to why gender equality issues are of importance for the U.S. in their engagement with peace and security questions. A

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<sup>2</sup> While both the U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 and U.S. SWPS 2019 present similar lines of effort, the U.S. SWPS 2019 only presents four lines of effort that have slightly different wording as the ones in the U.S. SNAPWPS. Here for simplicity the 2023 version was used, for comparison the 2019 strategy describes the goals as:

- “Line of Effort 1: Support the preparation and meaningful participation of women around the world in informal and formal decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis.”(U.S. Government, 2019, p. 6)
- “Line of Effort 2: Promote the protection of women and girls’ human rights, access to aid, and safety from violence, abuse, and exploitation around the world.” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 8)
- “Line of Effort 3: Adjust United States international programs to improve outcomes in equality for, and the empowerment of, women.” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 10)
- “Line of Effort 4: Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 12)

repeated problematization of four core areas throughout the papers can be observed here. These core areas that the contents of the paper were categorized into are *Objectives/Morals/Values*, *U.S. Security Interests*, *International Foreign Community/foreign Actors* and *Women in Conflict, Civil Society & Peacebuilding*. While there is some overlap between the categories, they each present a specific angle on the previously defined core problematization of lacking gender equality in peace and security in the WPS Strategies.

#### **4.1.1 Objectives/Morals/Values**

Both WPS Strategies highlight *democratic and economic freedom* as desirable values and conditions as cause and effect of gender equality, defining therefore the lack of either as a problem to issues of peace and security by claiming that “higher levels of equality make countries more prosperous, secure, and democratic; conversely, lower levels of gender equality result in greater instability, corruption, and conflict” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 21; United States Government, 2023, p. 3). Ensuring the dissemination of “the American values of individual liberty, religious freedom, and equal treatment” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 14) and promoting women’s economic security and democratic freedoms is portrayed as especially crucial due to “a rise of authoritarianism and broader democratic backsliding in recent years (United States Government, 2023, p. 8). The problem of lack of economic and democratic freedom is thus presented to be hindering gender equality as well as peace and prosperity.

#### **4.1.2 US Security Interests**

Lack of gender equality is also problematized in regard to U.S. security interests framing the WPS strategies implementation as a moral and strategic imperative for U.S. conduct in foreign policy and national security questions. Inequality is repeatedly described as a driver of conflict conversely making the WPS strategies “a tool to achieve gender equality” that “remains dedicated as a means to achieve national security and foreign policy objectives” (White House, 2019, p. 24). By practicing gender mainstreaming through incorporating gender analyses in security-related decisions and ongoing actions as well as by diversifying the military and workforce, previous national

security strategies, that did not take an intersectional gendered perspective into account, will be improved (U.S. Government, 2019; United States Government, 2023).

The second objective is to improve military operations and the military sector in general. The enhancement of gender equality and thus the implementation of the WPS Agenda in the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) in order to “strengthen women’s meaningful participation in the U.S. military and to diversify U.S. forces” (White House, 2019, p. 31) is presented as means to improve the efficiency of the U.S. military. Furthermore, the incorporation of “gender analyses into military operations, including security cooperation programs and activities which considers gender together with other socio-cultural factors to understand human behaviors and the different security needs and challenges of host nation civilians” (White House, 2019, p. 33) is also presented as a tool to improve the outcomes of U.S. military actions.

The underlying subproblem found here perpetuating the main problem representation of lack of gender equality in peace and security is thus described as a *lack of diversity and gender sensitivity in the U.S. armed forces and military operations*.

#### **4.1.3 International Community/Foreign Actors**

LOE 3: Relief and Response, and Recovery in U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 asserts that “U.S. and international responses that take women and girls into account from the outset are more likely to prevent or mitigate systemic breakdowns during crises” (United States Government, 2023, p. 13) and both WPS Strategies declare international cooperation with like-minded partners incorporating WPS principles as essential to respond to global security threats and achieve equality goals (United States Government, 2023, p. 18). However, U.S. SWPS 2019 claims that achieving equality goals globally has “proven elusive” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 4) to the international community not placing enough importance on gender equality as well as a regression of gender equality in many societies in the last years due to ongoing conflicts resulting in a heightened presence of violent extremist groups and fragile, corrupt or authoritarian governments (U.S. Government, 2019; United States Government, 2023).

#### **4.1.4 Women in Conflict, Civil Society and Peacebuilding**

Emphasizing the connection between gender equality goals and peace and security again, the insufficient participation of women in decision-making processes regarding

peace and security and inadequate consideration of gender-specific security needs in crisis responses is presented as a problem. Hence, the objective of an appropriate increase of women and girls in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and counter-terrorist initiatives to improve “conflict prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, and operations” (United States Government, 2023, p. 9) is formulated as a goal. Furthermore, by working together with local women sensibility to the local environment and culture in areas of conflict is increased, which means conflict responses can be adapted better to local populations by e.g. by the DoD to “inform the Department’s definition of the civilian environment” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 31).

## **4.2 What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?**

Building on the problematizations described so far, it is necessary to assess how these problematizations can be read within the context of knowledge production (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). This means critically examining the underlying assumptions and ways of thinking inherent in the presented problem formulations as well as understanding the “particular usages of concepts and their purposes” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016) in the WPS Strategies and finally investigate the presence of distinct government rationalities in the text (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016).

### **4.2.1 Assumptions and Conceptualizations**

One of the core concepts defining the WPS Strategies is gender equality, which the implementation of the WPS Strategies is claimed to promote through the described objectives by mainstreaming gender into U.S. Peace and Security policies and institutions. While the U.S. SWPS 2019 offers a description of gender equality “as the end state whereby women can meaningfully participate in preventing, mediating and resolving conflict and countering terrorism”(U.S. Government, 2019, p. 5) clear non-WPS specific definitions of gender equality are not given, despite the repeated claims that the strategies will improve gender equality overall. Repeatedly, gender equality is linked to benefits for the U.S. such as strategic and moral advantages as well as peace, prosperity and democracy while the absence of gender equality is portrayed as a root cause of conflict and instability, showing that in the WPS Strategies gender equality is

not mainly understood as a moral/social justice issue but rather as a tool necessary to produce positive peace and security outcomes.

Within the solutions and codes of conduct in the WPS strategies several assumptions can be deducted that allow us to understand how gender equality or advancement towards it is conceptualized.

One of them is the assumption that the inclusion of women will automatically improve the impact and efficiency of institutions and operations in the Peace and Security sector. In U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 LoE 1:Participation and LoE 4: Integration and Institutionalization, this is enhanced by arguing that gender equality will be improved by diversifying the military women and the claim that women are inherently better peacekeepers and negotiators in Peace Processes due to having a better connection to the communities they are engaging with (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 12; United States Government, 2023, p. 8). This view of the role of women in peace and security issues is based on a gender essentialist assumption that women possess inherent qualities that makes them better peacemakers. Hudson problematizes that this leads to a situation where “[based] on liberal notions of public representation, inclusion of women in peace processes is then simplistically equated with peace – and exclusion of women with conflict” (Hudson, 2012: 453). She argues however that the inclusion of women in conflict resolution has not had the promised result and attributes this to the fact that the simple addition of women into existing structures and “the adaption of gender equality objectives to fit within taken-for-granted regulatory frameworks that are still largely defined by male standards” (Hudson, 2012, p. 448) cannot comprehend the complexity of conflict dynamics and is unable to challenge underlying systemic issues in the international system. This means that while as Sylvia Walby describes there is no universally accepted understanding of what gender mainstreaming as a tool to achieve gender equality constitutes and practical applications vary drastically, in the WPS Strategies gender mainstreaming is understood as the integration of WPS principles into existing frameworks to improve them and make them more gender-sensitive (Walby, 2005).

Adding on to this, while U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 describes gender-based discrimination as systemic and intersectional several times<sup>3</sup> and accentuates the need for protecting the LGBTQI+<sup>4</sup> and including “people of all genders” (United States Government, 2023, p. 7) repeatedly in the policy implying that U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 does frame its policy as addressing those systemic and intersectional issues when looking at rest of the Strategy and the proposed lines of efforts, it becomes clear that this intersectional understanding is not represented in the majority of the paper as, apart from the mentioned reference to LGBTQ+ issues, the paper talks exclusively about women. Similarly, while gender equality is claimed to be systematic when looking at the section describing this “Systematic Approach” (United States Government, 2023, p. 7) the underlying assumption becomes clear that systemic inequality is mainly seen in the society of the ones who “benefit from peace and security efforts” (United States Government, 2023, p. 7).

While U.S. SWPS 2019 does not understand gender equality as systemic in general, it also locates systemic inequality elsewhere, namely in zones of conflict as well within “imbalanced or corrupt systems of power and influence” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 12). The underlying assumption here is that conflict and systemic inequality both originate and are exacerbated by what the U.S. Administration understands as “malign actors” (United States Government, 2023, p. 18) who “seek to erode the rules-based order” (United States Government, 2023, p. 5) and exploit women for “their own gain” (White House, 2019, p. 4) which then affects global security by causing destabilization and conflict (U.S. Government, 2019; United States Government, 2023). This is seen as especially important in the face of increased threats and risks impacting U.S. security with heightened global insecurity, raised tensions with actors such as China and Russia, and the fight against terrorism being named as major challenges for the U.S. in the WPS Strategies. Both U.S. SNAPWPS 2023 and U.S. SWPS 2019 advocate for the necessity of integrating the WPS Strategies as means to strengthen US

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<sup>3</sup> For comparison: U.S. SWPS 2019 does not mention intersectionality or the LGBTQI+ Community at all. However, “systemic inequality” is mentioned once on p.11. Apart from the mentioned difference in the length of the documents, this was the only major difference found in the contents of the U.S. WPS Strategies. That the 2019 document does not mention these topics and has a less diverse definition of gender-related discrimination could have to do with the earlier release date or with the political positions of the 2019 U.S. Administration

<sup>4</sup> Protection of the LGBTQ+ community is mentioned on page 11, 19, 24, 27, 39, 49 in U.S. SNAPWPS 2023

national security strategies based on two main objectives. Problematizing actors who do not support gender equality, the first objective is to promote American values and thereby combating malign actors such as “state and non-state authoritarian regimes [seeking] to erode the rules-based international order and erase progress on human rights” (United States Government, 2023, p. 5) by prioritizing “equality as both a moral and strategic imperative” (United States Government, 2023, p. 18) and therefore setting the U.S. apart from actors who violate human rights and undermine gender equality.

This means that in contrast to antagonized actors, the U.S. is portrayed as the epitome of embodying liberal values as it is “committed to setting itself apart as a credible model of inclusion, equality, and democratic governance” (United States Government, 2023, p. 5) that combats the destabilizing influence of elements who do not incorporate those values by empowering women worldwide to reach peace and prosperity (U.S. Government, 2019). Consequently, this means that the WPS strategies illustrate an understanding of their role in the international system that is constructed, in the words of Pratt, through “[p]ractices and understandings of security and insecurity [that] depend upon the identification of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and particular constructions of Self/Other, which are particular configurations of gender, race, class, and sexuality underpin dominant discourses and practices of international security” (Pratt, 2013b, p. 772, 2013a, p. 772). The U.S. and parts of the international community its ‘like-minded partners’ are presented to be the ‘us’ that commit themselves to gender equality, conflict resolution, women’s rights, democracy, and peace while the ‘them’ are the illegitimate actors working against these efforts. The underlying assumption here is one of *American exceptionalism* where liberal democracy and its associated values are seen as superior as well as fundamentally American setting the U.S. apart from other actors (Ahmed, 2004). Successively, the codes of conduct proposed by the WPS Strategies are presented not only as political modes of action but rather as expressions of the ‘right morality’, which through the logic of *American exceptionalism* makes them cultural issues (Pass, 2019).

### **4.3 Discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects**

This section as outlined in the research framework, will look at how the problematisations in the WPS Strategies have come about in line with Question 3 of



Bacchi's WPR approach ("How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 20)). Furthermore, utilizing Question 5 of WPR this chapter will examine the effects the problematization by investigating their implications on discourse, subject creation, and lived reality through the lens of hegemony.

Several discursive effects can be determined from the core *problematization lack of gender equality* in the U.S. WPS Strategies. Bacchi in reference to Foucault describes that discursive effects are evaluated by paying attention to "how the terms of reference established by a particular problem representation set limits on what can be thought and said" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 23). Coming back at the core areas of problematizations, *Objectives/Morals/Values, U.S. Security Interests, International Foreign Community/foreign Actors* and *Women in Conflict, Civil Society & Peacebuilding*, presented in Chapter 3.1 and taking into account the underlying assumptions described in Chapter 3.2 discursive effects can be deduced.

The WPS Strategies frame gender equality (or lack thereof) as a moral issue through the idea of *American Exceptionalism*, which was already touched upon in the previous section, and define that the WPS Strategies are able to "promote U.S. values that make us stronger, safer, more prosperous, and more democratic." (United States Government, 2023, p. 5) as they present "a holistic approach that engages with and includes people of all genders, challenges discriminatory gender norms and promotes gender equality" (United States Government, 2023, p. 7), as well as presenting the approach as all-encompassing and declaring it as a supreme policy by urging other countries to follow the example. This reproduces a justification of the power the U.S. currently has in the international system based on its foundation on "principles of liberty" (Pass, 2019, p. 171).

In line with this, the international community is constructed as suffering collectively and universally from gendered oppression and its effects, and as long as gender equality will not be reached, global peace and security will not be achieved, if, as claimed by the "malign actors [can] frequently exploit individual, community, and societal vulnerabilities for their own gain" (U.S. Government, 2019:4). In consequence, to pursue gender equality and reach peace, the international community needs to stand united against the "malign actors" (U.S. Government, 2019:4) destabilizing the international system and causing global insecurity.

Through this universalization of the subjects in the WPS Strategies that sets a normative space based on liberal morality and values of gender equality, freedom, democracy, and rule of law the antagonist can be understood as the antagonized other of the subject group, or the actor hindering the subject group from achieving a realization of their goals (Herschinger, 2012). In other words, the antagonist is the ‘other’ that’s fundamentally different from the ‘us’ of the universalized subject and norm group, in this case, the ‘malign actors. Regarding the WPS strategies and in line with the literature on UN RES1325 and embedded feminism, this points to the genealogy of the use of the concept of gender equality. As articulated by Foucault, Genealogy has the goal of making visible the history of generally accepted morals, norms and concepts tracing how they came to be in order to “de-evilize the present” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 47). In the case of gender equality as problematized by the WPS Strategies, postcolonial scholars have pointed to the historical use of women’s rights by colonial powers to justify colonial projects as for example Gayatri Spivak and Kristia Hunt have extensively analyzed (see: Hunt, 2016; Rygiel and Hunt, 2016; Spivak, 2003). Claims to gender equality have in the past served “as an instrument of colonial domination” (Hunt, 2016, p. 54). In continuation of this colonial logic, appeals to women’s rights and gender equality have then been used to justify U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In continuation, while the WPS Strategies do not focus on the use of violence directly and emphasize the importance of working together with local partners, the norms and values conceptualized by the approaches do construct a normative group based on liberal values, legitimizing liberal Western understandings of a just society establishing a framework of legitimate action, thereby, taking into account the implied underlying assumptions as pointed to by the genealogy of gender equality in peace and security issues, dividing the discursive space into the “Western liberal/non-liberal other”(Maschietto, 2020, p. 3). Meaning that effectively women’s rights, freedom, and democracy are the norms that are used as “defence of particular social forms or institutions”(Ahmed, 2004, p. 134) as the representation of gender equality in the WPS strategies as a core American value marks gender issues as an integral part of liberal democracy.

Furthermore, by declaring gender equality a part of the moral national agenda of the U.S. it can be argued a certain understanding of the concept of gender equality (in peace and security issues) is (re)produced, through the articulated Lines of Effort and the integration of WPS into the existing foreign policy and national security strategies. As a result of this, the lack of gender equality is seen by the WPS strategies as mainly a problem of the unequal representation of women in numbers in issues concerning peace and security, such as the military and conflict resolution with the strategies proposed solution being located in what Mohanty calls “UN-orbit” (Mohanty, 2013, p. 982) feminism, meaning an “approach toward gender equality embedded in systemic proposal-based global agendas” (ibid.) that is exercised from the top down and where values like democracy, individual liberty, freedom, rule of law and human rights affirm a liberal world order and declare an implicit norm group. The insiders of the norm group are understood as the like-minded actors who share these liberal values using “gender discourses as a tool to enforce its norms” (Hudson, 2012, p. 444). At the same time, other norms, that have historically been connected to feminism and women’s rights have been subverted by the discourse, with the WPS strategies for example actively rejecting the pacifist position historically connected to many feminisms and asserting the necessity of protecting nation-state’s rights to military means and legitimate violence, if assessed through a gendered lens (Chenoy, 2004). Consequently, when the struggle for gender equality is integrated into the framework of Western gender-mainstreaming in peace and security, this sends the message that “the best way for women to improve their status is to join, negotiate with or reinforce the existing state system” (Chenoy, 2004, p. 30), as the strategies support women conditionally, meaning if they act in within the delimitations set by the (policy) discourse, which in the WPS Strategies is for example that the strategies are implemented in line with and in order to improve the existing “national security and foreign policy objectives” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 24) rather than challenge or problematize them.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

This understanding of the WPS Strategies as gender mainstreaming sets the stage for comparing the gendered discourse in the U.S. WPS strategies to embedded feminism, which Kristia Hunt defined as “the incorporation of feminist discourse and feminist activists into political projects that claim to serve the interests of women but ultimately

subordinate and/or subvert that goal” (Hunt, 2016, p. 53). Several similarities can be found in the gendered discourse presented in the WPS Strategies and the Bush administrations embedded feminism during the so-called war on terror, which is the focus of Hunt’s work on the topic. One of them is the persistent use of moral arguments that assert the moral superiority of the U.S. through the logic of *American Exceptionalism*<sup>5</sup> as well as the framing of women’s emancipation as a means to counter instability (in the WPS Strategies ‘instability’ is more broadly mentioned, while the Bush Administration focusses on terrorism).

However, in contrast to the so-called war on terror where Hunt describes that the subversion of women’s interests relied on feminists aligning themselves with the Bush administration’s policies (Hunt, 2016, p. 67), I argue that this is not the case in gender mainstreaming strategies such as the WPS Strategies. While the embedding of feminism by the Bush administration in the so-called war on terror can be understood as a most likely conscious strategy of using appeals to women’s rights as a means to gain the support of certain demographics for the Administration’s military actions, especially those who were not traditionally aligned with the Bush Administrations politics; gender mainstreaming as articulated in the WPS strategies can be seen as a consequential outcome of the logic of liberal governance per se. In line with this, Sara Ahmed observes that:

The definition of values that will allow America to prevail in the face of terror—values that have been named as freedom, love, and compassion—involves the defense of particular institutional and social forms against the danger posed by others. Such values function to define not only ideals that supposedly govern war aims and objectives but democratic norms of behavior and conduct, of what it means to be civil, a civil society, and a legitimate government (Ahmed, 2004, p. 134)

As presented in the previous sections of this analysis, the WPR Approaches can be understood as formulating need interpretations (for women, for the international system as a whole) and presenting a certain model of gender equality. In this context, the

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<sup>5</sup> e.g: U.S. SWPS 2019: “Promote the American values of individual liberty, religious freedom, and equal treatment under the law in our engagement with other nations to implement the WPS Strategy.” (U.S. Government, 2019, p. 14)

George W. Bush speech at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2005: “But Americans have always held firm, because we have always believed in certain truths. We know that if evil is not confronted, it gains in strength and audacity and returns to strike us again. We know that when the work is hard, the proper response is not retreat, it is courage. And we know that this great ideal of human freedom is entrusted to us in a special way and that the ideal of liberty is worth defending.” (Bush, 2005)

strategies can then be understood as an *articulating practice* ‘fixing’ the moral and normative space and presenting this specific understanding of advancement to gender equality in peace and security issues as universal (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). As Mouffe and Laclau argue, “this relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a *hegemonic relation*” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. xiii). Hence, applying this to gender mainstreaming as presented by the WPS strategies, the strategy can be understood as an expression of a hegemonic relation as the strategies articulate a universal, fixed understanding of concepts, norms, and morals and delimit the space of political action by presenting certain legitimate and illegitimate actors (in the WPS strategies this would be the U.S. and its allies as legitimate actors and the “malign actors” as illegitimate actors). It can further be argued that this “new hegemony operates as a form of ‘camouflaged politics’ masking the economic and political rationale behind the global dynamics of power” (Zine, 2008, p. 31), as the strategies delimit the frame of possible action which includes antagonizing actors who do not act in the normative frame and present gender equality as a means to achieve strategic and economic goals using gender discourse as a tool to do so (Hudson, 2012).

While as already mentioned in 4.2.1, the WPS strategies do not present a clear definition of what a state of gender equality looks like despite this being declared the end goal of the strategies implementation, I argue that since the formulated goals and strategies of the WPS approaches operate as system-integrative gender-mainstreaming this means that gender equality in the strategies is based on a self-evident understanding of U.S. politics and national identity, that is not free from prejudices and stereotypes (Mohanty, 2003b). However, this does not mean that the WPS approaches conceptualization of gender equality shows “a theoretical or conceptual deficit on the part of those engaged in policy making” (Cook, 2016, p. 357). Rather, I argue that the ambiguous understanding of gender equality in the strategies should precisely be understood as the place of emergence of a hegemonic claim. Having already established that the strategies fix the moral and normative frame by articulating a universal definition of gender equality in peace and security issues and delimit actors who act outside this frame; the strategies can be understood as exercising *epistemic violence* (Brunner, 2020). Epistemic violence according to Brunner is an indirect, hegemonical

form of violence that through discursive “*truth claims*” (Brunner, 2020, p. 91) has the power to establish “which forms and purposes of violence are just and justified” (Brunner, 2020, p. 91)<sup>6</sup>. Looking at the discourse in the WPS strategies this means that since they do not present a targeted practice towards a certain goal, they could be used to legitimize a broad space of possible action to a broad audience. By leaving the specifics of gender mainstreaming and equality goals undefined and therefore presenting a broad ‘truth claim’ based on liberal values universally accepted as good, the WPS strategies keep open a broad frame for the U.S. to intervene in various ways, including diplomatically, economically, or militarily, under the pretext of advancing gender equality. In this sense, the ambiguity of the strategies may be used to justify violence, placing them in line with Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as the interplay of consent and coercion (Pass, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

In Conclusion, this thesis critically explored how gender mainstreaming can be understood as functioning through the (re)production of liberal hegemonic claims based on the two most recent U.S. Women, Peace and Security Strategies. Using the concepts of hegemony and embedded feminism as a lens to evaluate power structures in gender mainstreaming discourse, this thesis has found that while the 2019 and 2023 U.S. WPS strategies frame the issue of gender equality in peace and security issues as systemic and at least in part intersectional, they lack transformative potential and can be understood as system integrative approaches focusing mainly on equality in numbers as well as understanding gender analysis as a tool to serve existing national security objectives. Furthermore, the core finding of this thesis is that the 2019 and 2023 U.S. WPS Strategies frame the issue of gender equality in peace and security through the logic of hegemony by (re)producing liberal hegemonic claims through values such as freedom, liberty, and equality. Through this *articulating practice* organized around values and norms that are commonsensically understood as good and just, the hegemonic discourse in the strategies presents a claim to the “proper social order” (Ludwig, 2009, p. 96), in

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from German: „welche Formen und Zwecke von Gewalt gerecht(fertigt) sind“ (Brunner, 2020, p. 91)

this case, the state-centric international system with the U.S. as its moral leader (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Pass, 2019). The most important aspect of this hegemonic logic is the organization of consent which in the problematizations of gender equality and through the strategy of gender mainstreaming this thesis finds as being created by subordinating and subverting feminisms with system transformation goals into the hegemonic governance framework. This finding aligns with previous research on gender mainstreaming and embedded feminism, as gender mainstreaming in the U.S. WPS strategies focuses on increasing women's representation in peace and security institutions without addressing the broader power structures that sustain inequality.

By working within existing institutional frameworks, these policies fail to enact the structural transformations necessary for genuine gender equality. Additionally, this thesis found that in comparison to other forms of embedded feminism, gender mainstreaming, as exercised in the WPS strategies opens the space for a broad range of possible actions, something that should further be critically explored, seeing the historical use of embedded feminism in colonialism and U.S. military interventions. The framework of this thesis, modifying Bacchi's WPR approach to allow for a focus on hegemonic power structures in the discourse, has allowed this thesis to explore previous theoretical understandings and engage with different concepts to understand how gender equality is discursively framed. However, a different choice of method such as either a strict policy analysis or a conceptual/theoretical paper, could enhance further in-depth insights into contemporary gender mainstreaming.

Hence, interesting endeavors for further research could be more comprehensive policy analyses of liberal hegemonic claims in contemporary gender mainstreaming, especially with the emergence of more and more feminist foreign policies integrating systems challenging feminisms such as postcolonial, Marxist, and black feminisms. Moreover, different concepts and theories could be explored especially ones focusing on non-Western perspectives, such as Gayatri Spivak's 'agent-as-instrument' (Birla, 2002).

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