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Where Are the Women in UN Mediation?

I started thinking about women, gender, and UN mediation over a decade ago, as an undergraduate intern for the UN's mediator in Cyprus.[1] I chose to research the barriers and opportunities to Cypriot women's inclusion in the peace process, which the UN had been facilitating since the 1960s. At that time, late 2011 to early 2012, the lack of women's formal participation in the Cypriot process had become a concern, not least because it showed that the UN was lagging in the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda. This Agenda was established in 2000, when a coalition of feminist civil society and elected members of the UN Security Council (Namibia, Jamaica, and Bangladesh, in particular) successfully campaigned for the adoption of resolution 1325. In this resolution, the Council committed to increasing the 'representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict'.[2] All ten of the WPS resolutions from the Security Council, adopted from 2000 to 2019, refer to increasing women's participation and mainstreaming gender in peace and security decision-making.[3] Later WPS resolutions strengthened language on women's participation,

[1] Unless referring to a specific mission, I use the term 'a/the mediator' to refer to an individual representing the UN at a high level. This includes Special Envoys (SESGs), Special Advisers (SASGs), Special Representatives (SRSGs), and Personal Envoys (PESGs) of the Secretary-General.

[2] UN Security Council 2000.

[3] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the WPS Agenda in the UN, and Table 2.1 for mediation-relevant language in the WPS resolutions.

stressing that it should be full, equal, and meaningful.[4] The resolutions also singled out UN-supported peace talks as a target for implementation.[5] As one feminist activist who worked on the campaign for 1325 noted, they hoped this Agenda 'could make photos of only male leaders at peace negotiating tables starkly outdated'.[6]

However, the picture in Cyprus in 2011 had not changed much at all. Although the UN had included more women on its team, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiating teams were all male, with the exception of one or two junior female members. Moreover, despite concrete and detailed proposals from Cypriot women on the issues on the table, it was unclear how the negotiators considered gender, if at all.[7] I came away from the experience perplexed at how those who seemed to be most committed to solving the conflict – the Cypriot women who worked tirelessly to create an inclusive and peaceful future – were least likely to be included in the formal talks. Even in a context where the stars seemed to align for women's participation, including an organised group of women with a clear agenda and UN officials who were amenable to WPS, there were so many obstacles.

My frustration at the slow progress of the WPS Agenda seems, perhaps, like a naïve perspective – surely it is natural that such an ambitious feminist agenda would encounter resistance! And, indeed, it is easy to find simple explanations for women's exclusion from peace mediation that focus on the political will of the conflict parties, the 'real' nature of the political process, the 'actual' root causes of the conflict, and so on. Naraghi-Anderlini's foundational critique of WPS in the UN system diagnosed a 'Triple-A syndrome' of apathy, ad hoc approaches, and institutional amnesia.[8] It is still common to hear that a lack of political will and knowledge about the Agenda, as well as under-resourcing, explain poor outcomes.[9] While these problems are undoubtedly real, apathy or under-resourcing are not explanations but reflections of how an institution ascribes value. Understanding who and what UN mediation values and how this is gendered means delving into the institutional common

[4] UN Security Council 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2019a.
[5] UN Security Council 2019b.
[6] Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004, p. 137.
[7] On women, feminism, and the Cyprus conflict, see Economidou 2002; Hadjipavlou 2010; Demetriou and Hadjipavlou 2014; Cyprus Gender Advisory Team 2017; Hadjipavlou and Mertan 2019; Papastavrou 2020.
[8] Naraghi-Anderlini 2007, pp. 213–18.
[9] Coomaraswamy 2015; Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd 2020, p. 14.

sense that has shaped how the UN has translated the WPS Agenda into its 'mundane daily procedures',[10] as well as into its high-profile peace negotiations. To investigate these issues, I started by asking basic questions about how the UN thinks about and practises 'mediation' and 'the WPS Agenda'. While the WPS Agenda is wide-ranging, the focus of this book is how UN mediation has incorporated women's participation and a 'gender perspective' into its work.[11] Rather than identifying a set of 'objective' standards against which I can measure the implementation of the Agenda, I contend that the WPS Agenda is remade whenever actors use it. Moreover, I assume that the WPS Agenda and UN mediation are co-constitutive, rather than neatly bounded entities encountering one another. This is why I use the term 'incorporation' rather than 'implementation' throughout this book to describe these dynamics.

This chapter introduces the argument, summarises the findings, and describes the conceptual framework that I use to analyse UN mediation as a gendered, colonial institution. The UN defines mediation as a 'process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage, or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements'.[12] This definition focuses on mediation as the particular conflict resolution technique, while in this book I treat UN mediation as an institution that encompasses the formal and informal practices, narratives, and subjects of UN mediation across all sites where the UN works, from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) at UN headquarters to missions across the globe. It also includes the norms and rules of the UN Charter and the specific instructions that the Security Council may mandate for a mediation effort. The WPS Agenda also sets out norms regarding gender mainstreaming and the participation of women in peace and security.

In the institutional context, this analysis trains a critical lens on how gender is woven throughout competing visions of *what* UN mediation is, *how* it should be done, and by *whom*. The WPS Agenda is rearticulated through these existing institutional logics, each with their own particularly gendered narratives, practices, and subject positions. These logics co-opt or marginalise the WPS Agenda, even as internal advocates of the Agenda seek reform. By taking this approach, this book contributes to the theoretical project of studying gender in international institutions

[10] Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004, p. 134.
[11] Bell 2015a.
[12] DPA 2012, p. 4.

by focusing on everyday narratives and practices. It also improves our understanding of the WPS Agenda by providing the first systematic study of its incorporation in UN mediation. Importantly, it is also a normative project that argues for decolonial feminist approaches to peacemaking.

THE ARGUMENT AND KEY FINDINGS

In brief, this book examines how the UN has incorporated the WPS Agenda into its mediation work in a way that has co-opted and undermined the aims of these gender equality reforms. It shows how UN mediation is comprised of two main logics: Mediation as a science; and mediation as an art. Special Envoys and field-based staff tend to think of UN mediation as an art, while experts and headquarters units conceptualise it as a science. The logic of UN mediation as science co-opts gender expertise and the consultation of local women to inform and legitimise existing approaches to mediation. For those invested in UN mediation as an art, considering the nexus between gender inequality and conflict or including women risks upsetting the carefully managed relationships between male mediators and negotiators. Caught within these logics, the potential of the WPS Agenda to achieve meaningful women's participation in peace processes remains unrealised. My analysis has three main moves. First, I make visible institutional common sense – here, I adopt the terminology of 'institutional logics', which are comprised of narratives, practices, and subjects (i.e. categories of people who are ascribed varying levels of agency). Second, I examine how these logics are gendered. Third, I then analyse how these logics co-opt, adopt, exclude, and rearticulate the WPS Agenda. Bearing in mind the co-constitution of the different elements, which is flattened when depicted in a table, Table 1.1 presents a summary of the analysis, including the logics of UN mediation, their corresponding narratives, practices, and subjects, and their implications for the WPS Agenda.

The logics of UN mediation as an 'art' or a 'science' both shape the incorporation of the WPS Agenda, but they do so in different ways. The logic of UN mediation as a science has, in many respects, successfully co-opted the WPS Agenda. This logic is organised around ideas of efficiency, linearity, and expertise. At stake is the smooth functioning of a process that, through the application of expertise, will be able to produce sustainable peace. The WPS Agenda, in the form of expert knowledge about gender, can be harnessed to promote the efficiency of UN mediation. This generates practices such as 'gender-sensitive conflict analysis'

TABLE 1.1 *Summary of key concepts and findings*

Logic	Narratives	Practices	Subjects	Implications
Art	Mediation is a diplomatic art that cannot easily be taught Mediation relies upon relationships and a 'feel for the game'	Storytelling from personal experience Emotional labour; building relationships in informal settings Mediator discretion Appointment of 'ideal' mediators	'The mediator' 'Conflict parties' 'Youths'	Exclusion of local women and gender issues from negotiations Selection of 'political men' as mediators Framing of 'inclusion' as inimical to stopping violence
Science	Mediation is a technical science that has best practices and procedures for process design that can be adapted across contexts Mediation must become more professional (i.e. expertise-driven) to deal with 'complexity' of conflict and its root causes	Mediation process design Training and development of guidance documents Conflict analysis of 'root causes' and gender-sensitive conflict analysis Transmission of best practices Consultation of 'the women'	'The women' Gender experts	Extraction of knowledge and labour from 'the women' Co-optation of gender as an area of expertise Elision of 'inclusion' with 'consultation' Centring the UN as the main agent and beneficiary of the WPS Agenda

and the circulation of 'best practices' in implementing the WPS Agenda. The WPS Agenda is layered into existing practices in ways that limit its transformative insights about the co-constitutive nature of gender and conflict. For instance, 'gender-sensitive conflict analysis' falls prey to the same colonial logics of knowledge production as its foundational practice, conflict analysis. Meanwhile, the 'best practices' the UN adopts emphasise establishing consultative forums for local women, over direct political participation. As a result, UN mediation practice shifts further

away from the WPS Agenda's concept of full, equal, and meaningful participation and also rewrites the meaning of participation for future practitioners. These practices of expertise creation and consultation, in turn, co-constitute the subject position of 'the women'. Throughout UN mediation narratives and practices, 'the women' figure as labourers, informants, and legitimators who are simultaneously useful to the UN and incapable of full political agency.

By contrast, the logic of UN mediation as an art leads to the marginalisation and exclusion of women and gender. This logic prioritises relationships and political judgement over technical expertise. The biggest issue at stake for the mediator is retaining the consent of conflict parties to talks, so that they can put an urgent stop to violence. Two key practices that emerge from this conceptualisation of mediation are emotional labour and discretion. UN mediators practise emotional labour, such as empathetic listening, to manage conflict parties, who are seen as male politicians or military leaders. This practice also hinges on male bonding in informal settings. This means including women is a risky proposition, as doing so can disrupt homosocial spaces and endanger parties' consent. UN mediators also continue to exercise a significant degree of discretion over the WPS Agenda, despite the constraints under which they work. Mediators may choose not to prioritise the WPS Agenda because they see it as incompatible with speedy negotiated settlements. In that case, pursuing inclusion may mean the mediator is seen as having poor political judgement. Additionally, promoting women's inclusion draws accusations of partiality, meaning it imperils a mediator's ability to present themselves as an impartial third party, which is a requirement for anyone representing the UN. These narratives and practices, which reproduce masculinised spaces and hierarchies of issues and actors, co-constitute the subject of the 'mediator' as a 'political man'. Practices that shape the selection and appointment of UN mediators, as well as informal narratives around mediators' ideal attributes, continue to elevate male candidates with diplomatic or political experience over similarly qualified women. There is also a colonial hierarchy of masculinities in UN mediation: The 'conflict parties' are constructed as irrational, traditional 'others' who need the guidance of a paternalistic figure, the UN mediator.

The logic of UN mediation as a science, while dominant, is not hegemonic. The logic of UN mediation as an art, which is embedded in diplomacy, shaped earlier practice and continues to do so today. The tensions between them may be observed in the space of a single guidance document or interview transcript, or among staff in the same mission. While

the logic of UN mediation as a science has been ascendant for some time, the limitations of a depoliticised, technical approach to conflict resolution are becoming clearer to scholars and practitioners.[13] The dominance of senior UN mediators with diplomatic and political experience also means that this approach to mediation is not going anywhere, anytime soon. These struggles will continue to shape the incorporation of the WPS Agenda in UN mediation.

WHY UN MEDIATION?

UN mediation is worthwhile paying attention to for several reasons. First, peace agreements are, in Bell and O'Rourke's words, 'sites of feminist intervention'.[14] This project focuses on 'Track I', 'formal', or 'high-level' peace processes, which are the areas of mediation that have been least amenable to women's participation, in contrast with 'grassroots' or 'Track III' peacebuilding.[15] These elite processes often have the highest stakes, as they are where comprehensive political agreements are signed. As such, they provide opportunities for the reordering of societal institutions, including gender relations. An inclusive approach to mediation can potentially transform the status of women as, in many cases, conflict forces women into new roles and spurs their political mobilisation. These social and political changes present opportunities for creating a gender-just peace.[16] There is a clear connection between the descriptive and substantive representation of women in mediation: An inclusive process means the final agreement will be more likely to include provisions on gender equality.[17] Furthermore, the presence of WPS language in a ceasefire or comprehensive peace agreement provides 'hooks' for action and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that it is harder to negotiate away gender equality provisions in the implementation phase.[18] So, unless women are involved in decision-making, it is likely that they will be left out of post-conflict institution building.

Second, UN mediation has been particularly slow to address WPS. Despite the WPS Agenda's clear applicability to UN mediation, it took

[13] DPPA 2019, p. 32.
[14] Bell and O'Rourke 2010, p. 946.
[15] For discussions of women's participation beyond formal processes, see Naraghi-Anderlini 2007; Porter 2007; Dayal and Christien 2020.
[16] Björkdahl 2012; Arostegui 2013; Anderson 2016; Berry 2018.
[17] True and Riveros-Morales 2019.
[18] Bell 2015a.

nearly ten years for DPPA to start considering gender in its work. That it finally began to do so was partly because of the influence of feminists among its staff.[19] The first document focused on gender and UN mediation that it produced was the 2012 *Guidance for Mediators: Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire Agreements*, which, while important, is quite narrow in its focus. The UN's definitive text on gender and mediation, the *Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies*, did not appear until 2016. To put this in context, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) published its first guidance on gender-responsive mediation in 2013.[20] In 2019, the Secretary-General lamented that 'ensuring the meaningful participation of women in all phases of United Nations-backed peace processes remains a challenge'.[21] While women are now included in more negotiating teams in UN-facilitated processes, their numbers remain low.[22] Securing the presence of women not affiliated with conflict parties, especially in high-level negotiations, remains difficult. Moreover, although the involvement of the UN tends to have a positive effect on the number of gender provisions in peace agreements, and the number of mentions of 'women' in peace agreements has increased over time, few peace agreements include provisions that address the linkages between violence and marginalisation.[23]

Third, I am concerned with how UN mediation erodes the rights-based case for women's participation. The WPS Agenda traces part of its lineage to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which guarantees political participation as a human right.[24] However, the increasingly popular instrumental argument for women's participation focuses on the positive effects that including women can have on the longevity of a process, or how women are better communicators or more interested in peace. Some mixed-methods studies find a correlation between the presence of women in a process and the longevity of the agreement, particularly where civil society women are able to work with women on negotiating teams.[25] That is, it is women's influence, rather than just their presence, that leads to these outcomes.[26]

[19] Interview 20165.
[20] OSCE 2013.
[21] UN Secretary-General 2019, p. 4.
[22] Ibid., p. 6.
[23] Bell and O'Rourke 2010; Ellerby 2013; Bell 2015a.
[24] O'Rourke and Swaine 2018.
[25] Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018.
[26] Ellerby 2016.

These findings, although preliminary, have strengthened the instrumental case for women's participation, which many advocates have adopted as they have struggled with unresponsive mediation institutions.[27] But, in the long run, it makes women's right to political participation conditional on how well they can facilitate a peace process. Men do not have these preconditions placed on their participation in peace processes. Violent women, incapacitated women, women who choose silence, women who do not conform to expectations of diplomatic behaviour, women who resist bad deals, and women who do all they can in the context of a failing process – they all lose their right to participate. Worse, liberal feminist approaches to mediation that harness a depoliticised form of women's action undermine feminist activism that is explicitly political and disruptive.[28]

Lastly, UN mediation matters because of its influence on mediation writ large. While the UN's mediation work is less resourced and often less visible than peacekeeping or peacebuilding, it is a concrete example of how the UN wields its moral and expert legitimacy in global governance.[29] It not only uses its moral authority to broker conflicts but also produces expertise and sets standards for mediation practice globally. DPPA is enmeshed in a community of practice of mediation experts, academics, and NGOs who constantly refine approaches to mediation and disseminate these among their networks through 'best practices', policy papers, training workshops, and seminars.[30] This means that how the UN deals with issues like women's participation in mediation can shape practices in other organisations, affecting the incorporation of the WPS Agenda beyond the UN.

This project addresses these issues and contributes to the literatures on WPS and mediation. The literature on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in UN-supported peace processes has largely been developed for a policy audience. These papers focus on making the case for women's participation, diagnose barriers to inclusion, and provide solutions, often based on vignettes of specific processes.[31] While there is a literature on women and the WPS Agenda in mediation, negotiation, and peace agreements, it does not look systematically at the UN.[32] One exception is

[27] Paffenholz 2019, p. 149.
[28] Smith 2018.
[29] Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Convergne 2016a.
[30] Convergne 2016b.
[31] Rehn and Johnson-Sirleaf 2002; Naraghi-Anderlini 2007; Bell and O'Rourke 2010; Bell 2015b; Paffenholz and Ross 2016; Paffenholz 2019.
[32] Nakaya 2003; Ellerby 2013, 2016; Aroussi 2015; Turner 2019; Sapiano 2020.

Catherine Turner's study of women mediators and the UN.[33] This book bridges the feminist interest in mediation, the UN, and the WPS Agenda and provides a theoretically grounded and empirically rich account of UN mediation that, I hope, will generate analysis of the WPS Agenda in mediation institutions beyond the UN.

Meanwhile, the mediation literature is largely structured around rationalist bargaining frameworks. This generates questions about parties' and mediator's interests, the timing of and consent for mediator entry, mediator leverage, how mediators can help parties overcome commitment problems, and the techniques and outcomes of mediation.[34] The institutional, social aspects of mediation have been given less attention, despite the turn towards 'the everyday' in the peacebuilding literature.[35] Recent studies are beginning to take the institutional context seriously by studying mediation mandates, as well as the role of individual mediators and mediating organisations in promoting norms.[36] This book advances our understanding of mediation by opening the 'black box' of a specific mediation institution – the UN – to examine its historical and social terrain.

THINKING OF UN MEDIATION AS AN INSTITUTION

I conceptualise UN mediation as a gendered-colonial institution that is riven by struggles over what it means to do mediation. The narratives, practices, and subject positions that constitute UN mediation as an institution, I argue, are germane to understanding how the WPS Agenda is incorporated therein. Here, I begin by discussing existing feminist approaches that put institutions at the centre of analysis. I then set out the framework that I use to analyse the everyday of UN mediation, the historicity of this institution, and the entwining of gendered and colonial notions of difference in ideas about UN mediation and the WPS Agenda.

Feminist Approaches to Institutions

Feminist scholars in International Relations and Development Studies have long grappled with the gendered nature of global governance and

[33] Turner 2018.

[34] Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 1999; Zartmann 2000; Maundi et al. 2006; Regan and Aydin 2006; Beardsley 2011; Duursma 2014, 2020; Hellmüller 2021.

[35] Autesserre 2010, 2014; Koddenbrock 2016; Goetze 2017; Sabaratnam 2017.

[36] Lanz 2011; Karlsrud 2013; Nathan 2017, 2018; Hellmüller, Pring, and Richmond 2020.

the failures of reform strategies.[37] Adopted in the 1990s, 'gender mainstreaming' quickly became the dominant method for reform. Aimed at transformation, gender mainstreaming arose as a challenge to the 'add women and stir' model that did little to change patriarchal institutions.[38] The UN defined it accordingly:

> Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, 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 programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.[39]

This means that gender mainstreaming is aimed at displacement; that is, changing the mainstream by identifying and eliminating the structural causes of gender inequality.[40] Its implementation was a core tactic employed by transnational feminist civil society, leading to the rapid diffusion of gender mainstreaming across global governance and state bureaucracies.[41]

However, feminist scholars, particularly those focused on women in development, quickly noted that gender mainstreaming was failing at its most transformational goals.[42] Critics argued that gender mainstreaming is prone to being implemented in a piecemeal, formalistic fashion because it specifies the tools for implementation but does not fully articulate the vision of achieving gender equality.[43] Meier and Celis describe a culture of 'procedurality', which allows institutions to appear to mainstream gender, while doing little to disrupt patriarchy.[44] Caglar argues that a lack of clarity in conceptualisation allowed institutional actors to reinterpret gender mainstreaming, thereby diluting its potential for radical change.[45] The WPS Agenda adopted the language and methods of gender mainstreaming, meaning that it soon fell prey to some of the same problems – it did not adequately challenge the patriarchal structures of

[37] Rai and Waylen 2008.
[38] Prügl 2009, p. 175.
[39] UN Women 2022.
[40] Squires 2005.
[41] True and Mintrom 2001; Rai 2003.
[42] Jahan 1995.
[43] Daly 2005; Beveridge and Nott 2002.
[44] Meier and Celis 2011.
[45] Caglar 2013.

international peace and security, it reified the category of 'woman', and tended towards box-ticking measures, rather than transformation.[46] While these are powerful critiques, there are some limitations to framing issues with the WPS Agenda as stemming from the Agenda itself or the techniques of gender mainstreaming. As Waylen argues, the gender mainstreaming literature does not always grapple with how exactly institutions are gendered, tending to focus instead on the limitations of the particular reform policies.[47] True observes that it was inevitable that powerful institutions should co-opt the WPS Agenda: The question is, therefore, to understand the political effects that come with 'gender' being articulated in these new sites.[48] No matter how well defined a policy may be, it will always be subject to a politics of contestation and interpretation in the implementation process.

Feminist Institutionalist (FI) theory offers a range of analytical tools for understanding these processes of incorporation. FI is concerned with how institutions are gendered and processes of institutional change and continuity.[49] FI proceeds from the premise that institutions are also gender regimes: 'constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily life or logic of political institutions'.[50] Often, these gender regimes are structured around hegemonic masculinity, an ideal-type masculinity to which other masculinities and femininities are subordinated.[51] FI scholars therefore closely examine how different institutions are built around and reproduce 'cultural codes of masculinity'.[52] Informed by feminist social theory, FI conceptualises gender as a relation of power, even as studying women in institutions raises the possibility of reifying the gender binary.[53] Gender regimes distribute material and symbolic resources and people according to hierarchical gender relations that typically place men and masculinities above women and femininities.[54] Yet, gender operates in ways that are hidden or taken for granted, making unequal institutional outcomes seem natural or unavoidable.[55] Gendered power is not simply distributional; it is also symbolic and can be studied

[46] Cohn 2008.
[47] Waylen 2011, p. 148.
[48] True 2003.
[49] For an earlier survey of FI, see Krook and Mackay 2011.
[50] Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, p. 580.
[51] Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kronsell 2005.
[52] Lovenduski 1998, p. 339.
[53] Lovenduski 1998.
[54] Acker 1990; Kenny 2007; Krook and Mackay 2011.
[55] Lowndes 2014.

through the discursive struggles within an institution.[56] A recognition that institutions are gendered fosters, in turn, an interest in how they can be 'regendered' through feminist advocacy.[57] FI scholars therefore focus on how actors leverage different forms of symbolic and material resources to challenge gender regimes. FI scholars tend to consider agency in terms of 'critical mass' or 'critical actors': The women (and some men) inside and outside of formal institutions who push for gender reforms.[58] For example, Woodward's early work on 'velvet triangles' in the European Union linked the implementation of reforms to a relationship between 'femocrats', women's civil society, and a broader epistemic community of feminists.[59] Critical actors may also block the progress of gender reforms.[60]

A core question for FI scholars is whether and how political institutions change in response to feminist actors and policies. FI scholars have converged around a distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' rules in an institution to explain processes of change and continuity. A core contention is that informal rules can undermine formal rules (e.g. written regulations) on gender equality, affecting the degree of change possible.[61] This is especially the case where the formal rules are vague or ambiguous, leaving extra room for interpretation.[62] Furthermore, informal rules, often in the form of narratives and practices, constitute a 'gendered logic of appropriateness' that affects the incorporation of formal gender reforms.[63] Unequal outcomes may, for instance, persist due to male-dominated informal networks or gendered discourses of political efficacy that are seen as common sense.[64] Reforms also fall prey to what Mackay calls 'remembering the old and forgetting the new'; that is, 'new rules, structures and roles may be diluted or unravelled and reincorporated into old ways and old paths'.[65] FI scholars analyse how processes of institutionalisation may water down reforms, leading to incremental or partial change. For example, Chappell analyses the institutional legacies

[56] Kulawik 2009.
[57] Beckwith 2005, p. 133.
[58] Childs and Krook 2009.
[59] Woodward 2004.
[60] Thomson 2018.
[61] Waylen 2017.
[62] Mahoney and Thelen 2010.
[63] Chappell 2006; Mackay 2011.
[64] Freidenvall and Krook 2011; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016.
[65] Mackay 2014, p. 555.

of the International Criminal Court, namely international criminal and humanitarian law. These legacies provide conceptions about legitimate subjects and principles in international law that are structured around Eurocentric masculinity. In being either forgotten or made to fit these legacies, feminist jurisprudence has had an attenuated effect on the Court.

While much of the early FI literature focused on the state, there is an increasing cross-fertilisation between FI and Feminist IR, which is a fruitful development for studying the WPS Agenda in international institutions. FI's focus on informal institutional structures shares many concerns with Feminist IR scholars' attention to how global gendered hierarchies are articulated through mundane practices and narratives.[66] Much Feminist IR work is institutionally oriented, having developed a feminist analysis of hegemonic masculinity in global governance.[67] Likewise, there is a growing body of FI literature that examines the implementation of the WPS Agenda: For instance, Thomson argues that an FI approach can better explicate the gaps between stated policy and actual practice.[68] Rather than focusing on inputs and outputs, an FI approach can draw 'attention to the institutional cultures that sustain and enable their particular modalities of operation'.[69] At an organisational level, institutional approaches have been applied to understanding the European Union's and NATO's adoption of the WPS Agenda.[70] FI is also being applied to studying mediation and international negotiation. Aggestam conceptualises peace negotiations as masculinised spaces/institutions, which helps to explain the exclusion of women.[71] Similarly, Aharoni argues that peace processes should be treated as institutions, contending that the logics of military security, crisis, and secrecy are constitutive elements of negotiations.[72] In addition, Waylen examines how the institutional design of peace processes in South Africa and Northern Ireland relied on informal negotiations in male-dominated spaces and networks.[73]

FI provides a conceptualisation of peace mediation as a gendered institution, as well as an approach that opens the 'black box' to examine

[66] Holmes et al. 2019.
[67] For example, Kronsell 2005.
[68] Thomson 2019.
[69] Ní Aolaín and Valji 2019, p. 62.
[70] Chappell 2016; Wright 2016; Haastrup 2018.
[71] Aggestam 2019.
[72] Aharoni 2018.
[73] Waylen 2014.

how practices and narratives can affect the incorporation of the WPS Agenda. In tandem with Feminist IR, which interrogates the gendered logics of global governance, it provides a powerful analytical toolkit for parsing how UN mediation has incorporated the WPS Agenda. The approach I develop shares these core commitments while also situating the examination of institutional logics and their constitutive elements – namely, narratives, practices, and subject positions – in social theories and interpretive methodologies that have been developed specifically to make sense of the everyday operation of power structures such as gender and coloniality. I examine how the logics of UN mediation – those competing approaches to defining what UN mediation is and how it should be done – shape how well the WPS Agenda fits in the institution. As the WPS Agenda is riven with vagueness, inconsistencies, and tensions, the process of incorporation is also a process of (re)-writing the Agenda. Thus, the WPS Agenda is changed as it encounters and changes UN mediation, with implications for advancing feminist approaches to peace mediation.

Institutional Logics: Narratives, Practices, and Subjects

To analyse UN mediation as an institution, I use five main concepts. Concept number one is the idea of an institutional 'logic', which is an internalised sense of 'how things are done around here'.[74] Concepts two, three, and four are narratives, practices, and subject positions, respectively. These constitute logics and provide different vantage points from which to make sense of them. The fifth concept is gender as a colonial construct. I use the concepts of narratives, practices, and subject positions to explicate the gendered-colonial logics that shape how UN mediation functions and, in turn, the incorporation of the WPS Agenda. This section defines these concepts and develops the interpretive, feminist approach to institutions I take here. This framework draws upon work on the WPS Agenda that has demonstrated the importance of narrative representations of concepts such as 'women', 'gender', or 'peace'.[75] Scholars have examined the production of subject positions through these narratives and how they create or constrain agency.[76] I also draw on the practice turn in IR, which examines the reproduction of practices and subject

[74] Lowndes 2014.
[75] Shepherd 2008.
[76] Shepherd 2017; Martín de Almagro 2018.

positions in fields like peacebuilding.[77] I see practice-oriented analysis as a way to make explicit the structures of power inherent in the everyday procedures that are of interest to FI scholars. It also reinforces the bridge between Feminist IR and international practice theory.

I think of an institution not only as a collection of formal and informal rules and practices but also as a dynamic site of struggle played out through narratives, practices, and subject positions. This struggle may range across formal and informal modes. This way of thinking about an institution borrows from social theorist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of social fields. Fields are areas of social life organised around certain 'stakes at stake'.[78] Bourdieu uses the example of a game to illustrate what he means by this. A field is like soccer: It has stakes (e.g. scoring goals to win), it is arbitrary, it is bounded by rules, and it occupies a particular time and space. The earlier someone has started playing soccer, the more natural and self-evident (and thus invisible) the rules become, meaning they have an intrinsic sense of how to stay onside.[79] The stakes of social fields are often much higher than in a game of soccer: Fields are all about power. In other words, they generate the 'conditions of possibility' for relations of social domination.[80]

Struggles centre around defining the stakes of the field, which are critical for organising relations of domination. People attempt to make authoritative claims about what the stakes are, because getting to define the stakes for others is a source of power. What makes claims authoritative is symbolic capital: Education, beauty, money, artistic skill, or expertise are examples. The value of a given form of capital depends on the field; for instance, athletic ability would not be much use to an economist in her career, while having parents who are economists would be. Moreover, capital is unevenly distributed across actors. Actors use their capital (or try to revalue existing forms of capital) to get others to recognise that their claim about what the stakes 'really are' is authoritative. UN mediation as an institution is therefore a field of social activity organised around particular stakes, in which people levy different forms of symbolic capital to make claims about what these stakes should be. It is therefore intensely political.

From a practice theory perspective, we can think of institutional 'logics' as a felt, internalised sense of the stakes of an institution, rather

[77] Autesserre 2014; Goetze 2017; Holmes 2019.
[78] Leander 2008, p. 16.
[79] Bourdieu 1990, pp. 66–7.
[80] Goetze 2017, p. 7.

than just in terms of a shared understanding of roles and routines, as in sociological institutionalism.[81] 'Stakes' by their nature imply struggle. There can therefore be multiple, competing logics in a given institution. A central struggle in UN mediation is defining its stakes: What is the role of the UN in mediation, and what counts as good mediation practice? Who counts as a mediation practitioner? UN mediation has undergone significant changes in the post-Cold War era that have seen it shift towards more technocratic forms of governance. Elodie Convergne uses the terms 'art' and 'science' to differentiate between the traditional approach to UN mediation as a diplomatic art of managing relationships and the post-Cold War emphasis on expert governance, focused on the deployment of expertise to define and manage policy problems.[82] I adopt these terms to describe the dominant logics of UN mediation, which overlap and compete to define its stakes. I build upon Convergne's argument to examine how these logics are constituted through particular ideas about gender, race, and 'the international' that affect the incorporation of the WPS Agenda.

Narratives

Logics are constituted through narratives, practices, and subject positions. Although this analysis separates out these elements, they are in practice inextricable from one another and should not be reified as things that exist independently of the social field. They are immanent to the institution of UN mediation. Narratives are representational practices: They are '… a primary way by which we make sense of the world around us, produce meanings, articulate intentions, and legitimise actions … through narratives, we not only investigate but also invent an order for the world'.[83] Where narratives render things as natural or inevitable, they legitimise gendered and racialised political outcomes.[84] Narrative, especially in Western traditions, implies a plot and a search for narrative closure (an ending, a moral), which helps us to think about how institutions articulate policy problems. For instance, how do institutions 'overcome poverty' or 'resolve conflict'? Narratively, these imply a quest, an agent, and subjects to be acted upon in certain ways, with a certain goal in mind. Narrative also places authorship and voice at the forefront: Who narrates? Through

[81] March and Olsen 1981, p. 61.
[82] Convergne 2016.
[83] Wibben 2011, p. 2.
[84] Lowndes 2014.

whose eyes do we view the action? With whom is the narrative asking us to empathise, to conceive of as a fully agential being? Being attuned to voice and silence in a narrative, to its ordering, pace, and timing, to its authorship and structure, to its format, and to the context of a text's production, reveals something about the stakes of an institution and the forms of capital valued most. Narratives about the stakes of an institution expand the authorised range of action and allow new practices to emerge. New practices, in turn, may allow different narratives to arise. Once established, 'the practice speaks: "this is how we have always done things around here"'.[85] Analysing narratives allows me to pay attention to the authorising stories about UN mediation, while a practice-oriented lens draws our attention to the kinds of everyday actions that such narratives authorise, as well as how these narratives are reproduced throughout the institution.

To analyse narratives, I employ Annick Wibben's feminist narrative approach to international security as well as the work of the original theorist she builds upon, Mieke Bal.[86] Narratives can be explored at the levels of text, story, and fabula. The text level of analysis explores the production, authorship, and textual format of a given narrative. For example, the timing of key documents that define UN mediation, as well as their differing formats and varying narrative devices, help to illuminate shifts in the social field as agents struggle over the stakes of UN mediation. The story level presents the elements of a narrative, such as characters, events, locations, and relationships. This provides a meso-level analysis of a narrative, allowing me to examine the most important elements in the UN's narratives about mediation and how these elements are ordered, which reveals assumptions about the ends and means of UN mediation according to its different logics. The story level also employs a concept called 'focalisation', which refers to the telling of a story from a particular perspective. Focalisation is separate from narration; a narrator may focalise a character by telling events from the latter's point of view. Focalisation silences or emphasises aspects of the story and it constructs a subject that is 'able to speak'.[87] Finally, the fabula is the content of the narrative: The events, actors, time, and location.[88] The fabula level is amenable to some of the typical tools of deconstructionist discourse

[85] Neumann 2002, p. 637.
[86] Bal and van Boheemen 2009; Wibben 2011.
[87] Wibben 2011, p. 50.
[88] Bal and van Boheemen 2009, p. 8.

analysis used in Feminist IR, such as analysing representations of subject positions and the chains of meaning that form when words are placed in proximity to one another.[89] I use the story and fabula levels of analysis to investigate narrative representations of the purpose of UN mediation, how practitioners describe their work, the production of 'objective' or 'universal' knowledge about UN mediation, and the role of gender and coloniality (discussed later) in the production of subjects.

Practices

In the FI literature, 'practice' is often (though not exclusively) understood as a routine action or a 'standard operating procedure'. This usefully foregrounds the quotidian nature of practice, although it can obscure how a practice is also a relation of power, not simply an action or interaction between atomised actors.[90] Thus, I situate the analysis of practice in broader relations of power related to global governance and intervention, and show how narratives, practices, and subjects are mutually constitutive. Further underscoring the relational aspects of practice, we can think of them emerging at 'the point of intersection wherein bodies and structures of domination meet'.[91] Practices are intersubjective and subject to appraisals of their competence.[92] Practitioners can be recognised by others as amateurs, 'virtuosos', or failures.[93] Practitioners can fail by being unable to carry out an expected practice, by trying too hard to fulfil expectations, or by having recognition denied to them, regardless of their actions.[94] The question is not simply what practitioners do, but how they do things, why they do things a certain way, and how others assess their practices. Some IR scholars have distinguished between practices and habits to try to deal with the problem of agency.[95] However, I do not maintain this distinction, as the concept of practice used here encompasses unreflexive, habitual action, as well as more conscious action – the problem of agency is largely epiphenomenal to how IR theorists have translated practice theory into the discipline.[96]

[89] Puechguirbal 2010; Shepherd 2011.
[90] Bigo 2011; Martin-Mazé 2017.
[91] Jabri 2013, p. 159.
[92] Adler and Pouliot 2011, p. 6.
[93] Cornut 2017; Wilcox 2017.
[94] Neumann 2005.
[95] For example, Autesserre (2014) distinguishes between narratives, practices, and habits.
[96] Hopf 2017.

Studying practices poses unique challenges because of the inarticulate character of the 'feel' that helps to produce them. Directly asking people about their practices may result in post hoc rationalisations for their actions.[97] Moreover, practitioners may respond to interview questions by describing what they think they should be doing, rather than what they actually do. This is a particular challenge in this project because interviewees are aware that I am interested in the WPS Agenda, and it is socially desirable to at least appear to support it. Moreover, there is an institutional imperative for the UN to show that it is doing well in implementing the WPS Agenda.[98] Some interviewees were interested in preserving the UN's reputation, while others were more critical of its progress. One way I tried to get around this was by asking what interviewees think happens in general or what they think other people do, in addition to asking about their work. In the analysis, I treat transcripts from interviews not as objective accounts of institutional practice (although they often provide valuable information about practices that I have been able to confirm elsewhere) but primarily as evidence of practices of representation.[99] In addition, I used UN guidance documents on mediation and conflict analysis as sources for a textual ethnography in which I reconstructed an idealised version of practice.[100] Each document I analysed went through at least two readings: First, to gather basic information about UN mediation, and second, to hand-code for narratives, practices, and subjects.

Subjects

Subjects or subject positions are the categories of people that carry out UN mediation and/or that are acted upon. I use two main tools to analyse subjects. The first is a narrative approach that examines how categories such as 'the women' and 'the mediator' are constructed and contested. The construction of subjects can be captured through narrative representations of the ideal, as well as descriptions of moments of rupture or failure in practice. I also examine the degree to which these subject positions are accorded political agency. This approach to subjectivity is common in the feminist literature on the WPS Agenda, in which scholars have critically analysed the construction of subject positions such as the 'victim',

[97] Pouliot 2013.
[98] Holmes et al. 2019.
[99] Pouliot 2013.
[100] On textual ethnography, see Jackson 2006.

'superheroine', or 'woman-in-conflict'.[101] These narrative constructions are important because they ascribe institutional value and agency according to gender and location (e.g. local/international). As I show later in the analysis, the twin logics of UN mediation can also construct the same subjects in different ways, illustrating further the tensions and contestations around these categories.

The second analytical approach is subject as habitus, which I combine with the narrative analysis in the discussion of 'the mediator'. Habitus is one's accumulation of 'schemes of perception, thought, and action' that are deposited over time through exposure to fields of social, political, and economic life.[102] It does not mean that an individual lacks agency or reflexivity about their position, but that their agency is conditioned through social structures. The habitus is the 'fit' (or lack thereof) between an individual and an institution; it prompts individuals to act according to internalised notions of common sense. Returning to the metaphor of the game, habitus results in a 'feel for the game' and an internalisation of its stakes. Therefore, habitus and practice are interdependent: Practices emerge from habitus and vice versa. Habitus is additionally the embodiment of power relations in a field: Analysing habitus can reveal how gender, race, class, and other forms of symbolic capital influence one's 'fit' or 'feel'.[103] In regard to UN mediation, it prompts questions like: What is the background of a typical UN mediator? How should they behave? What is common sense to a UN mediator? What counts as symbolic capital? I have ordered subjects last in the analysis to avoid giving the impression that narratives and practices simply emerge from actors. Subject positions are instead reproduced through social relations.[104] Without understanding what counts as the stakes of UN mediation, an analysis of these subject positions would be incomplete.

Gender

In keeping with the focus on narratives, practices, and subjects, I conceptualise gender as representational, embodied, and constantly in process. Masculinities and femininities structure social fields and are embodied through the habitus. Within institutions, gender hierarchically organises

[101] Shepherd 2011; 2016; cook 2016.
[102] Bourdieu 1990, p. 56.
[103] McCall 1992.
[104] Bigo 2011, p. 236.

people, resources, and policy priorities.[105] As I show throughout this book, representations and practices of UN mediation rely on gendered notions of political authority and agency, such as masculine gravitas. In addition, masculinities and femininities are practised and reproduced by embodied subjects, thereby *gendering* UN mediation.[106] Gender is not reducible to sex or simply 'men' and 'women': Gender is social, performed, and inscribed on and through bodies in practice.[107] There is no 'real' biological foundation, in the sense of a concrete and universal sex binary. Gender performances can be unstable, undermining social categories such as the gender binary.[108] In addition, gender can act as a malleable form of social capital. Performances are context-dependent, meaning that the practices of different people may be understood as masculine or feminine, regardless of their sex or gender.[109] For instance, I examine how male mediators use feminised skills to advance their careers, while for women, these same skills are taken for granted and therefore less valued.

I also centre a conceptualisation of gender as colonial. This is due to the relationship between colonisation and intervention, and because the construction of the modern gender binary cannot be divorced from colonial relations of power. UN peacebuilding, in which UN mediation is imbricated, can be directly traced to its roots in the management of colonial territories through the UN's trusteeship system.[110] From Cyprus to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, contemporary UN mediation deals almost exclusively with conflicts in postcolonial states and territories. Colonisation relied upon a fundamental dichotomy of human/non-human, articulated through a new concept: Race. This produced

> an evolutionist historical perspective, so that all non-Europeans could be placed vis-à-vis Europeans in a continuous historical chain from 'primitive' to 'civilised', from 'irrational' to 'rational', from 'traditional' to 'modern', from 'magic-mythic' to 'scientific'; in sum, from non-Europeans to something that could be in time, at best Europeanised or 'modernised'.[111]

The myth of biological difference naturalised colonial, capitalist systems of labour extraction like slavery. It also centred the West as the foundation and principal theatre of the world political-economy, of scientific

[105] Acker 1990.
[106] I borrow here from Shepherd's (2017) use of gendered/gendering.
[107] McNay 1999; Bourdieu 2001.
[108] Butler 1990; Wilcox 2017.
[109] el-Malik 2014, p. 13.
[110] Sending 2015; Goetze 2017.
[111] Quijano 2000, p. 221.

knowledge production, and of conscious political agency. Aníbal Quijano terms this system of beliefs and material relations 'coloniality', which persists beyond the formal institutions of colonial occupation to structure global hierarchies today.

Decolonial feminists like María Lugones have taken the study of coloniality and gender a step further by showing that the modern gender system is *also* a colonial one.[112] el-Malik, also arguing from a Bourdieusian perspective, notes that coloniality and gender together constructed a system of social domination underpinned by binary thinking that would become remarkably resilient due to the misrecognition of these categories as natural.[113] Colonised peoples were not comprehended within Western schemas of humanity and therefore did not fit the European gender binaries of man/woman in which men were the normative ideal and women were inversions thereof. That is, to have a gender presumed also having humanity, but colonised peoples were excluded from humanity almost by definition. Thus, colonised 'males became not-human-as-not-men, and colonised females became not-human-as-not-women'.[114] This was an exigency of colonial labour relations: The labour of European 'women' was in the domestic sphere, protected from hard labour, but still reproducing the colonial system by having and raising white children. Meanwhile, colonised females-as-not-women were 'viragos'[115] and therefore subject to the full violence of colonial forced labour and enslavement. In these processes, Indigenous means of conceptualising and enacting sex and gender were displaced.[116]

As Méndez argues, a decolonial feminist approach 'begins from a theoretical clearing wherein using gender as a critical category of analysis means being attentive to the complex racialised arrangement of bodies and power that were integral to its formation'.[117] In so doing, 'decolonial feminism … does not wish to become *the* theory, but to facilitate transborder and international alliances'.[118] While decolonial thinking is becoming more visible in IR, it is not new, and there is a long legacy of postcolonial feminist IR scholarship that shares its concerns.[119]

[112] Lugones 2007.
[113] el-Malik 2014.
[114] Lugones 2007, p. 744.
[115] Lugones 2007.
[116] Oyewumi 1997.
[117] Méndez 2015, p. 49.
[118] Vergès 2021, p. viii.
[119] Chowdhry and Ling 2010; Parashar 2016; Blaney and Tickner 2017; Scauso 2020. On the relationship between postcolonial and decolonial approaches, see Bhambra 2014.

Decolonial feminisms share a commitment to political projects that challenge the coloniality of knowledge and power, and that foster liberation. Importantly, both decolonial and postcolonial feminisms offer a situated history of the politics of gender and resist the generalisation of the category of 'woman' and the 'universalisation of women's oppression'.[120]

To analyse gender in the absence of coloniality leads to an ahistorical account of the operation of gendered power. This is particularly important because several scholars have shown how gender and coloniality are enmeshed in international institutions. Hudson argues that liberal feminism is enmeshed in a colonial project of liberal peacebuilding, creating a gendered peace that reinforces global hierarchies.[121] Similarly, Shepherd shows that gender and space – namely, the local/international divide – structure UN peacebuilding.[122] Decolonial scholars of international intervention have shown how Eurocentrism operates by construing the 'local' as a site lacking in agency or the capacity for full political subjectivity.[123] Locals are unable to properly 'know' the conditions of their lives, so this necessitates the 'civilising mission' of international interventions that purport to bring electoral democracy, liberal markets, and human rights.[124] As Jabri contends, a colonial rationality that emphasises the 'government of populations and their internal relations' drives international peacebuilding.[125] However, peacebuilding is a means rather than an end of coloniality, as its primary function is to legitimate the self-conception of interveners as saving 'others'. Thus, coloniality does not need successful peacebuilding interventions and in fact disregards whether interventions actually work as intended for the beneficiaries.[126] In addition, local staff of UN missions face low pay, poorer working conditions, and condescension from international staff.[127]

Here, I pay attention to how gender as a colonial construct organises bodies, resources, and authority in the context of UN mediation. This can help us to make sense of, for instance, the UN's expectation that local women will offer their labour in service of mediation processes from which they are excluded, or how mediators are evaluated based

[120] Mohanty 2003, pp. 32–3.
[121] Hudson 2016.
[122] Shepherd 2017.
[123] Rutazibwa 2014.
[124] Paris 2002.
[125] Jabri 2013, p. 13.
[126] Sabaratnam 2017.
[127] Smith 2019.

on diplomatic norms of behaviour developed in hegemonically masculine European institutions. Throughout the book, I refer to 'gendered-colonial' constructs to remind the reader that I am working with a concept of gender *as* coloniality. To sum up, the core concepts at work in this framework are institutional logics – which are constituted by narratives, practices, and subjects. Colonial gender structures the broader social field and is enacted through narratives, practices, and subject positioning. Given the nature of these concepts, the research design uses interpretive methods that can make sense of meaning and describe the ontology of UN mediation.

AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Interpretive political science analyses how humans make individual and collective meaning of their worlds. Interpretation 'denaturalises dominant explanations' to study the political power of truth claims, while also implicating the researcher in these processes.[128] Several features characterise interpretive IR research: An emphasis on mutual constitution and contingency rather than linear causality, a focus on the importance of language in constructing rather than simply representing reality, a recognition of the researcher's positionality and reflection on how this shapes the research process, and a centring of power relations in the research process and phenomena under study.[129] In IR, interpretive explanations of politics often describe conditions of possibility, or historical and social contingency. They examine how the structural position of agents shapes possibilities for action, or how language makes certain policy choices (un-)thinkable. Interpretive research, despite some misconceptions, is not 'impressionistic'; it is systematic without necessarily being linear.[130] While an ideal positivist research design should proceed deductively from theory to hypothesis, conceptualisation and measurement, data collection, and so on, an interpretive research design begins with a question and a set of hunches. The ensuing logic of research is recursive, not linear.

[128] Lynch 2013, p. 14. Interpretive social science is 'science', in that it is 'empirical inquiry designed to produce knowledge' (Jackson 2011, p. 19). However, it is conducted and evaluated according to standards that have developed within a distinct community of practice. Positivist scientific practices are similarly historical, situated, and co-produced, although they are misrecognised as monolithic and objective in political science methods debates. My preference is to claim the label of science, rather than cede it, while recognising many other critical and interpretive scholars may choose differently.

[129] Lynch 2013, pp. 22–3.

[130] Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, p. 70.

This means that I began with a set of motivating questions and modified my research design as I went to ensure that I was continuing to ask meaningful questions and find sources that could help me investigate them. The literatures on WPS, gender and peace processes, and gender and institutions informed these questions and hunches. My guiding questions included: How has UN mediation incorporated the WPS Agenda in its work? What do people mean by 'mediation'? How are such meanings gendered? How does the everyday practice of mediation affect how people understand and use the WPS Agenda? One challenge I faced was to develop a grounded and rich empirical analysis of UN mediation with little direct access to the institution. I adopted an eclectic approach to address these practical challenges. It also has the benefit of offering multiple angles from which to construct a historicised analysis of the institution. Information about narratives, practices, and subjects can be gleaned from a wide range of sources. Bueger and Gadinger catalogue many different methods practice-informed researchers can use, including interviewing, observation, and different approaches to analysing texts.[131] FI scholars have taken a similarly eclectic approach to studying institutions.[132]

I therefore use multiple methods and sources to capture the different elements of narratives, practices, and subjects. The first step of the analysis was to identify the logics of UN mediation by asking UN insiders about how they do their work and observing their behaviour. Mediation is politically sensitive and conducted with extreme discretion, so, quite understandably, my request to observe work at DPPA's headquarters office was denied. My initial research design focused on eliciting subjective understandings through interviews and the narrative analysis of primary sources. I then added an observation of a training exercise as the opportunity became available. Being unable to speak directly to many UN mediators, I used memoirs to learn more about how they have historically thought about their jobs. I coded each transcript and document several times, using codes for narratives, practices, and subjects that I initially deduced from the literatures on narrative analysis, the WPS Agenda, institutional mechanisms of change and continuity, and the sociology of peacebuilding. I then added to this lexicon through inductive analysis, adding themes and meanings from the texts. I sometimes recoded a text after I had developed a new code, or after a new question had arisen.

[131] Bueger and Gadinger 2014, pp. 76–96.

[132] For example: Bacchi and Rönnblom 2014; Weldon 2014; Chappell 2016; Holmes 2019.

The next step was to historicise these understandings in order to analyse how they are constituted through struggles over the stakes of UN mediation.[133] I triangulated interviewees' accounts against dozens of primary source documents, from UN reports to mediation guidance documents, training materials, mediators' memoirs, and internal UN documents.[134] All of these texts make claims about what UN mediation is, how it should be practised, and by whom. While these texts vary in form, they receive similar treatment in the analysis, first, because they are all amenable to these methods, despite their different formats. Slides from training presentations, interview transcripts, and memoirs all construct narratives that can be analysed for their textual format, elements of story, and the content of their fabula. In addition, they provide information about ideal practices. I also used biographical data to examine the gendered division of labour among leaders of UN mediation, as well as to analyse similarities and differences in regard to their career background. My approach is similar to, although less exhaustive than, Catherine Goetze's application of the prosopographical method, in which she uses surveys and LinkedIn to examine the career backgrounds and symbolic capital of peacebuilders.[135] The Appendix describes these different sources in detail, provides a list of primary sources, including interviews, and also describes the analysis of UN mediators.

Reflexivity and Accountability

Reflexivity has two senses: First, the imperative in practice theory to move back and forth between subjective and objective (i.e. historicised) understandings of UN mediation.[136] I dealt with the first in the discussion of the institutional logics and the research design. The second is a reflection on the role of the researcher in knowledge production. This, along with transparency, is key to interpretive rigor. A researcher's social position is contingent and constantly unfolding. This means reflexivity is an ongoing process, rather than a once-off disclosure.[137] Here, I discuss the limitations of the project, how my positionality as a researcher shaped the choices I made, and how I engage with decolonial approaches.

[133] Pouliot 2010, p. 75.
[134] Pouliot 2010, p. 71. On triangulation, methods, and sources in practice approaches, see Bueger and Gadinger 2014.
[135] Goetze 2017, pp. 37–8.
[136] Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992.
[137] Nagar and Geiger 2007.

Meera Sabaratnam identifies several 'avatars of Eurocentrism' in the critical literature on intervention. The first is the exclusion of targets of intervention from methods and theoretical frameworks, even those critical of intervention.[138] With this come all the risks of reinforcing Eurocentric tropes in IR. In addition, Sabaratnam warns that critical scholars can empathise so much with the interveners that it 'leads to a closed circle in which there is no alternative to intervention, so we have to make it softer and friendlier'.[139] While taking cues from and engaging in conversation with decolonial feminisms, this project is limited by its focus on a conventional site of power: The UN. It cannot give the reader a fine-grained analysis of how people who are the targets of intervention experience UN mediation. It is also not a decolonial project in Robbie Shilliam's sense, as it does not engage with the 'living knowledge traditions of colonised peoples'.[140]

I have used my position to 'study up'[141]; to access the UN and 'demythologise' mediation by uncovering its assumptions about peace and 'best practices', and examining how they reproduce gendered-colonial hierarchies.[142] Several privileges have enabled my research: My limited experience with the Cyprus peace process, my whiteness, my nationality (Australian), my location in the US, and my tenure-track job. Unlike many scholars in the Global South, I have had the proximity, visa status, and research funding to access UN headquarters.[143] So, there is a tension between the fact that I have access to certain forms of power and that I seek to fragment these through feminist research. For instance, several white women I interviewed spoke to me as if we shared the same assumptions about gender, race, and the value of international intervention. While I felt uncomfortable at the time, I did not challenge their statements. This both made me complicit in the reproduction of these systems and helped to reveal how they operate.[144]

As time has gone on, I have thought more about how the problem of 'worlding' International Relations – that is, engaging with an ontology of difference[145] – extends to UN mediation. As Bilgin argues, critical

[138] Sabaratnam 2017, pp. 23–35.
[139] Ibid., p. 24.
[140] Shilliam 2015, p. 7.
[141] Holmes et al. 2019.
[142] Sabaratnam 2011, pp. 787–88.
[143] Ibid., p. 224.
[144] Becker and Aiello 2013.
[145] Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Blaney and Tickner 2017.

scholars of peacebuilding miss how these practices constitute a particular world. Even trenchant critics still assume that locals and interveners have different perspectives on the same reality, instead of realising they inhabit realities with ontologically distinct features: Planes of existence, actors, relations, boundaries, notions of time, modes of agency, and so on.[146] Blaney and Tickner call this 'backing into' ontological difference rather than confronting it head-on.[147] As I have researched and written this book, I have followed a similar trajectory, coming to find that ontology is one way to resist the epistemic pull of UN mediation on my thinking. To think outside and beyond UN mediation, to seek to decolonise peacemaking, means centring ontologies. I have come to think of this book's focus on the everyday as an attempt to grasp how UN mediation is specifically worlded. Undoubtedly, I miss a lot due to my own thoroughly worlded perspective. However, in doing so, I wish to offer a starting point for reworlding through engagement from and across ontological difference. At a time of multiple existential crises, we urgently need to confront how our colonial political, economic, and social structures breed misery rather than liberation. Shilliam argues that decolonial science seeks to 'repair colonial wounds, binding back together peoples, lands, pasts, ancestors, and spirits' and cultivates an 'ethos of … wilful relating'.[148] I try to contribute to this project by engaging with possibilities of decolonial feminist peacemaking that exceed and reworld the WPS Agenda and UN mediation. I return to these questions in the Conclusion.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The analytical chapters in this book are separated into three parts, mirroring the way I conceptualise institutional logics. Part I focuses on narratives, Part II examines practices, and Part III analyses subjects. For readers unfamiliar with UN mediation and/or the WPS Agenda, Chapter 2 discusses the politics of the WPS Agenda in the UN: How it is articulated, adopted, and resisted. It also describes the different forms UN mediation takes and grounds the later analysis by describing three processes that come up throughout the book: The Great Lakes, Syria, and Yemen.

Chapter 3 explores narrative struggles over defining UN mediation. I examine the discursive production of UN mediation as an institution,

[146] Bilgin 2018.
[147] Blaney and Tickner 2017, p. 295.
[148] Shilliam 2015, pp. 13, 17, 30.

from its beginning as a series of ad hoc diplomatic engagements to its institutionalisation in the 2000s. Over time, we can observe the increasingly dominant construction of conflict as a technical rather than political challenge. I trace these struggles by contrasting two key documents on the UN's role in peace and security: Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* and the UN's *Handbook on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes between States*. The tensions between these documents foreshadow those today over whether UN mediation is an art or a science. I compare and contrast the narrative features of these logics and discuss how they rely upon gendered-colonial assumptions about the nature of politics, violence, and agency that shape the incorporation of the WPS Agenda.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on mediation practices. In Chapter 4, I examine how the logic of UN mediation as a science produces and disseminates technical knowledge. I analyse the practices of conflict analysis and the circulation of 'best practices' in implementing the WPS Agenda in Syria and Yemen. Conflict analysis produces instrumental knowledge about conflict by fixing actors and issues in a schema that is legible to interveners. It is imbricated in colonial schemes of knowledge production that diagnose the local sphere as lacking in capacity. As such, 'gender-sensitive conflict analysis' – a common tool for implementing the WPS Agenda in UN mediation – is subject to many of the same problems and cannot produce critical knowledge. I also argue that the UN produces 'best practice' cases of WPS that depoliticise knowledge about gender, position the UN as the protagonist of women's participation (by erasing its own history of resistance to WPS), and diminish local women's agency. Crucially, these best practice cases also elide 'participation' with 'consultation', undermining the WPS Agenda's call for the substantive representation of local women in UN mediation.

Chapter 5 explores what it means to practise UN mediation as an 'art'. This logic emphasises the fluid, contingent nature of mediation and prioritises relationships with negotiating parties. This chapter examines two practices that emerge from this particular understanding of mediation: Emotional labour and discretion. In the first section, I describe how UN mediators regulate their emotions, and those of the negotiating parties, in order to facilitate negotiations. The creation of emotional ties relies upon the exercise of empathy and bonding in informal settings, which can create masculinised spaces. With regard to mediators' discretion in implementing their mandates, they are often reluctant to use their discretion in favour of the WPS Agenda because it is seen as a risk to the process and the UN's impartiality.

Chapters 6 and 7 analyse how the respective logics of UN mediation produce the subjects of 'the women' and 'the mediator'. Chapter 6 analyses narrative representations of local women, who feature throughout UN mediation texts as 'the women'. 'The women' are expected to play a legitimating, information-providing role that supports UN mediation. This is an extractive relationship. UN narratives position 'the women's' labour as central to mediation effectiveness; however, they also question their abilities and authenticity as representatives of their communities. Capacity-building training is one method that the UN, and particularly gender advisors, use to discipline women into appropriate forms of participation. In turn, local women resist and navigate the subject position of 'the women' through strategic essentialism, critique, or opting out.

Chapter 7 builds on the argument in Chapter 5 to explore how the logic of UN mediation as an art produces masculinities, particularly the subjects of 'the mediator', 'conflict parties', and 'youths'. The first part examines the narrative representations of 'the mediator' as a political man who should show good judgement, have excellent interpersonal skills, and be spatially mobile. 'The mediator' has to be empathetic and good at listening – feminised traits that operate as capital for male mediators, but less so for women. In addition, the selection process for mediators draws from the masculinised professions of diplomacy and politics, and the informal, male-dominated networks of diplomats at the UN. In the second part of the chapter, I examine representations of local men. 'Local men' – often equivalent to the 'conflict parties' – function as the constitutive outside of 'the mediator'. 'Conflict parties' are represented as emotional, traditional, and irrational, recalling colonial constructions of the 'other'. Meanwhile, male 'youths' appear not as political agents, but as potential vectors of mindless violence. Thus, a colonial hierarchy of masculinities exists in which local men are racialised and feminised in relation to the mediator.

Chapter 8, the conclusion, draws together the major themes of the analysis and prompts further thinking on decolonial feminist modes of conflict resolution. I argue that the UN's attempt to stay relevant through developing mediation expertise is counterproductive, and contend that it should instead adopt a solidaristic approach that aims to produce 'knowledge encounters' between different worlds.[149] I discuss some principles for a decolonial feminist peacemaking practice, which include encounters across different ontologies of peace, decolonising expertise, solidarity, and establishing relations of care and accountability.

[149] Inayatullah 2019.