

**Peacekeeping Experiences in Navigating Gender Mainstreaming and UNSCR 1325:
Individual, Organizational and Operational Realities for
Integrating Gender Equality into Peace and Security**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctorate in Philosophy degree in Women's Studies

Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
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Dedication

In loving memory of three extraordinary women who shaped my life
and made me who I am today -

Nurjahan Ahmed – my mother

Ayesha Akhter Khatun – my maternal grandmother

Dr. Shamsad Ahmed – my only sister (younger)

Acknowledgments

This dissertation marks the culmination of a remarkable journey shaped by the generosity, wisdom, encouragement, and unwavering support of many extraordinary individuals. With profound gratitude, I acknowledge those who have accompanied me throughout this academic and personal journey. First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Emeritus Dr. Claire Turenne-Sjolander. Your exceptional scholarship, intellectual rigour, and deep confidence in my abilities guided me from the earliest stages of this project to its completion. You challenged me to think more critically, write more clearly, and believe in myself when I struggled to do so. Your mentorship transformed not only this dissertation but also my development as a feminist scholar. I will remain forever grateful for your patience, encouragement, and the countless hours you devoted to helping me bring this work to fruition.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Jane Parpart, whose pioneering scholarship and teaching inspired my academic journey in feminist security and masculinities studies. Special thanks are owed to my PhD committee member, Dr. Rebecca Tiessen, whose guidance, extraordinary support, and encouragement have profoundly shaped my thinking and continue to inform my scholarly aspirations. I remain deeply indebted to both of them.

I also extend my sincere thanks to the Chair of my PhD Committee, Dr. Elke Reissing. I am especially grateful to Dr. Kathryn Trevenen, Director of the University of Ottawa's Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, for her generous guidance throughout my doctoral journey and for serving as my internal examiner. I am equally grateful to my external examiner, Dr. Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Professor at the Université de Montréal, for her thoughtful evaluation and insightful feedback. I also thank Dr. Sarah Elizabeth Sharma for her valuable comments, critical insights, and constructive feedback, which significantly strengthened this dissertation. It has been a privilege to learn from each of them.

My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Christabelle Sethna, whose teaching enriched my intellectual development during my years at the Institute. I am grateful to Dr. Mythili Rajiva for her support and encouragement. I honour the memory of Dr. Caroline Andrew, who opened the door to this remarkable academic journey.

I gratefully acknowledge the dedicated administrative staff at the University of Ottawa and the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, including Caroline Bruyère, Sylvie Thériault, Natacha Lemieux, Marco Becerril, and Nandy Cassamajor, for their invaluable support throughout my doctoral studies.

I am deeply grateful to several distinguished individuals whose encouragement and inspiration have enriched both this research and my professional life: my late professor, Dr. Syed Manzoorul Islam, who profoundly shaped my academic thinking; and Ismat Jahan and Ferdous Ara Begum, whose pioneering leadership has consistently motivated me. My heartfelt thanks also go to my colleagues and friends. I especially remember the late Dr. Reaz Islam and the late Ferdousi Shahriar, whose friendship I continue to cherish. I thank Dr. Anna Bogic, Marie-Lynne Boudreau, Kaleb Saulnier, Sarah Coly, Dr. Eva Cupchik, and Celine Coletta for their camaraderie and support. I am equally grateful to my dear friends, Shahnaz Gazi, Naushaba Akhter, Dr. Raka Amin, Safinaaz Hassan, Dr. Sabrina Rasheed, Nayeefa Chowdhury, Naheed Akhter, Nazmul Hossain, Safia Ghazi Rahman, and Mujibur Rahman, for their enduring friendship and support.

To my beloved father, Rafique Ahmed, thank you for instilling in me the values of education, integrity, resilience, and perseverance. I wish my late mother, grandmother, and sister could have seen this milestone; I carry their love and blessings with me every day. To my dear husband, Hassan, thank you for your endless patience, unconditional love, understanding, and support throughout the many years it took to complete this dissertation. To my beloved sons, Sheehan, Rohan, and Jeeshan, thank you for filling my life with joy, hope, and purpose. I also express my sincere gratitude to my parents-in-law, Kamal Uddin and Sultana Afroz; my uncles, Salim, Nazim, and Faisal; my aunts, Kamrun and Shamsun; my cousins, Farhan, Fardin, Faria, and Nafiz; and my nephew, Rifat, for their encouragement and support.

Finally, I acknowledge all the research participants who generously shared their experiences, insights, wisdom, and perspectives. Their willingness to contribute made this dissertation possible. I hope this research honours their voices and, however modestly, advances feminist scholarship and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Abstract

Gender mainstreaming in United Nations Peace Operations, mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, requires societal transformation for full implementation across diverse communities. Adopted in 2000, the resolution calls not only for increasing the representation of women in UN peace operations, as often understood within the United Nations (UN), but also for a deep commitment by UN member states to social justice to eradicate embedded inequalities and promote peace and security for all. My empirical research, based on interviews with peacekeepers from Bangladesh, reveals that UN peacekeepers encounter complex challenges in post-conflict societies, including navigating militarized institutional cultures, operating in risky settings, and confronting gendered protection norms that hinder effective peacekeeping and reconstruction. It also shows that the reinforcement of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization creates significant obstacles for women, including inequality, restricted mobility, insecurity, and exclusion, preventing them from reaping peace dividends. UN peacekeepers are tasked with protecting civilians and maintaining peace and security through their operations, programmatic actions, and gender mainstreaming efforts. Therefore, understanding barriers to women's equal participation in UN peace processes remains crucial for identifying practical strategies to eliminate them. To this end, my research critically assesses the current effectiveness and inherent shortcomings of peacekeeping training as a tool for implementing the WPS agenda, with a particular focus on gender mainstreaming. The study's recommendations highlight the need to improve this training to be effective, gender-responsive, and transformative. As vectors for peace, peacekeepers must understand local specificities within cultural contexts and address the challenges to gender mainstreaming while navigating the broader systemic flaws of post-conflict reconstruction.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Prologue	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	8
Background of the Problem	15
Context.....	16
Rationale	20
Knowledge Gap	23
Statement of Purpose	27
Research Questions.....	29
Overview of Chapters	31
Conclusion	33
Chapter 2: UNSCR 1325: Context, Challenges and Potential	34
UNSCR 1325 and 1325+	34
Adoption of UNSCR 1325 and UN Peace Operations	35
Significance of UNSCR 1325	43
Limitations of UNSCR 1325	46
WPS Agenda.....	52
Gender Balance and Gender Mainstreaming	54
Gender Perspectives in Conflicts	56
Gender Mainstreaming.....	59
Global Study and HIPPO Report	61
Chapter 3: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Critical Evaluation of UNSCR 1325.....	66
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.....	67
Politics of Gender Mainstreaming	72

Challenges of Gender Mainstreaming at Organizational, Operational, and Individual Levels.....	74
Politics of Identity, Status of Women and Cultural Relativism.....	77
Cultural and Local Specificity	78
Questions on Cultural and Neo-colonial Implications.....	81
Gender Essentialism in Protection Doctrine	84
Sexual Violence and UNSCR 1325+	89
Theoretical Analysis of Patriarchy, Masculinity and Militarization.....	93
Power, Patriarchy, and Masculinity	97
Hegemonic Masculinity and Patriarchy.....	100
Militarization and Militarized Masculinity.....	103
Gaps in Literature	106
Conclusion	108
Chapter 4: UN Peace Operations and Significance of the Bangladesh Case Study	110
UN Peace Operations: A Complex and Gendered Process.....	110
Gender Mainstreaming and the Presence of Female Peacekeepers	116
Significance of the Case Study of Bangladeshi Peacekeepers.....	119
Low Presence of Female Troops.....	123
Conclusion	126
Chapter 5: Methodological Reflections and Methods	128
Methodological Reflections.....	130
Methodological Framework.....	136
My Standpoint.....	140
Methods.....	143
Interviews.....	152
Thematic Analysis	159
Problems Faced.....	165
Conclusion	170
Chapter 6: Gender Mainstreaming, UNSCR 1325 and Peacekeeping Realities.....	171
Mandate and Challenges for Peacekeepers.....	174
Gender, Insecurity and Militarized Masculinity in Darfur	177
Variable Gender Inequality and Political Insecurity.....	182
Creation of an All-female FPU	185
Bangladesh's All-Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) in Haiti	187

Gender Inequalities among Host Communities: Feminist Insights from Post-conflict Spaces	191
Hegemonic and Militarized Masculinity in Kalashnikov Culture	194
Reflections on Gender Injustice, Security and Limits of Peacekeeping.....	198
Local Ownership and Politics of Gender Equality in Peacekeeping	200
Repressive Regimes and International Politics of Gender Inequality.....	203
Transitional Justice and Gender: Rhetoric and Reality in Post-conflict Reconstruction...	205
Review of the Challenges and Main Argument.....	208
Conclusion	210
Chapter 7: Gender Mainstreaming, UNSCR 1325 and Socio-cultural Challenges.....	212
Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming in a Multinational Set-up.....	213
Dealing with SEA and CRSV: Women as Crisis Managers.....	218
Three Menaces and UNSCR 1325	223
Gender Inequality, Militarization and Inclusion of Women.....	227
Masculinity, Militarization and Exclusion of Women.....	230
Institutional Norms and Gender Mainstreaming.....	233
Rape Culture and the UN's Inaction.....	238
Recap on the Findings.....	244
Conclusion	246
Chapter 8: The Cornerstone of Peacekeeping: Training and UNSCR 1325+	247
The Imperative of Gender Training in Peacekeeping	251
Training for UN Peacekeepers.....	257
Training in the Bangladesh Context	264
Gender Mainstreaming and Essentialism in Training, Recruitment, and Deployment .	275
Challenges and Opportunities for Peacekeepers.....	279
Conclusion	282
Chapter 9: Conclusion and Lessons Learned.....	284
Research Questions and Key Findings	284
Main Arguments	291
Significant Contribution.....	293
Limitations.....	298
Future Studies	299
Conclusion	300
Epilogue: My Academic 'Nirvana'	302

References.....	303
Appendix B: Interview Invitation.....	335
Appendix C: Interview Guide.....	337
Appendix D: Questionnaire for BIPSOT.....	340
Appendix E: Consent Form	342
Appendix F: Approval from Bangladesh’s Armed Forces Division	345
Appendix G: Certificate from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Ottawa.....	346
Appendix H: Certificate from the United Nations Senior Women Talent Pipeline Program	348
Appendix I: Certificate from the United Nations Senior Mission Leaders Course	349

List of Tables

Table 1: United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1325+ on Women, Peace and Security.....	40
Table 2: Policy Review and Content Analysis.....	148
Table 3: Training for Peacekeepers Participating in UN Peace Operations	257
Table 4: BIPSOT Training Materials on CRSV and Observations	267

List of Abbreviations

AFD	Armed Forces Division (Bangladesh)
AHQ	Army Headquarters
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ARTDOC	Army Training and Doctrine Command
BIPSOT	Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training
CAR	Central African Republic
CEDAW	Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPTM	Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSOs	Civil Services Organizations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation
DPO	Department of Peace Operations (Formerly DPKO)
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FI	Feminist Institutionalism
FPU	Formed Police Units
FSS	Feminist Security Studies
GPOI	Global Peace Operations Initiative
HIPPO	High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IDP	Internally Displaced Person

IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IPO	Individual Police Officer
IR	International Relations
ISSAT	International Security Sector Advisory Team
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti
MONUC	United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NAP	National Action Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
PKOs	Peacekeeping Operations
PCC	Police Contributing Country
PDT	Pre-deployment Training
POC	Protection of Civilians
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SEAHV	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, Harassment and Violence
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TCC	Troop Contributing Country
TPCC	Troop and Police Contributing Country
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMID	United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Prologue

This thesis is the fruit of my saga as a scholar, a former diplomat, and a woman. My personal and professional experiences have shaped my academic work and my dedication to gender equality. As a woman navigating male-dominated fields such as international relations, diplomacy, and peacekeeping, while facing societal and institutional challenges, I wish to show how these experiences, alongside my academic pursuits, have shaped this thesis. Grounded in my extensive international background as a woman from the developing world, this dissertation reflects how I have overcome challenges and learned through continuous dedication, especially in my career in diplomacy and peacekeeping. It further demonstrates how these experiences have shaped my research on gender in UN peace operations.

My career began with privileges that gave me a unique vantage point from which to observe the evolution of global issues. However, it was not the prospects for professional growth that determined my trajectory, but rather a more profound sense of duty, a responsibility to unravel the truth, expose the unseen, and record the unheard. This sense of responsibility has driven me to research and contribute to understanding these critical issues. Ultimately, this commitment to truth and knowledge has led me to a new career trajectory that has reshaped my life and purpose, and has brought me to this milestone in my academic journey.

It was the year 2002. I was studying at the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA) in Paris, pursuing a diploma in international public administration and diplomacy, funded by a scholarship from the Government of France. I was young and naive, yet curious about what was happening worldwide. I lived in the Résidence Lucien Paye at La Cité Internationale Universitaire in Paris. One evening, after returning from my formal classes at ENA, I learned that one of my fellow students from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) had lost his mother. I went to

his room to offer my condolences. He sat there, sad, sharing memories of his mother with some of my colleagues from ENA. He regretted not having seen her for the past thirteen years. His mother from the DRC had done everything possible to get her son educated and out of the conflict zone. What struck me profoundly was that his mother was ill but could not be taken to a hospital or see a doctor for treatment because rebels controlled the area. The armed groups blocked the only road to the limited medical facility. I sympathized with him, but I did not fully understand the situation faced by the people in the DRC. I completed my studies and returned to my country, yet the memory of this tragedy remained deeply etched in my mind.

From 2004 to 2008, I was posted to the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations Headquarters in New York. My primary focus was on social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs, including issues related to United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 as part of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.¹ I served as the focal point for a resolution on the Culture of Peace sponsored by Bangladesh. I wrote and delivered statements to the UN and listened to other countries present their positions on various issues. Numerous UN reports addressed issues affecting citizens of its member states. Nevertheless, a persistent voice in my mind questioned whether we truly grasped the realities of these situations or recognized the deeper, more complex truths behind the official narratives. At the UN, member states typically present success stories and best practices; we did not deviate from this trend, relying on our government's interpretation of political, socio-cultural, and economic realities. As time passed, my curiosity about the real stories behind those national positions grew, lying beyond the official narratives we presented. By unravelling these complex truths, which are often sidelined in official narratives to maintain diplomatic consensus, this thesis examines how the inherently political nature of conflict

¹ Please see the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

contributes to the disproportionate suffering of women, children, and vulnerable groups, as well as to persistent implementation gaps within the WPS agenda.

My colleagues at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations used to invite other members and me to a monthly meeting of the Group of Friends of 1325, an informal ad hoc group coordinated by Canada to advocate for issues related to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. During my tenure, a delegation of Congolese women attended one such meeting. That was the first time I heard about the horrendous sexual and gender-based violence inflicted on women and children in the DRC. It was hard for me to process these painful narratives. My mind was disturbed. The burden of my privileges, which I had never understood before, weighed heavily on me. I began to think about why rape had been used as a tool of war and why women's bodies had become battlegrounds.²

While working at the Mission in New York, I married a wonderful man in Dublin, Ireland. My first child was born a year later in New York. My partner has always supported my work and dreams. My womanhood, combined with motherhood, has made me more sensitive to issues facing women, peace, and security. I felt a deeper obligation to act, but I did not know how.

I returned to my country to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangladesh, where I was first appointed Director of the Africa Wing and later of the United Nations and Human Rights Wing. During this period, I began to reflect more deeply on the situation of women in my country. Many women live in poverty and lack fundamental rights, with many employed in industries such as Ready-Made Garments (RMG) or as domestic helpers, enduring insecure living and working

² Historically, women have always been prone to different forms of violence during conflicts: sexual violence, exploitation, and other abuses. Violence against women is not a new reality of war, but rather, the systematic attention to it, particularly within the framework of international law, peacekeeping missions, and the WPS agenda, is relatively recent. The emphasis on addressing gender-based violence in conflict, primarily through mechanisms like UNSCR 1325, represents a conceptual shift in how the international community thinks about and responds to such issues.

conditions (Enloe, 2014, pp. 250-263). Nevertheless, participation in the formal and informal labour markets creates a complex dynamic in which many women leverage their status as breadwinners to negotiate greater personal autonomy and challenge traditional domestic power structures from within. Despite their roles as breadwinners, these women remain largely disempowered, as decision-making authority is usually held by their fathers, husbands, or brothers. This is a direct result of the deeply rooted patriarchy in Bangladeshi society, where gender roles are strictly defined and family and societal expectations often limit women's autonomy (Chowdhury, 2009).

Additionally, in Bangladesh, millions of refugees from Myanmar (formerly Burma) have been sheltered in camps near the Chittagong district. These unfortunate people fled brutal persecution and became victims of 'textbook ethnic cleansing' by the Myanmar military.³ The Rohingya men, women, and children were indiscriminately killed and brutally tortured by the Burmese army, local security forces, and militia groups. Many Rohingya refugee women and children from Myanmar who were raped and tortured by the Burmese military now live in camps in Bangladesh, and thousands have given birth. Their future remains uncertain; in fact, it looks very bleak. Witnessing their suffering left me even more distressed.

I attended a United Nations Senior Mission Leaders Course in Pretoria, South Africa, which trained me to become a civilian peacekeeper and prepared me for a leadership role in UN peace operations. After serving another diplomatic tenure at the Bangladesh High Commission in Ottawa, I returned to Dhaka and joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Director General. However, as the primary caregiver for my three young children, I was unable to take on

³ See Safi, M. (2017, September 11). Myanmar treatment of Rohingya looks like 'textbook ethnic cleansing,' says UN: Top human rights official denounces 'brutal operation' against Muslim minority in Rakhine state. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/11/un-myanmars-treatment-of-rohingya-textbook-example-of-ethnic-cleansing>

peacekeeping roles in non-family postings or fully pursue a diplomatic career in UN peacekeeping. Instead, I aimed to deepen my understanding of peacekeeping and UNSCR 1325 through theoretical study and empirical research. I decided to enroll in a PhD programme, but to pursue full-time doctoral studies, I needed permission and study leave from the foreign service. The government, in principle, supported higher education and training by providing resources such as deputation with full salary and benefits, study leave with half salary, and even scholarships.

Therefore, I applied for long-term leave through a deputation. Unfortunately, I faced strong opposition from my boss, the former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, Mr. Shahidul Haque. He rejected my leave application and actively blocked my efforts to begin my doctoral studies in 2015. The Foreign Secretary questioned why I needed a PhD, noting that he did not have one. He refused my initial deputation request and my second study leave application without providing any reasons. He disapproved of my plans to pursue higher education, which was my right. At the same time, he approved a long-term deputation for a male officer. He created both institutional and attitudinal barriers to discourage me from pursuing my goals. When he attended UN conferences in New York and Geneva, the same Foreign Secretary delivered excellent speeches on women's rights and progress. Yet within his own Ministry, he would violate those very rights. He seemed to exemplify double standards. At this stage of my career, I faced the harshest forms of gender discrimination, harassment, and humiliation.

Although I felt empowered as a civil servant to decide whether to pursue a PhD, I also felt helpless. One of my colleagues, then the Director at the Foreign Secretary's office, asked whether I wanted to pursue a PhD or take time off to focus on domestic life. I could not help but wonder whether he had ever asked similar questions of some of his male colleagues who had applied for permission to pursue higher education. I received no response to my query.

Negative comments about my true intentions, along with the attitudinal and institutional barriers created by a few colleagues, could not deter me from my objective and determination. On the contrary, the obstruction I faced from the highest authority in my service, the former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, only strengthened my resolve to pursue doctoral education rather than the comfort and security of a stable career with promotions, desirable postings, and attractive benefits. No female officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh had ever considered pursuing a PhD. I came to understand the reasons behind this when I experienced marginalization while requesting permission to pursue higher studies. Despite this, I found encouragement from colleagues who recognized the merit of my PhD project. The feminist slogans “the personal is political” and “the personal is international” became a reality for me. My lived experiences further reinforced my research interest in exposing the truth and challenging the double standards embedded in our patriarchal system. These experiences of denial, discrimination, and exclusion have profoundly shaped my worldview, offering firsthand insight into the subtle and overt manifestations of gender inequality within patriarchal systems and bureaucracies. This direct exposure fostered a deep and abiding desire to understand systemic inequalities with greater depth and nuance. Ultimately, these personal encounters served as significant inspiration for my research endeavours.

My research underscores my commitment to gender equality. I examined deep-rooted discrimination in our societies, focusing on the implications of UNSCR 1325 for peacekeeping. Through my work, I envision a world where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed. Ultimately, my aim is to help build a fairer society for women and other groups seeking equity, free from discrimination and hardship. I draw inspiration from Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a pioneer in women’s education in Bangladesh. Her remarkable 1905 science

fiction, *Sultana's Dreams*, depicts a feminist utopia and conveys powerful messages about women's empowerment, anti-colonialism, disarmament, and scientific progress. The words of the main character, the Queen of Ladyland, resonate with these values:

*We do not covet other people's land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the precious gems, which nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy nature's gifts as much as we can.*⁴

⁴ Please see: <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sultana/dream/dream.html>

Chapter 1: Introduction

It was a bright day during the monsoon in 2000 in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, located in a historic building in the Shegunbagicha area of the city, the three officers in the United Nations (UN) section had been extremely busy. They were preparing conference papers for the Bangladesh delegation's participation in the Millennium Summit in September 2000, a major event where world leaders gathered to discuss and set global development goals for the new millennium, followed by the 55th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), scheduled from September to December. Heads of state and government from around the world were expected to attend the high-level segment of the Millennium Summit and the inaugural sessions of the UNGA in September. I, along with my two colleagues, a senior female officer and a male officer, was engrossed in drafting briefing documents, agenda-specific statements, and talking points for the head of the delegation, the country's Prime Minister, as well as for the Deputy Head, the Foreign Minister, and other participating dignitaries and officials.

The intense workload and tight deadlines left little to no time for breaks. Our boss, Director General Hemayetuddin, emerged from his air-conditioned chamber for brief consultations with my senior female colleague, Saida Muna Tasneem. He seemed excited about the events at the UN Headquarters in New York and the roles the Bangladesh delegation would play in the coming months. One reason for his excitement was Bangladesh's participation as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (henceforth UNSC). The Security Council was also negotiating a resolution sponsored by Bangladesh at the time. This resolution was none other than the one on Women, Peace and Security, later known as Resolution 1325.

Adopted in 2000, this resolution was a landmark in gender equality and peacekeeping, recognizing the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and the importance of their participation in peace processes. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Bangladesh opened the door to this resolution during its March 2000 presidency. Bangladesh's then Permanent Representative at the UN Headquarters, Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, unequivocally declared that "peace is inextricably linked with equality between men and women"⁵ despite criticism that the country was diluting the UN Security Council's agenda by proposing to table a resolution on so-called 'soft issues' (A. K. Chowdhury, personal communication, October 4, 2018).

Five years later, in 2005, the UN Security Council held an open debate at UN Headquarters in New York to mark the fifth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (henceforth UNSCR 1325, Resolution 1325, or 1325). By then, I had been assigned to the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, focusing on 1325-related work. I was excited to attend this special event in the Security Council Chamber, the world's strategic centre. Starting on the morning of October 27, 2005, I listened to speeches from numerous delegations. I often found myself distracted by the large mural on the east wall, created by Norwegian artist Per Lasson Krohg. The artwork depicted themes of slavery, conflict, war, peace, and freedom, featuring men, women, and children in darkness and light, distress and hope, pain and joy – a reflection of the world's history. I wondered whether the mural captured the United Nations' founding or still reflected the human condition today.

I prepared a statement for my boss, Permanent Representative Ambassador Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury, and waited for his turn. Finally, the moment arrived: my boss took the speaker's seat

⁵ Reference UN Security Council Press Release on the International Women's Day statement of the Council at <https://press.un.org/en/2000/20000308.sc6816.doc.html>

at the edge of the horseshoe-shaped central table in the chamber, and I took the seat behind him. He delivered the country statement and reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to the resolution. After a while, the debate ended, but I was unsure what had been accomplished. I drafted country statements marking the anniversaries of Resolution 1325 and attended numerous other Security Council events during my nearly five-year tenure. For some reason, the anniversaries and events related to Resolution 1325 had become very dear to my heart. Its principal commitment to integrating women and girls into peace and security policies felt promising. I therefore began to develop an affinity for the resolution and its activities.

For over a decade, I participated in the Senior Women Talent Pipeline Program, sponsored by the Department of Operational Support at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. This opportunity granted me certification of my expertise and candidacy for United Nations system field offices (Appendix H). The experience also informed my thesis. It reinforced my belief that policies and priorities for United Nations peace operations, especially those that integrate gender mainstreaming into human rights, can promote global progress toward gender equality. Peace operations often occur in societies that have endured war, conflict, and serious human rights violations. If we foster gender equality through gender mainstreaming in these communities, it will support their emancipation. National commitments to UN peacekeeping policies can strengthen global peace, security, development, and gender justice in our interconnected world. Such commitments must be consistent, action-oriented, and gender-sensitive. UNSCR 1325 has shown how nations can meet these commitments.

In this research, I have combined my professional experience working on UNSCR 1325 at the UN and in policymaking in Bangladesh, a troop- and police-contributing country to UN peace operations, with my academic experience in Canada. This combination has provided me with a

unique opportunity to explore the challenges and experiences of peacekeepers from the perspectives of a Global South country. While my personal and professional experiences significantly inform this research, personal narratives serve as an entry point for examining broader systemic issues. These experiences are contrasted with empirical data, scholarly delineations, global trends, and a case study from Bangladesh, highlighting patterns that transcend individual accounts.

In this thesis, I examine the objectives of UNSCR 1325, its significance, and its limitations for gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping. I explore how the resolution is used to mainstream gender in UN peace operations, and whether it fosters genuine structural transformation or merely serves as a ‘checkbox’ for gender integration. I interview peacekeepers and policy practitioners from Bangladesh, the country of my case study, to learn about their experiences with gender mainstreaming across various UN missions, including Sudan, South Sudan, Darfur, Afghanistan, Haiti, the CAR, and the DRC. Through this research, I identify the challenges of gender mainstreaming and the barriers to achieving gender equality in UN peacekeeping.⁶

To situate these findings within relevant theoretical debates, I analyze them through the lenses of critical feminist scholarship and standpoint theory (Enloe, 2000, 2014; Peterson, 1992, 1993; Steans, 1998, 2006, 2013; Tickner, 1992, 2001, 2014; Harding, 1993, 1987), alongside theories of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization (Connell, 2002; Duncanson, 2015; Hooper, 1998, 2001; Parpart & Zalewski, 2008; Zalewski & Parpart, 1998; Whitworth, 2004), feminist institutionalism (Ackerly et al., 2006; Basini, 2017; Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010), and postcolonial feminism (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). I examine how these frameworks illuminate the ongoing challenges of

⁶ Challenges are many and varied in UN peacekeeping. I have discussed those challenges in detail in Chapters 2 and 3 through content analysis and a literature review, and the barriers in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 through my empirical data.

integrating gender mainstreaming into the operational realities of UN peace operations. I demonstrate that these theoretical lenses reveal a fundamental clash: the WPS agenda's transformative goals are consistently undermined by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures inherent to military peacekeeping environments.

In this dissertation, I use UNSCR 1325 as an umbrella resolution encompassing the ten subsequent resolutions under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, collectively referred to as UNSCR 1325+. Together, these resolutions constitute the Security Council's mandate to advance gender equality and women's participation in peace and security. This dissertation critically examines the implementation of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. It asks why, despite repeated commitments by the United Nations and its member states, gender mainstreaming continues to struggle to move from policy rhetoric to operational reality. Specifically, it investigates the gap between the UN's commitments and their implementation in peacekeeping practice, the challenges peacekeepers face in the field and during training, and how patriarchy, militarized masculinity, and militarization impede the implementation of the WPS agenda. This dissertation addresses three research questions. First, what challenges do UN peacekeepers face in integrating gender equality into peace and security? Second, what socio-cultural factors, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325? Third, what are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate gender training and develop the competence needed to implement the WPS agenda on the ground?⁷

To investigate the three research questions, I adopted a qualitative feminist research design and conducted a thematic analysis. I used a case study methodology and conducted semi-

⁷ The research questions are further elaborated in the relevant section later in this chapter.

structured, in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi peacekeepers, policy practitioners, and independent experts, who comprised my sample. I complemented these interviews with a content analysis of UN policy documents, training materials, and national peacekeeping guidance from the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT).

At the strategic level, I examined the policy discourse and the normative architecture of the WPS agenda, as articulated in 1325, 1325+, and related UN resolutions and policies. I reviewed the *Capstone Doctrine*,⁸ the *Global Study*,⁹ the *High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO)* report, and the UN Secretary-General's Reports, among others. At the organizational and operational levels, I analyzed institutional delivery and how military and security institutions interpret policy commitments, shaped by organizational culture, leadership, training, and institutional practices. At the individual level, I examined embodied practices and the lived experiences of peacekeepers as they negotiate gender equality within everyday operational realities. This framework enabled me to trace how global gender norms are transformed, negotiated, and sometimes constrained as they move from policy to institutions and to practice.

The first key finding of this study is the persistent gap between policy and practice. Gender mainstreaming is often misunderstood as simply “adding women” and reduced to women's numerical inclusion. Gender hierarchies continue to shape both UN missions and host societies, leaving women marginalized, while weak accountability mechanisms hinder the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325. The second key finding is that organizational cultures remain deeply masculinized. Patriarchal norms, militarized masculinity, and colonial legacies continue to

⁸ The 2008 publication *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, commonly known as the “Capstone Doctrine,” is a comprehensive guide that outlines the principles and guidelines for UN peacekeeping operations.

⁹ The review entitled *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, published in 2015, is known as the *Global Study*.

shape institutional practices, reproducing structural barriers that exclude women and perpetuate gender inequality despite formal policy commitments. The third key finding is that gender training for peacekeepers remains largely compliance-driven, functioning as a ‘problem-solving’ tool and reflecting a hegemonic transnational practice shaped by the Global North rather than a transformative approach to gender equality.

This dissertation makes several contributions to Feminist International Relations. Theoretically, it advances Feminist Security Studies and Feminist Institutionalism by integrating feminist theories into a multi-level analytical framework for examining gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping, where international mandates intersect with institutional practices and individual interpretations. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of feminist qualitative research for capturing peacekeepers’ lived experiences. Empirically, it centres a Global South perspective by examining how Bangladeshi peacekeepers navigate tensions between international gender norms and local patriarchal and militarized cultures. Practically, it identifies shortcomings in UN pre-deployment, in-mission, and specialized gender training, arguing for a shift from technical compliance to gender-analytical competence and offering concrete recommendations for gender training and institutional reform.¹⁰ This dissertation makes a distinctive contribution by integrating three interconnected dimensions into a single comprehensive study: the operational challenges faced by peacekeepers, the socio-cultural barriers, including patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, that shape gender mainstreaming, and the critical role of gender training in advancing the WPS agenda.

¹⁰ These contributions are detailed in the Significant Contribution section of Chapter 9.

Background of the Problem

Gender mainstreaming in United Nations Peace Operations, in accordance with UNSCR 1325, presents a complex challenge. This agenda is not merely about increasing the number of women in peace operations, as is often understood within the United Nations (UN), but also entails a deep commitment to social justice, addressing structural inequalities and patriarchy, and promoting peace and security for everyone.¹¹ The adoption of UNSCR 1325 on 31 October 2000 by the Security Council, under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework, was highly significant as it positioned the issues of ‘women and armed conflict’ at the heart of the UN and its Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) (Cohn, 2004; Dharmapuri, 2011).

The primary aim of UNSCR 1325 is to ensure women’s inclusion at all levels of peacemaking and peacebuilding, recognizing their unique experiences and contributions in conflict situations. UNSCR 1325 stipulates, “Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, resolution of conflict” (United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325 (2000), operative paragraph (OP) 1, p. 2). This includes increasing women’s participation in peace negotiations (OP 8), protecting them from gender-based violence during and after conflicts (OP 10, 11), ensuring their safety, and integrating their perspectives into the pursuit of peaceful solutions and post-conflict reconstruction (OP 5). The resolution underscores the crucial role women play in achieving lasting and sustainable peace. Despite considerable attention to UNSCR 1325 since its adoption, along with subsequent Women, Peace

¹¹ While member states interpret UNSCR 1325 in divergent ways, ranging from a narrow focus on numerical parity to a broader mandate for social justice, the resolution’s commitment to addressing structural inequalities and patriarchy reflects a normative framework established through the strategic collaboration of supportive states and transnational feminist activists (Cohn, 2008; Shepherd, 2008; Walby, 1990).

and Security resolutions (1325+), implementation has been slow and inconsistent (United Nations Security Council, 2019; Report of the UN Secretary General on ‘Women and peace and security’ agenda). However, some critiques argue that implementation is tokenistic and unimportant (Dharmapuri, 2011, 2013). Furthermore, the process faces institutional and attitudinal barriers (UN Women, 2015), obstructed by patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization.

Throughout my thesis, I argue that the promise of gender mainstreaming under UNSCR 1325 is constrained by socio-cultural obstacles within societies, especially patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. I also aim to understand why UNSCR 1325 is one of the UNSC’s most celebrated yet often misunderstood resolutions, and why it is frequently seen mainly as a commitment to increase the number of women in peacekeeping rather than as a transformative agenda promoting social justice and gender equality. My study would therefore explore whether future actions and resolutions could be more transformational, even though the UN and its member states might resist shifting the focus to such change.

Context

My research is situated within the context of implementing Resolution 1325 in UN peace operations. A group of UNSC non-permanent member states and an NGO working group on WPS persuaded the UNSC to adopt this historic resolution. As mentioned earlier, it was the first time in the Council’s history that a resolution on ‘Women, Peace and Security’ was adopted, addressing women’s roles in peace and security (Dharmapuri, 2011). Initially, the five permanent members of the UNSC (France, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States) opposed the adoption of this resolution. They viewed the proposed resolution as a ‘soft issue’ that would dilute the UNSC’s mandate (A. K. Chowdhury, personal communication, October 4, 2018).

2018).¹² This unprecedented event was overwhelming for the member states supporting the resolution and for the relevant NGOs focused on women's rights and activism worldwide (Cohn, 2004).¹³

Although significant attention was given and commitment expressed during the annual celebrations of its anniversaries since 2000, UNSCR 1325 has not been fully implemented by the UN, its agencies, and member states. While drafting this thesis, the resolution marked its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2025. The UN Secretary General, in his 2024 report on the implementation of the WPS or UNSCR 1325, reported the following,

Finally, power and decision-making on peace and security matters remain overwhelmingly dominated by men, and progress has been disturbingly slow in terms of ending impunity for those who perpetrate atrocities against women and girls. In 2023, the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared with the previous year, the number of United Nations verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence was 50 per cent higher than the year before, and the number of girls affected by grave violations in situations of armed conflict increased by 35 per cent. And yet, even basic public awareness about these injustices is lacking (United Nations Security Council, S/2024/671, 24 September 2024, paragraph 5, p. 2).¹⁴

¹² From the keynote address by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury at the International Symposium on Gender, Peace and Security at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan, 3 November 2012. A PDF copy was received by email from Ambassador Chowdhury on 4 October 2018.

¹³ The UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security, Friends of 1325 (a member state group), and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security collaborated to develop the resolution. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) created the PeaceWomen website (www.peace-women.org) to disseminate information to women peace activists across the globe (Cohn, 2004, p. 8).

¹⁴ A relevant report by the UN Secretary General states, "The United Nations recorded at least 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts in 2023, a 72 per cent increase as compared with 2022. The proportion of women and children killed doubled and tripled, respectively, as compared with 2022. ...In 2023, almost 30,000 civilians were killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in just six conflicts: Gaza, Myanmar, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic,

Given the findings of increased gender inequality and insecurity, the question remains why implementation is still ‘disturbingly slow’. The process is not only slow and inconsistent but also sometimes regressive, causing setbacks.

Based on recent statements and public documents, I observe that the focus of the UN and its member states on implementing UNSCR 1325 has largely centred on specific data points, such as increasing the number of women peacekeepers, expanding budget allocations as a prerequisite for implementation, or even limiting the agenda to solely reducing incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by UN peacekeepers. In my thesis, I explore the experiences of UN peacekeepers and policy practitioners to assess gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping. I focus specifically on their experiences at the operational level to better understand the challenges and opportunities of integrating gender into peacekeeping efforts under the WPS agenda.

Additionally, in Resolution 1325, training has been highlighted as a crucial implementation aspect, as its preambular paragraphs stipulate the following:

Recognizing also the importance of the recommendation contained in the statement of its President to the press of 8 March 2000 for specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations, (Preambular paragraph 9, UNSCR 1325 (2000)).

Recognizing that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, (Preambular paragraph 10, UNSCR 1325 (2000)).

Ukraine and Yemen. Civilians accounted for 90 per cent of those killed and injured when explosive weapons were 24-07305 2/16 S/2024/385 used in populated areas” (United Nations Security Council: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts: Report of the Secretary-General, 14 May 2024; pp. 2-3; <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/385>).

Therefore, the resolution's operative paragraphs 6 and 7 request that the UN Secretary General provide training guidelines and materials to troop-contributing member states for the pre-deployment training of military and police personnel, and urge member states to offer voluntary financial, technical, and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts. In this context, I have incorporated training into my thesis to address barriers and promote a better understanding of civilian protection and the integration of gender perspectives into peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, training can increase awareness of the impacts of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization in peacekeeping settings. I have also observed the role of gender essentialism in training, recruitment, and deployment. While I examine masculinity and gender essentialism to assess the relevance of training and the biases involved, I do not entirely blame the training for not directly addressing these issues, since that was not its primary focus at the outset.

To narrow the scope of my research, I have chosen Bangladesh as a case study to explore how Bangladeshi peacekeepers experience gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping missions. My study examines the participation of Bangladeshi peacekeepers, from a small but densely populated developing South Asian country,¹⁵ in modern peacekeeping efforts through a gender perspective. I focus on the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers because the country is a leading contributor of troops and police. Bangladesh has been deploying personnel to UN missions since 1988. The government has been working to mainstream gender in UN peace operations by including female soldiers and police in its peacekeeping contingents. It is important to examine how Bangladeshi peacekeepers implement UNSCR 1325 and the challenges they face. Since Bangladesh is committed to implementing UNSCR 1325, we expect its peacekeepers to apply the resolution on the ground. However, this does not necessarily mean that, despite the country's

¹⁵ In 2025, Bangladesh's population is 175.7 million, making it the world's eighth-largest country. Reference: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bangladesh>

commitment at the organizational and strategic levels, its military and police will be able to implement it effectively at the operational or individual level. The details will be discussed in the relevant chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Rationale

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 marked a watershed moment for women's rights following the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.¹⁶ As discussed, the resolution has become a milestone in recognizing women's participation in security and peace. Although UNSCR 1325 has a broader mandate for gender equality and mainstreaming, I examine its implementation in UN peace operations in particular.¹⁷ I have chosen the context of UN peace operations mainly because the WPS agenda was adopted to address women's challenges in war, conflicts, and peace processes. The text of UNSCR 1325 contains 18 operative paragraphs, and almost all of them address peace processes and women's enhanced participation in UN peace operations.¹⁸ Studying peacekeeping missions has provided insights into how the WPS agenda is implemented in these settings. Through 1325, the UNSC focused on WPS issues mainly within the framework of UN peacekeeping, although its scope is not limited to any specific context. Its preamble references the Charter of the United Nations and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and it embraces the theme of gender equality in all contexts.

¹⁶ *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) was adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It is a landmark document for advancing women's rights and gender equality. The declaration may be seen at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

¹⁷ The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) of June 2015 opines: "The United Nations should embrace the term "peace operations" to denote the full spectrum of responses required and invest in strengthening the underlying analysis, strategy and planning that leads to more successful design of missions" (p. viii). See at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/report-high-level-independent-panel-peace-operations>

¹⁸ Reference the full text of UNSCR 1325 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

It is widely recognized that the UN and its member states' efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 have faced significant challenges since its adoption (Braunmühl, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010). Unfortunately, UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions do not explicitly state that, on the ground, women and their equal rights are undermined by patriarchal norms and practices. The dominance of masculinity threatens peace, while security is jeopardized by systematic militarization, conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking of women and children, and related issues. I plan to verify this assumption through a literature review that will help sharpen the focus of my thesis. I will draw on and contribute to the critical and post-structural theories of Feminist Security Studies (FSS), masculinities studies, feminist institutionalism, and postcolonial feminism. The literature review is presented in Chapter 3.

My thesis employs a two-stage approach to study gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. The first stage involves a detailed review of official UN reports and policy documents, which outline current theoretical and policy frameworks and highlight gaps between official mandates and actual practices. These documents set the context for field investigations and justify in-depth empirical work through interviews. Consequently, my empirical data from the document review is supplemented by interviews with peacekeepers and policy practitioners. I conducted interviews with 22 participants, including 18 peacekeepers and four experts or policy specialists. I also seek to validate the interview data against the documents reviewed, especially UN reports and analyses by relevant independent experts and academics.¹⁹ Furthermore, I incorporate my own firsthand experiences to corroborate my findings by reflecting on broader social and cultural patterns. This multi-methods approach enables a comprehensive analysis that connects official

¹⁹ By 'validating' the data, I used methodological triangulation to cross-reference the personal testimonies of peacekeepers with official UN documentation and independent scholarly analyses, ensuring a balanced perspective that highlights the tension between institutional rhetoric and field-level realities.

discourse with the complex realities of gender mainstreaming in conflict and post-conflict environments.

To address the root causes of the precarious conditions faced by marginalized populations, UN members must identify hidden issues within their societies and listen to the silenced voices of their communities. However, many UN member states are hesitant to discuss the negative impacts of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization in their own societies. Arms-exporting countries, in particular, are unlikely to challenge the arms trade or militarism in their policies, as these serve their political and economic interests.²⁰ For example, examining the role of the arms trade in sustaining militarization shows that the world's major arms-producing countries are the five permanent members (P5) of the UNSC: the USA, Russia, the UK, France, and China. Collectively, these nations typically control between two-thirds and three-quarters of global weapons sales each year (Hartung in Williams, 2012, p. 442). This issue can be a significant constraint on decision-making at the UNSC.

The widespread silence surrounding embedded patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and militarization is a troubling sign of many societies' failure to commit to gender equality. This silence may be partly unintentional, as these issues are often normalized and difficult to recognize as problems (Connell, 2002; Enloe, 2014).²¹ Living within systems that normalize patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization has historically perpetuated discrimination and inequality, both during war and in peace. If we do not identify and challenge these systemic issues, how can UNSCR 1325 ever be truly transformative? The key question is why these established systems fail

²⁰ The top eleven arms-exporting countries are the US, France, Russia, China, Germany, Italy, the UK, Israel, Spain, South Korea and Turkey. Reference: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/fs_2503_at_2024_0.pdf

²¹ This observation aligns with the scholarship of Cynthia Enloe (2014), who examines how militarism is 'naturalized' through everyday social practices, and with Raewyn Connell (2002), who demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity sustains patriarchal dominance by rendering it both inevitable and invisible.

to meet even the basic standards for ensuring gender equality, thereby hindering the transformative potential of resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions 1325+.

Observations and lessons learned by peacekeepers and policy practitioners on gender mainstreaming remain a significantly underexplored area of research. This thesis addresses this gap by arguing that insights from those operating at the operational level are essential to dismantling the interlocking systems of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. By focusing on these actors, we can better address the ‘why’ questions that often go unanswered in policy circles, most notably, why gendered hierarchies persist in missions despite formal mandates and why gender mainstreaming often fails to translate from rhetoric into field reality. For example, the firsthand experiences of international peacekeepers, who are arguably supposed to be a neutral force, have significant potential to help answer these ‘why’ questions. These experiences can also critically inform our understanding of the persistent inequalities embedded within current peace and security policies during ceasefires, post-conflict reconstruction, and peacebuilding efforts. Their narratives can expose how masculinist protection norms prioritize military objectives over the human security of local women. Their insights are not merely anecdotal but valuable and essential assets in effectively reshaping gender mainstreaming within UN peace operations. My thesis seeks to contribute to this overlooked field.

Knowledge Gap

There is a significant knowledge gap among communities of practice²² in understanding gender mainstreaming, gender balance, and the integration of gender perspectives.²³ Similarly, adequate research on the gendering of UN peace operations and their challenges is lacking. In this

²² The ‘communities of practice’ for this thesis include the national civil servants, diplomats at the UN, policy makers, law makers, UN officials and employees, UN peacekeepers, and field-level employees, among others.

²³ These concepts are discussed at length in Chapter 2.

thesis, I explore the experiences of UN peacekeepers and several policy practitioners, as well as the realities they face at the individual, institutional, and organizational levels. Gender operates not only at the individual level but also shapes the very structure of the institutions and organizations involved in UN peace operations. In peacekeeping, both uniformed and civilian peacekeepers navigate a shared, gendered space. Despite this, studies of peacekeeping do not adequately focus on individuals' experiences. Although a growing body of ethnographic scholarship (Giannini & Vermeij, 2014; Higate & Henry, 2009; Newby & Sebag, 2020; Vermeij, 2020), as well as Feminist Security Studies (Basini, 2013, 2017; Kreft, 2017) and Feminist Institutionalism (Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2016, 2017), has increasingly centered the lived experiences of peacekeeping personnel, there remains a critical need to further investigate how individual interpretations of UNSCR 1325 within shared, gendered operational spaces shape the ground-level realities of diverse mission contexts.

Despite high-level commitments, the limited implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its persistent challenges continue to puzzle me. The inherent structure of peacekeeping operations and the lived experiences of personnel often serve as direct barriers to these goals. Rather than viewing these challenges as mere logistical hurdles, this thesis argues that the organizational, tactical, and behavioural dynamics of missions frequently hinder the realization of the WPS agenda by reinforcing the very systems of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. While existing scholarship has identified institutional biases (Basini, 2013, 2017; Higate & Henry, 2009; Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2016, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020), there remains a critical analytical gap in understanding the micro-level mechanisms through which peacekeepers interpret and sometimes resist gender mandates in the field. By centering the firsthand experiences of those navigating these gendered spaces, this research moves beyond a 'checkbox' approach to

implementation. It instead analyzes how the friction between policy ideals and ground-level realities creates both obstacles and opportunities for integrating gender equality into UN peace and security operations.

Secondly, I analyze the challenges of gender mainstreaming in post-conflict societies, drawing on the experiences and insights of the peacekeepers and policy practitioners I interviewed. Because peacekeepers are deployed with mandates that often include protecting civilians and implementing UNSCR 1325, their feedback is essential. Their perspectives on the difficulties of operating in politically and culturally diverse environments and on integrating gender equality within those societies are crucial. Peacekeepers act as a link between local communities and policy-making bodies, and their observations can offer valuable insights into both the challenges and opportunities for advancing the WPS agenda.

In this study, I focus on the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers who served in UN peace operations, as well as their observations of local communities in post-conflict societies. While this research does not capture the direct voices of local community representatives, it analyzes how their lives are constructed and understood through the descriptions shared by my interviewees, the peacekeepers themselves. Consequently, these Bangladeshi personnel serve as the primary analytical lens through which the ‘local context’ is filtered.

I document their insights into the conditions of women and children to understand how these peacekeepers perceive the gendered impacts of war. However, it is important to clarify that these accounts do not represent the lived experiences of the local population; rather, they reveal the peacekeeper’s gaze and the subjective frameworks used to interpret the local environment. From this perspective, the local context, as mediated through these interviews, helps illuminate

how gender mainstreaming policies are translated and often constrained by the peacekeepers' interpretations and the missions' institutional biases.

While acknowledging that gender is a complex concept encompassing a wide range of identities, including those within LGBTQ+ communities, this research focuses explicitly on the experiences of women, analyzing the participation of female peacekeepers and the gendered interactions between peacekeeping personnel and local women (Karim & Beardsley, 2016, 2017; Olsson & Gizelis, 2015). This focused approach does not diminish the significance of other gender identities, especially LGBTQ+ communities, but aims to provide a detailed analysis of a vital and often overlooked area. By examining gender relations between men and women, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges and achievements in implementing gender mainstreaming policies, particularly for women within the framework of UNSCR 1325. Therefore, my focus on women remains important and central to international priorities.

Understanding gender mainstreaming on the ground is crucial for refining guidelines for implementing UNSCR 1325. It is essential to understand the work of individual peacekeepers, who provide firsthand insights into how these broad policies are experienced in real-world settings. UN peacekeeping operations are often where international mandates meet local realities. Peacekeepers therefore operate at the intersection of global policy and local socio-political and cultural contexts, where the lived experiences of host communities and peacekeepers shape the success of gender mainstreaming. Their feedback shows whether gender mainstreaming efforts are taking root or are merely top-down directives that do not reflect local needs or constraints. Recognizing the role of individuals within organizations, especially peacekeepers, means understanding that they are not merely instruments of institutional policy but human actors who shape its practical application.

Peacekeepers bring their perspectives, values, and biases, which can either support or hinder the broader goal of gender equality. Whether these experiences are unusual or reflect a larger issue in peacekeeping depends on how they compare to common patterns observed in missions. If many peacekeepers report similar experiences, it may point to systemic problems or gaps in the implementation of gender policies; therefore, these observations are more than just isolated incidents. Engaging with peacekeepers' experiences can offer a deeper understanding of both the connection and the gap between individual actions and institutional mandates. We can see how personal viewpoints and professional decisions either promote or obstruct the achievement of gender equality goals. This approach acknowledges that policy success depends on institutional frameworks, official mandates, and how individuals within those structures interpret and apply policies. It enables us to assess whether these are merely personal issues or part of a larger, more serious problem that requires comprehensive, structural solutions.

Statement of Purpose

The primary focus of my thesis is the implementation of UNSCR 1325. It examines the experiences of peacekeepers and policy practitioners as they navigate individual, organizational, and operational realities in implementing the WPS agenda. Specifically, I investigate whether their experiences in peacekeeping missions are linked to the operationalization of gender mainstreaming more broadly and to UNSCR 1325 in particular. The personal values and organizational norms regarding gender equality held by peacekeeping personnel can significantly influence their roles in peacekeeping missions. I also explore whether hegemonic masculinity contributes to the marginalization of women through dominant ideologies and discourses in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Given that security institutions, including UN peacekeeping forces, are predominantly male-dominated, with most personnel (military and police) being men, there exists

an overarching ‘gender power imbalance’ (Karim & Beardsley, 2017) embedded within the hyper-masculine culture and norms of these institutions. Consequently, resisting the military norms of militarized masculinity remains challenging, even with the inclusion of female soldiers in UN peacekeeping (Kronsell, 2006).

Institutions are shaped by attitudes, which can be difficult to change. At the same time, institutions can foster attitudes that lead to unequal treatment of women and men, reinforcing gender inequality and obstructing gender mainstreaming. Social and cultural beliefs about women’s vulnerability, along with the construction of their political and socio-economic inequality by members of male-dominated peacekeeping operations or state bodies, can create significant obstacles. These attitudinal and institutional barriers need to be addressed to advance gender mainstreaming. However, the question remains: how does a lack of expertise or training among UN personnel hinder their ability to identify and address these barriers, whether they are rooted in institutional norms or personal attitudes? I also consider whether training and awareness-raising can help foster gender equality.

Implementing policies such as UNSCR 1325 depends on how individual peacekeepers think and feel, that is, their attitudes and values regarding issues such as gender equality. Just as individual professors at a university may hold racist views despite the institution’s commitment to antiracism, individual peacekeepers may hold values that contradict the organizational mandate on gender equality. Analyzing these individual attitudes will help us determine whether these views are merely outliers within an otherwise good institution or reflect broader systemic challenges within the peacekeeping entity. Are the individuals simply exceptions, or do their attitudes indicate larger issues that hinder the operationalization of gender mainstreaming and the WPS agenda?

This critical reflection is vital to understanding the peacekeeping mission's commitment to gender equality.

Research Questions

This dissertation primarily explores the politics of gender identities, gender mainstreaming, and pervasive gender inequalities within UN peace operations. It aims to examine the individual, organizational, and operational challenges faced by UN peacekeepers through the lens of cultural and contextual factors, persistent gender disparities, and institutional and attitudinal barriers. Building on the critique of UNSCR 1325, I outline three research questions for this thesis.

- i) What challenges do UN peacekeepers face when integrating gender equality into peace and security?
- ii) What socio-cultural challenges influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization?
- iii) What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground?

Question 1 critically examines Resolution 1325, highlighting its conflation of 'gender' with 'women,' which promotes gender essentialism, reinforces women's victimhood, and omits accountability mechanisms. I explore how peacekeepers perceive persistent and varying gender inequalities, their understanding of gender, and the misconceptions surrounding gender mainstreaming, which is often reduced to simply 'adding women' (Dharmapuri, 2011). Additionally, I scrutinize the challenges of achieving gender equality across diverse UN peacekeeping contexts. I address this potential contradiction, that is, critiquing the reduction of 'gender' to 'women' while simultaneously centering women as the primary subjects of the study, through a feminist institutionalist lens (Karim & Beardsley, 2016, 2017; Mackay et al., 2010),

which distinguishes between the numerical representation of women and the power to influence gendered structures. By focusing on women, I am not suggesting that their inclusion alone fulfills gender mainstreaming; rather, I use their specific experiences as an ‘analytical tool’ to expose how UN peacekeeping remains oriented to masculinist protection norms that equate gender work solely with female bodies.

Furthermore, I examine the complexities of female troop participation, particularly within All-Female Formed Police Units (FPUs), where gender essentialism persists. My research shows that the implementation of UNSCR 1325 has not received adequate priority. Instead, attention has focused on issues such as sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), with the resolution used only partially to address these concerns. This analysis also highlights operational realities, showing that local ownership and transitional justice pose challenges and that effective gender mainstreaming requires coordinated efforts to overcome obstacles.

Question 2 examines the critique that Resolution 1325 remains silent on unequal gender relations and gender hierarchy, as well as the effects of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization in post-conflict societies (Parpart, 2017). This silence overlooks the deeply rooted structural issues that sustain gender inequality and hinder meaningful women’s participation in peace processes (Ibid). The resolution does not adequately address how these entrenched systems of power create barriers to gender equality and sustainable peace. My study uncovers a key finding: the limited success in incorporating gender perspectives within peacekeeping units, which significantly obstructs the broader and more effective implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Building on the previous two questions, question 3 examines the problematic aspects of gender mainstreaming under Resolution 1325 and further explores training for UN peacekeepers,

which the resolution encourages. In peacekeeping training, gender mainstreaming is often treated as a ‘problem-solving tool’ primarily to address issues such as SEA and CRSV. This narrow focus reduces gender mainstreaming to reactive measures rather than proactive, transformative approaches that challenge and change underlying gender dynamics. Despite its limitations, Resolution 1325 remains an important policy instrument for promoting gender equality in peace and security, prescribing awareness-building and training. It offers a framework that, if expanded and effectively implemented, can create meaningful opportunities for gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. The resolution’s potential lies in its ability to highlight gender issues and advocate for women’s inclusion in all aspects of peace and security, emphasizing the need for ongoing effort and political will to address its shortcomings and unlock its transformative power.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis comprises several chapters: a literature review, a methodology chapter, three chapters presenting research findings, and a concluding chapter. To connect my personal and professional journey with academic inquiry, the thesis is further contextualized by a Prologue and an Epilogue that offer personal reflections. The first chapter provides an introduction, background on the problem, a rationale for the study, and a statement of purpose. Chapter 2 outlines UNSCR 1325’s origins, significance, and limitations, including a critical literature review of gender mainstreaming and an exploration of organizational, operational, and individual challenges. Chapter 3 introduces the feminist theoretical framework and discusses the dynamics of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, as well as their implications in post-conflict settings. Chapter 4 examines UN peace operations as a gendered process in the context of Bangladesh, highlighting the underrepresentation of female peacekeepers and the challenges associated with gender mainstreaming.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological framework and techniques used in the Bangladesh case study, including the rationale for its selection. I examine relevant theories and approaches in Feminist International Relations (IR), including critical, structural, and institutional feminism, particularly those that emphasize the gendered dimensions of peace and security. I clarify my chosen research methodology and methods, including an overview of how to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews and perform qualitative thematic data analysis, all within feminist methodological perspectives on studying peace and security.

Chapter 6, the introductory discussion chapter, highlights the mandates and challenges faced by peacekeepers, particularly the tensions between gender essentialism and constructivism in gender mainstreaming efforts. It examines levels of gender inequality and political insecurity in post-conflict settings, with a particular focus on Bangladesh's creation of the All-Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) and its deployment in Haiti. The chapter explores gender inequalities within host communities, the impact of hegemonic masculinity, and gender injustice in peace operations. It also examines gender hierarchies, local ownership, and the dynamics of gender inequality in repressive regimes, and assesses the role of transitional justice in addressing these key issues, drawing on my findings. The chapter concludes by summarizing the main challenges and core arguments.

Chapter 7 examines the socio-cultural challenges associated with gender mainstreaming in multinational peacekeeping efforts, with a focus on SEA and CRSV. I present findings on gender inequality, patriarchy, and the exclusion of women. The chapter investigates how women are marginalized in peace operations, primarily due to masculinity and militarization, and highlights the role of institutional norms in shaping gender mainstreaming. It also points out the UN's lack of action regarding the rape culture within peacekeeping missions. The chapter concludes by

summarizing the findings and assessing the obstacles to effectively embedding gender considerations in peacekeeping.

Chapter 8 examines the role of training and awareness-building in gender mainstreaming within peacekeeping efforts. It focuses on training for UN peacekeepers, particularly in the context of Bangladesh and the BIPSOT training materials. This chapter questions the use of gender training as a ‘problem-solving tool’ and examines the challenges and opportunities it poses for peacekeepers. It also critically addresses how gender essentialism shapes training, recruitment, and deployment. The concluding remarks highlight the challenges and potential strategies to enhance gender integration in peacekeeping training.

In conclusion, Chapter 9 summarizes the findings of my empirical study and addresses the research questions. I highlight my original contribution to research on gender and peacekeeping and explain how it has enhanced our understanding of the literature. Ultimately, I evaluate the study's limitations and the lessons learned. Additionally, I offer a few policy recommendations and underscore key areas for future research on gender considerations in UN peace operations.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the premise of my research, including the topic, context, and background of the issue, and identified the knowledge gap and the rationale for the study. Additionally, I articulated the research purpose, outlined the research questions, and provided an overview of the dissertation’s chapters and structure. The next chapter will present a literature review on UNSCR 1325 and the challenges of gender mainstreaming within UN peace operations at the organizational, operational, and individual levels. It will further explore the politics of identity and the significance and limitations of UNSCR 1325.

Chapter 2: UNSCR 1325: Context, Challenges and Potential

In the Introduction, I outlined the background, context, and rationale for this thesis. I also presented the research questions and the structure of this dissertation. This chapter highlights the importance of UNSCR 1325 and 1325+, the WPS agenda, and key concepts such as gender balance, gender mainstreaming, and gender perspectives in conflict. It further discusses the limitations of UNSCR 1325. Additionally, it briefly covers the independent report, the *Global Study*, and the *High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report*, both commissioned by the UN. The main question I explore is what challenges arise in translating policy into practice when implementing gender mainstreaming in United Nations peace operations following UNSCR 1325.

UNSCR 1325 and 1325+

UNSCR 1325 is a landmark resolution adopted by the UN Security Council under the WPS agenda. Although the resolution encompasses a broader scope for gender equality and mainstreaming within the WPS framework, I focus mainly on its implementation in UN peace operations.²⁴ I have chosen the context of UN peace operations because the UN Security Council adopted this resolution primarily to address the challenges faced by women in war, conflicts and peace processes. Since UNSCR 1325 is the cornerstone of my thesis, the following section presents the historical context of its adoption and implementation in UN peace operations.

²⁴ The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) of June 2015 opines: “The United Nations should embrace the term “peace operations” to denote the full spectrum of responses required and invest in strengthening the underlying analysis, strategy and planning that leads to the more successful design of missions” (p. viii). See at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/report-high-level-independent-panel-peace-operations>

Adoption of UNSCR 1325 and UN Peace Operations

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 on ‘Women, Peace and Security’ in October 2000 marked a significant milestone, bringing the issue of “women and armed conflict” to the forefront of the UN and its peace operations (Cohn, 2004). This adoption reflects the culmination of a long political and historical process rooted in the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945, which aimed to promote equal rights for men and women. The UNGA, through the declaration of the United Nations Decade of Women (1975-85), first emphasized the interconnectedness among women’s status, gender equality, and international peace and security (Turenne-Sjolander, 2005). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, further strengthened this link (Olsson & Gizelis, 2013).

The 2008 publication *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, commonly known as the “Capstone Doctrine,” is a comprehensive guide outlining the principles and guidelines for UN peacekeeping operations.²⁵ Published by the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support,²⁶ it stipulates that peacekeepers are deployed to support the implementation of a cease-fire agreement. (p. 19). Following a ceasefire, the United Nations deploys its multinational ‘peacekeeping operations’ or ‘peace enforcement operations’ to maintain peace and security and protect civilians in conflict regions. However, a ceasefire does not guarantee that all parties to the conflict will accept peace; belligerent groups and rebels often do not support the ceasefire agreement or endorse peace processes. Consequently, peacekeepers are often required to maintain the ceasefire through peacemaking efforts to prevent

²⁵ For detailed information, please see the guidance section of the UN peacekeeping webpage at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/guidance>

²⁶ For the full text of the publication *Capstone Doctrine*, please see: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf

further conflicts or a resurgence of violence. They must address gender-based and communal violence, among other issues. They may sometimes have to confront rebels and uphold peace or engage in early peacebuilding initiatives when peace is consolidated. These ongoing challenges in peace operations underscore the urgent need to mainstream gender in efforts to establish sustainable peace and security.²⁷

The Security Council authorizes peace operations that traditionally fall under Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes). In “volatile post-conflict settings where the State is unable to maintain security and public order” (*Capstone Doctrine*, 2008, p. 14), the Security Council may invoke Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression) to deploy peacekeeping forces²⁸ (Mazurana et al., 2005). These operations are given country-specific mandates by the Security Council, which define their roles and responsibilities in supporting the ceasefire and maintaining peace. These mandates are “influenced by the nature and content of the agreement reached by the parties to the conflict” and “reflect the broader normative debates shaping the international environment” (*Capstone Doctrine*, 2008, p.16). Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 within the WPS agenda, mandates for UN peace operations have incorporated this resolution, focusing on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. According to the Capstone Doctrine, Resolution 1325 is among the thematic tasks assigned to UN peace operations, along with two other landmark Security Council resolutions, i.e., UNSCR 1612 on children and armed conflict (2005) and UNSCR 1674 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (2006) (*Capstone Doctrine*, p.16).

²⁷ Reference the UN peacekeeping webpage at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-we-do>

²⁸ Please see the UN Charter at <http://www.un.org/en charter-united-nations/>

The text of UNSCR 1325 includes the following key provisions, which have been integrated into the mandates of peace operations:

- i) Equal participation and involvement of men and women in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (Preambular paragraph)
- ii) Increased participation of women in peace processes (OP 1 and 2)
- iii) Integration of gender perspectives in peace processes (OP 5)
- iv) Recognition of sexual and other forms of violence as war crimes (OP 11)
- v) Ending impunity for perpetrators of such violence (OP 11)²⁹

Concisely, UNSCR 1325 calls on member states and the UN to increase women's participation and integrate gender perspectives into peace processes. It recognizes the unique needs and human rights of women and children in conflict (preambular paragraphs 7 and 9, as well as OP 6, 8(a), 12, 13, and 14), emphasizing their protection from gender-based violence. The resolution also acknowledges sexual and other forms of violence as war crimes and calls for an end to impunity, excluding such crimes from any amnesty provisions³⁰ (Mazurana et al., 2005; Pankhurst, 2010).

UN peace operations, in addition to their core peacekeeping activities, such as monitoring and ceasefire enforcement, the protection of civilians, Security Sector Reform (SSR), Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), facilitating humanitarian assistance, and supporting the electoral process, must implement gender mainstreaming in accordance with UNSCR 1325 (*Capstone Doctrine*, 2008). Mainstreaming gender includes incorporating gender

²⁹ Please see the text of the resolution: S/RES/1325 (2000), 31 October 2000, at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/132>. 'Impunity' is the exemption from punishment or freedom from prosecution for injurious actions committed by perpetrators in war and conflicts. In post-conflict societies, perpetrators of rape and CRSV often go unpunished. Impunity undermines women's rights and hence hampers gender mainstreaming. This will be discussed further later.

³⁰ See the text of the resolution: S/RES/1325 (2000), 31 October 2000 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

perspectives into planning and execution, increasing female participation across all programs, engaging local women, preventing gender-based violence (GBV) and SEA, assigning gender focal points, and providing gender training for personnel, among other measures.

Systematic violence and mass rape as weapons of war persist during conflicts, and violence against women often continues even after ceasefire agreements and during peace processes (Braunmühl, 2013; Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006). This dire situation, driven by gender inequality, underscores the need for gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations and beyond. The resolution urges member states and the UN to increase women's participation and integrate gender perspectives into peace processes, thereby significantly promoting gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping (Dharmapuri, 2011). It also calls for recognizing sexual and other forms of violence as war crimes and for ending impunity (Mazurana et al., 2005; Pankhurst, 2010).

Furthermore, UNSCR 1325 encourages member states to adopt National Action Plans (NAPs) and to reinforce the Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) agenda. As of May 2025, 112 countries (57%) have adopted NAPs on 1325,³¹ and some of the remaining countries are in the process of doing so. These Action Plans are national-level strategy documents that outline approaches and policy guidelines for implementing the WPS agenda.³² For contributing countries, NAPs on WPS outline their policies and strategies for participating in UN peace operations, particularly regarding the training and deployment of civilian and military personnel. NAPs also provide policy guidelines for increasing women's participation in peace processes and operations, tailored to each country's situation and capacity.

³¹ See the current data at <http://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>

³² For more information, please see Ibid.

Through UNSCR 1325, the UN Security Council addressed WPS issues, particularly in conflict and peacekeeping contexts. However, its scope extends beyond these parameters. Carol Cohn (2004) notes that Resolution 1325 is unique in many ways, offering tools to address gender in peace and security and supporting women's mobilization and political empowerment. Women activists, NGOs, and civil society played a crucial role in adopting the resolution (Ibid.). Resolution 1325 has been translated into over a hundred languages and is a key reference for women's organizations worldwide (Heathcote & Otto, 2014; Braunmühl, 2013). Shepherd (2008) states that UNSCR 1325 can serve as both a 'policy tool' for gender-sensitive political arrangements and an 'advocacy tool' to promote gender equity in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and peace operations.

Cohn (2004) argues that the genesis of 1325 demonstrates its revolutionary impact on the work of the UN, generating momentum by recognizing women as active agents of peace rather than merely passive victims to be protected. However, as we will see in the following sections, this perspective contradicts scholarly arguments that depict UNSCR 1325 as focusing on women's victimhood and reinforcing the binary essentialism of the 'protector-protected' dichotomy (Braunmühl, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Willet, 2010). Additionally, the resolution's silence on unequal gender power relations (Parpart, 2017) and on issues of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization is a significant omission. My thesis explores how peacekeepers navigate these contradictions and omissions in the practical application of the resolution in UN peace operations.

The United Nations (UN) Security Council has adopted eleven resolutions on "Women, Peace and Security." These resolutions are: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), 2493 (2019), and 2538 (2020).

Together, these eleven resolutions constitute the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, collectively known as 1325+. They guide efforts to promote gender equality and strengthen women's participation, protection, and rights across the conflict cycle, from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction.³³ The main objectives of these resolutions are presented below in the table:

Table 1

United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1325+ on Women, Peace and Security

Resolution	Date of adoption	Main Objectives
1325	31 October 2000	First time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; Recognizes the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; Stresses the importance of women's equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.
1820	19 June 2008	Recognizes sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war; Notes that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, crime against humanity, or a constitutive act related to genocide; Calls for training of troops on preventing and responding to sexual violence; Calls for more deployment of women in peace operations.
1888	30 September 2009	Reiterates that sexual violence exacerbates armed conflict and impedes international peace and security; Calls for leadership to address conflict-related sexual violence; Calls for the deployment of a Team of Experts where cases of sexual violence occur. Reiterates that sexual violence exacerbates armed conflict and impedes international peace and security; Calls for leadership to address conflict-related sexual violence; Calls for the deployment of a Team of Experts where cases of sexual violence occur.
1889	5 October 2009	Focuses on post-conflict peacebuilding and women's participation in all stages of peace processes;

³³ Partially adopted from the source of the Peace Women webpage on the Resolutions: <http://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>

		Calls for developing indicators to measure the implementation of UNSCR1325 (2000).
1960	16 December 2010	Reiterates the call for an end to sexual violence in armed conflict; Sets up “naming and shaming” listing mechanism, sending a direct political message that there are consequences for sexual violence, including: listing in the Secretary General’s annual reports, referrals to UN Sanctions Committees and to the ICC, international condemnation, and reparations.
2106	24 June 2013	Focuses on operationalizing current obligations rather than on creating new structures/initiatives; Includes language on women’s participation in combating sexual violence; Supports recourse to avenues of justice.
2122	18 October 2013	Explicitly affirms an “integrated approach” to sustainable peace; Sets out concrete methods for combating women's participation deficit; Recognizes the need to address the root causes of armed conflict and security risks faced by women; Calls for the provision of multisectoral services to women affected by conflict; <u>Links disarmament and gender equality by mentioning the ATT twice.</u>
2242	13 October 2015	Encourages assessment of strategies and resources regarding the implementation of the WPS Agenda; Highlights the importance of collaboration with civil society; Calls for increased funding for gender-responsive training, analysis and programmes; Urges gender as a cross-cutting issue within the CVE/CT Agendas; <u>Recognizes the importance of integrating WPS across all country situations.</u>
2467	23 April 2019	Recognizes that sexual violence in conflict occurs on a continuum of violence against women and girls; Recognizes national ownership and responsibility in addressing root causes of sexual violence, and names structural gender inequality and discrimination as a root cause; Recognizes the need for a survivor-centred approach; it further encourages member states to ensure that prevention and response are non-discriminatory and specific, and respect the rights and prioritize the needs of survivors, including vulnerable or targeted groups; Affirms that services should include provisions for women with children born as a result of sexual violence in conflict as well as men and boys, and

		urges member states to strengthen policies that offer appropriate responses and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability; Urges member states to strengthen access to justice for victims, including via reparations, and strengthen criminal law, including removing procedural impediments to justice.
2493	29 October 2019	The resolution urges all UN Member States, UN bodies, and regional organizations to fully implement the WPS agenda, particularly by integrating women meaningfully into peace processes and decision-making at all levels. Stresses the importance of accountability for violations of international law affecting women and girls. The resolution calls for greater support for national and regional initiatives, including developing and implementing National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS, to promote gender equality and protect women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings.
2538	28 August 2020	The resolution recognizes the vital role of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations - not only in promoting peace and security but also in enhancing operational effectiveness, credibility, and trust with local communities. It urges Member States, the UN, and regional organizations to increase the number of women in peacekeeping at all levels and across all functions (military, police, and civilian). This includes setting national targets, improving recruitment and retention, and addressing barriers to women's participation. The resolution calls for the creation of safe, enabling, and gender-sensitive environments for women peacekeepers, including preventing sexual harassment and abuse, ensuring appropriate training and facilities, and supporting leadership opportunities for women.

(Source: *PeaceWomen: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*)³⁴

Among these resolutions, UNSCR 1889, adopted in 2009, is notable for directing member states to develop indicators to track the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In preambular paragraph 17 of this resolution, member states asked the UN Secretary-General to develop "... a set of indicators for use at the global level to track implementation of its resolution 1325 (2000), which could serve as a common basis for reporting by relevant United Nations entities, other international

³⁴ Partially adopted from the table at the webpage of PeaceWomen: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at <https://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>

and regional organisations, and Member States on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in 2010 and beyond.”³⁵ The indicators developed are based on four pillars: prevention, protection, participation, and, finally, peacebuilding and recovery.³⁶

By ‘prevention,’ the primary policy is to prevent conflict, and the use of force must always be the last resort. ‘Protection’ refers to the protection of unarmed civilians in general. Protecting women and children from sexual and gender-based violence is also considered incredibly important. ‘Participation’ aims to promote women’s involvement in peace processes. For example, increasing the number of women at all levels of decision-making is critical to the ‘operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes,’ according to the UN’s *Global Study* on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (*Global Study*, 2015, p. 20). Resolution 1889 further addresses the exclusion of women from peacebuilding and the lack of attention to women’s needs in post-conflict recovery (Ibid., p. 31). The implementation policy comprises actions related to these four pillars, which are comprehensive and wide-ranging, and are included in UN peace operations mandates.

Significance of UNSCR 1325

UNSCR 1325 is a milestone in the history of the United Nations Security Council. Since its adoption in 2000, UN member states have celebrated its anniversary annually at both the UN and national levels. The fifteenth anniversary of the resolution in October 2015 was marked by a high-level review, ministerial meetings, and a significant open debate that featured the highest

³⁵ For details, please see resolution 1889 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1889>

³⁶ The review entitled *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* is known as the *Global Study*. For details, please see page 13 of the UN *Global Study* on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 at https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

number of speakers in the Security Council's history.³⁷ The open debate assessed the status of its implementation. Additionally, the *Global Study* on Resolution 1325 noted the slow progress of its implementation, as previously indicated.³⁸

In October 2018, UN Secretary General António Guterres addressed the Security Council's open debate.³⁹ He revealed that between 1990 and 2017, women comprised only 2 percent of mediators, 8 percent of negotiators, and 5 percent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes. He expressed regret that women represented merely 4 percent of the military and 10 percent of police peacekeepers. Furthermore, he noted that the UN had documented over 800 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2017, marking a 56 percent increase since 2016.⁴⁰ To accelerate implementation, Guterres ensured that gender analysis would be included in his reports to the Security Council. He also committed to holding UN entities accountable for their commitments to track spending on gender equality and the WPS agenda, aiming for these initiatives to account for at least 15 percent of their budgets by 2020.⁴¹

By the twentieth anniversary of the resolution in October 2020, the world had been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which hindered the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

³⁷ For further details, please see <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-10-25/remarks-security-council-women-peace-and-security>

³⁸ For further information, please see https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

³⁹ The Security Council's open debate on women, peace and security entitled "Promoting the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Sustaining Peace through Women's Political and Economic Empowerment" was held on 25 October 2018 at UN Headquarters in New York.

⁴⁰ For details, please see <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-10-25/remarks-security-council-women-peace-and-security>

⁴¹ Ibid

Nevertheless, hundreds of virtual events were held to mark the milestone.⁴² During the open debate in October 2021, the Secretary General announced this significant milestone: “Since January 2018, the percentage of women staff officers and military experts has risen from eight percent to nearly 18 percent today - and from 20 to 30 percent among individual police officers” (UN Secretary General, Remarks, October 21, 2021).⁴³ This progress in women’s representation was a cause for optimism and a clear sign of the positive impact of UNSCR 1325. The Secretary General also shared another encouraging development during the debate, noting that there was then parity among the Heads or Deputy Heads of missions, with more women in leading positions in field missions. This achievement was a testament to women’s empowerment in the UN system.⁴⁴

Despite these efforts and achievements, the percentage of women in military troops involved in peace operations was only 5.2 percent at the end of 2020, falling short of the UN’s target of 6.5 percent, according to the Secretary General’s 2021 report to the Security Council on the WPS agenda.⁴⁵ In 2023, women represented just 9.6 percent of negotiators, 13.7 percent of mediators, and approximately 25 percent of signatories to peace and ceasefire agreements.⁴⁶ By the end of July 2025, female military representation in UN peace operations rose to 8.8 percent,

⁴² Please see para 2 of the UN Security Council Report S/2021/827 dated 27 September 2021 at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf

⁴³ For details, please see the remarks by the UN Secretary General at the UNSC open debate in 2021: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/10/speech-sg-guterres-security-council-open-debate-on-women-peace-and-security>

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵For the full report, please see S/2021/827 dated 27 September 2021 at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf

⁴⁶ Reference: The Report of the UN Secretary General on the implementation of UNSCR 1325; S/2024/671 dated 24 September 2024 at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/273/49/pdf/n2427349.pdf>

and police representation to 21 percent, while the total number of uniformed female personnel, military and police combined, reached 10 percent.⁴⁷

The data presented in speeches and reports on women's numerical representation in UN peace operations appears puzzling, as it highlights various categories of women's participation and achievements. Despite significant progress, the presence of women remains limited. The UN Secretary General's September 2024 report on implementing UNSCR 1325 indicates that women continue to comprise a low percentage of peacekeepers and have low representation in peace processes.⁴⁸ Furthermore, quantitative data alone does not capture the realities women face in peace processes, nor does it reflect the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations or the limitations of UNSCR 1325. The following section outlines the limitations of UNSCR 1325 and emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming, drawing on relevant literature and studies.

Limitations of UNSCR 1325

The Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325, which expands the mandate for gender equality and specifically focuses on gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. It recognizes that peace and security are profoundly interlinked with gender and does not limit its focus to women alone when addressing *gender perspectives*, *gender considerations*, and the *gender dimensions* of peace processes and conflict resolution.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Reference: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_88_july_2025.pdf

⁴⁸ Reference: The Report of the UN Secretary General on the implementation of UNSCR 1325; S/2024/671 dated 24 September 2024 at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/273/49/pdf/n2427349.pdf>

⁴⁹ The terms 'gender perspectives', 'gender considerations', and 'gender dimensions' appear in operative paragraphs 5, 15, and 16, respectively, of the resolution at S/RES/1325 (2000), dated 31 October 2000, available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>.

However, there is a widespread misunderstanding of the terms gender and women, as they are often taken as synonyms. This situation reminds us of Catharine MacKinnon's words: "...sexuality appears as the interactive dynamic of gender as an inequality...Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women" (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 6). This conflation perpetuates gender discrimination by obscuring the structural inequalities that gender, as a social construct, seeks to address and dismantle.

The primary tool for achieving gender equality, i.e., gender mainstreaming, has had a mixed record in conflict and peace contexts. This is because the policy of mainstreaming is often misunderstood, with gender erroneously interpreted to mean only women, which ultimately marginalizes women (Detraz, 2012). True and Parisi (2013) echo a similar observation. When the terms gender and women are used interchangeably, the agenda of 'women's empowerment' becomes conflated with the use of a gender perspective (Dharmapuri, 2011). Detraz (2012) further critiques Resolution 1325's call to adopt a gender perspective, noting that it is unclear how broad this perspective is intended to be.

UNSCR 1325 has not only been ambiguous about the meaning of *gender and gender perspective* in UN peacekeeping but has also remained silent on *gender relations*. Parpart (2017) posits,

While a move in the right direction, the Resolution has been constrained by its focus on women rather than gender and its preoccupation with legal and policy "solutions" to problems requiring more complex analyses. Moreover, it has neither destabilized masculine privilege nor altered the patriarchal nature of most peace processes (p. 70).

This is because mainstreaming often overlooks how gender relations and hierarchies perpetuate gender inequality (Parpart, 2017; True, 2010). Despite these efforts, gender discrimination

endures, and mainstreaming fails to address women's deep-rooted inequality. As a result, the main aim of gender mainstreaming, achieving gender equality, remains unachieved. In Chapter 3, we will see that this shortfall has fostered the common view that gender mainstreaming within the UN and its peace and security institutions is mainly about increasing women's representation rather than tackling structural barriers to equality.

Feminist scholars widely regard gender as a social construct. Gender is also a cultural construct with numerous possibilities of 'being', in which bodies become sites for the cultural production and reproduction of identities. These identities are manifold in international relations, encompassing nations and communities with racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, faith-based, sectarian, and Indigenous identities. In the study of peace and security, these identities interact, intersect, and entangle with gender. As Butler states, "...it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler, 1999, p. 6). The gender spectrum thus contributes to the politics of identities, which are deeply entrenched in our social and political institutions and, more so, in peace and security institutions. Heathcote, in Heathcote and Otto (2014), posits, "Furthermore, SCR 1325 does not address the intersection of gender with other vectors of privilege and marginalisation" (p. 52).

The liberal feminist's question, '*where are the women?*', underscores women's absence from mainstream state politics. This absence stems from body politics between men and women, in which men and masculinities subjugate women and femininities. The UN's policy to increase women's participation in peace operations aims to address this absence but has achieved limited success in advancing gender equality. Parpart (2017) observed that this approach does not address masculine privilege or the patriarchal nature of peace processes.

Furthermore, the public/private dichotomy essentializes women's roles and responsibilities, which are essential to nation-building yet are not valued alongside men's contributions (Enloe, 2000, 2005, 2014; Steans, 1998, 2006, 2013). To elaborate, in the public sphere, men's roles and responsibilities in politics, the economy, defence, and other areas are regarded as incredibly important at the national level and are greatly valued. In contrast, women's roles and responsibilities in the care and reproductive sectors, such as childbearing and child-rearing, elderly care, household maintenance, and social services, are not seen as holding the same level of importance as men's work at the national level, despite their significant contributions to nation-building and ensuring its future. The tendency to essentialize women's roles mirrors a broader phenomenon in development discourse. On gender essentialism in development, Tiessen (2015) succinctly argues:

The result of gender essentialism is that women are seen exclusively as victims and recipients of development assistance and rarely, if ever, as important actors in state-building, political participation, and decision-making. Thus, this approach is in direct contrast to the policy commitments to involve women more directly in post-conflict political participation (p. 99).

This gender-essentialist approach also suggests that the UN's commitment to increasing women's participation addresses only part of the problem, while gender equality remains largely unattained. Women's exclusion and marginalization are evident in UN peace operations, which are male-dominated institutions governed by states. Consequently, only ten percent of current peacekeepers are female military and police (uniformed) personnel. There is also a tendency to view peace and security as masculine affairs, even though both men and women are affected by

war and conflict in different ways and can become active agents in peace processes (Newby & Sebag, 2020).

In addition to the UN's reports mentioned in the previous section, empirical research by many scholars suggests that despite some progress, the implementation of Resolution 1325 is slow and uneven (Braunmühl, 2013; True, 2011). Claudia van Braunmühl's chapter entitled "A feminist analysis of UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security" in Caglar, Prügl, and Zwingel's edited book *Feminist strategies in international governance* provides a lucid introduction to 1325 as well as four subsequent resolutions, i.e., 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010), which complement Resolution 1325. She critiques the limitations of these resolutions, which aim to provide peacebuilding actors with a 'meta-strategy' for gender mainstreaming, noting that 1325 and 1325+ have focused more on women's victimhood than on their agency in sustaining peace and development.⁵⁰

Braunmühl further echoes Mukhopadhyay (2004) in noting the absence of 'accountability mechanisms' in these resolutions and highlights the systemic limitations of gender mainstreaming strategies, arguing that gender power relations are the leading cause of violence against women. Mukhopadhyay posits that, to implement the development agenda, practitioners de-contextualize the inequality between men and women, allowing the prevailing gender disparity and unequal gender power relations to remain intact by "getting rid of the focus on women, regardless of context" (p. 100). Willet (2010), in a similar vein, critiques the existing power relations within the UN's gender mainstreaming mechanism, which reinforce binary essentialism, and suggests,

⁵⁰ As mentioned in the Introduction, UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent resolutions adopted under the Women, Peace and Security agenda are collectively known as 1325+. There are currently eleven such resolutions. These resolutions are: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), 2493 (2019) and 2538 (2020). They guide efforts to promote gender equality and strengthen women's participation, protection, and rights across the conflict cycle, from conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction (Partially adapted from the source: <https://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions>).

“Through these discursive strategies women have been assigned a certain type of agency and identity, namely as the objects of protective action” (pp. 143-144).

As Tiessen (2015) and Willet (2010) do, Puechguirbal (2010a) critiques binary essentialism, including the protector-protected dichotomy. She argues that to better understand peace and security issues in UN peacekeeping through a gendered lens, it is essential to overcome the language barrier that portrays women only as victims. Language not only reflects culture but also shapes our attitudes and behaviours. When official documents, such as UN reports, resolutions, and national policies, reinforce the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy, women are depicted as passive and lacking agency. This framing can undermine gender mainstreaming efforts by perpetuating attitudes that view women as dependent rather than as empowered participants in peace and security initiatives.

The literature cited above highlights several challenges that hinder the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in line with UNSCR 1325. Key issues include conflating ‘gender’ with ‘women-only’ initiatives, an emphasis on women’s victimhood, and the reinforcement of gender essentialism and unequal gender power dynamics. These dynamics perpetuate the notion of women as victims in need of protection. Additionally, the ongoing lack of accountability mechanisms and the absence of women’s agency represent significant limitations within UNSCR 1325 that continue to impede its objectives: participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery, and mainstreaming. Some aspects of the resolution are attainable, such as ensuring women’s participation in peace processes and preventing sexual violence, while others require societal transformation, such as achieving gender equality, ensuring equal participation, and addressing impunity for gender-based violence. UNSCR 1325 is a Security Council resolution adopted through an intergovernmental negotiation process in a multilateral setting; therefore, it is

a negotiated document. Member states of the UN hold different positions on gender equality and employ varying approaches to gender mainstreaming, which can further exacerbate existing limitations.

WPS Agenda

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the Security Council has encouraged member states to adopt National Action Plans (NAPs) and to implement the WPS agenda at the national level, while remaining mindful that this agenda is intended to apply in all situations of peace, conflict, and transition. Although NAPs are country-specific, certain values and principles concerning women's equality with men must be universal, irrespective of cultural differences among societies. For example, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR)⁵¹ is a set of widely accepted international human rights norms. Despite universal adherence to the *UDHR*, there remains a wide range of cultural variation across the global community regarding equal rights. We observe these differences regarding women's equal rights in the numerous reservations that UN member states file when ratifying the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW).⁵²

Due to patriarchy, women are not always regarded as equal to men at the local, national, or international levels. However, women's socio-economic development and political empowerment are essential to societal progress and economic growth. UNSCR 1325 can, therefore, be seen as a vital conceptual and transformational tool, not only to maintain peace and security through the implementation of the WPS agenda but also to advance normative progress

⁵¹ For details please see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁵² For more information please see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations.htm>

in gender equality and to bolster human rights (Braunmühl, 2013; Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006; Shepherd, 2008).

UN peace operations must integrate gender mainstreaming as a core element of the WPS agenda. Under UNSCR 1325, the Security Council has made mainstreaming essential to its peace operations through various policies and programmes. Gender mainstreaming is, therefore, not merely a procedural task at the organizational level but a key step towards advancing gender equality (Tiessen, 2007). The official definition of the *ECOSOC*⁵³ also supports that the goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (Ibid). Despite numerous policies and strategies for gender mainstreaming, gender inequalities persist. Women's participation in peace processes remains low. Most post-conflict societies prioritise militarization to enhance security for their people. However, this can be paradoxical, particularly when violence continues to erupt against unarmed civilians, including men, women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, despite the presence of UN forces (Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006; Leatherman, 2011; Pankhurst, 2008, 2010; Willet, 2010).

Through UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda affirms that peace operations should aim to reduce gender inequality through gender mainstreaming. We also recognize that UN peacekeepers receive training on implementing this resolution. However, as Jacqui True (2010) notes, “[m]ainstreaming has made limited progress in breaking down masculine hegemonies and their organizational and policy norms” (p. 197). She highlights that the focus on organizational policies related to training, focal points, toolkits, checklists, and decision-making often fails to capture the “... big picture of how gendered power operates discursively to reinforce gender injustices” (Ibid.). Nadine Puechguirbal (2010) argues that “...the very composition of peacekeeping operation poses

⁵³ For the official definition of ECOSOC, please see:
<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ecosoc1997/eresAgreedConclusions1997-2.pdf>

a problem insofar as it is structured around male-dominated military and police contingents with their hyper-masculine culture and norms” (p. 172).

The issues highlighted by scholars are highly relevant. In my thesis, I explored the limitations of implementing gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations as outlined in UNSCR 1325 under the WPS agenda. I also examined the challenges peacekeepers face during deployment and training. A key question remains: can gender mainstreaming, constrained by these challenges, genuinely ensure women’s equality in global and national peace and security strategies? Furthermore, can the nominal participation resulting from their inclusion, driven by the UN’s advocacy, effectively improve conditions for pursuing the WPS agenda?

Gender Balance and Gender Mainstreaming

For my thesis, it is important to understand that gender is not synonymous with women; women’s inclusion is one component of *broader gender inclusion*. It is therefore essential to examine how individuals and organizations interpret terms such as *gender*, *gender balance*, and *gender mainstreaming* to implement relevant policies effectively. Several terms are used to describe increased female participation across processes. For instance, *gender balance* or *gender inclusiveness* refers to ensuring greater representation of women at all stages and in all roles within peace processes and social reconstruction. In contrast, *gender mainstreaming* involves integrating the concerns of both men and women, acknowledging their differing needs, priorities, and the unique barriers they may face during post-conflict rehabilitation (Baksh, Etchart, Onubogu & Johnson, 2005). However, achieving *gender balance* by simply increasing the number of women may not yield meaningful results if women’s concerns and priorities are unmet in peace processes. Thus, *gender balance* must be applied alongside *gender mainstreaming* to achieve the goal of women’s equal participation and full involvement in maintaining and promoting peace and

security, as envisioned in preambular paragraph 5 of UNSCR 1325.⁵⁴ The paragraph outlines the following,

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution, (preambular paragraph 5, UNSCR 1325 (2000)).

Although my thesis focuses on *gender mainstreaming* and argues that gender involves more than just women, neglecting *gender inclusivity* or *gender balance*, as shown by gender-disaggregated data, would be unwise. *Gender mainstreaming* and *gender balance* must work together to promote gender equality. I therefore acknowledge the inherent tension in my argument. While I stress that *gender* should not be equated with *women*, I also present data on women's presence or absence to highlight the challenges of mainstreaming gender in UN peacekeeping.

At this point, I would like to highlight that I use *women* as an 'entry point' in my research on gender mainstreaming.⁵⁵

While I acknowledge that, by definition, *gender mainstreaming* addresses the needs and priorities of both men and women, persistent gender inequality often results in power imbalances that disproportionately disadvantage women. Women, regardless of their positions or privileges, may face multiple layers of gender inequality due to intersectionality,⁵⁶ that is, the interplay of

⁵⁴ For the full text of the UNSCR 1325, please see: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

⁵⁵ Meghna Guhthakurta, a prominent scholar and human rights activist in Bangladesh, explained in her interview that she uses women as an 'entry point' in her research on gender. I have adopted her idea to address the tension in my thesis (personal communication, 24 January 2020).

⁵⁶ Intersectionality is a term that represents "the multiplicity and interconnectedness of various types of discrimination and how these relate to domination and oppression, i.e., the exploitation of one social group by another." However, 'intersectionality' meshes with 'Identity politics.' (Source: The Canadian Encyclopedia at

various identities such as class, race, age, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc. This phenomenon is observed globally, in both the Global North and the Global South. Therefore, it is prudent to focus on the most deprived or equity-deserving groups when mainstreaming gender. In many cases, this group is primarily women. In my study, I focus on the experiences of female peacekeepers advancing the WPS agenda in UN peace operations and promoting gender equality for local women. I examine the challenges that gender inequality poses to local women through my respondents' perspectives.

By using women's specific experiences as an analytical entry point, this research does not reinforce the policy conflation of 'gender' with 'women' but rather critiques it by showing how the institutional focus on female presence often masks a failure to transform patriarchal operational structures. Thus, I treat women's interactions with peacekeeping missions as an analytical lens to expose the broader gendered power dynamics and masculinist norms that constrain policy implementation on the ground.

Gender Perspectives in Conflicts

Gender perspectives in conflict resolution and peace processes are increasingly vital, yet the term 'gender' often lacks a clear definition in this context. It refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender-diverse individuals. While all civilians are deeply affected by contemporary conflicts, which now account for nearly 90% of casualties (up from 50% in WWII) (Baksh et al., 2005, p. 22), experiences vary significantly across gender identities.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/intersectionality>). Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw is the iconic proponent of the theory on 'intersectionality' through the publication of her article in the University of Chicago Legal Forum entitled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" in 1989.

Men and boys primarily face death and torture due to their perceived status as combatants or potential fighters, and for refusing to fight. However, they also endure CRSV. Rape has been used as a ‘weapon of war’ against women, girls, and even men. Women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals are disproportionately subjected to CRSV and gender-based violence, including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, impregnation, forced abortion, and death.⁵⁷ Such violence is frequently used as a weapon of war, aiming to destroy communities. For instance, mass rapes occurred during the Rwandan genocide (an estimated 500,000 women, predominantly Tutsi) and the Bosnian war (20,000-50,000 primarily Muslim women) (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). Recent atrocities by non-state actors like ISIS⁵⁸ against marginalized groups such as Yazidi women⁵⁹ and state-sponsored violence against Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar (2017-2018) highlight this devastating pattern.⁶⁰ Critically, current conflicts in Sudan also exhibit some of the highest rates of sexual violence in conflict in the world. Conversely, women are also fighters and actively engaged in conflict through their roles in combat, communication, spying, and other military capacities. These gender perspectives are important in SSR and DDR in peace operations.

In his 2024 report on implementing the WPS agenda, the UN Secretary General noted, “The impact on civilians is devastating. In conflict situations, the United Nations registered a dramatic increase in the proportion of women killed and the number of women and girls affected

⁵⁷ Reference UN Peacekeeping webpage on CRSV: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/conflict-related-sexual-violence>

⁵⁸ ISIS stands for Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (the Levant), popularly known as *Daesh* in Arabic, is a militant group following the ‘so-called’ ideology of fundamentalism of Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam, campaigns to establish an Islamic State in the region through militarization. ISIS is designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations. (Source: Wikipedia).

⁵⁹Noble Peace Laureate (2018), Nadia Murad, a Yazidi rape and sexual slavery survivor, interviewed on BBC Hardtalk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRbHxsPLmkg>

⁶⁰ Source: The Guardian article on Myanmar ethnic cleansing of Rohingya populations: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/11/un-myanmars-treatment-of-rohingya-textbook-example-of-ethnic-cleansing>

by sexual violence” (United Nations Security Council, Women and peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/671, 24 September 2024, paragraph 39, p. 15).⁶¹ The report highlighted the devastating harm experienced by women, girls and civilians at large in the unresolved conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, the Sudan, Syria, and Gaza (paragraph 29, p.11). However, the report failed to acknowledge that men and boys also experience sexual violence in war and conflict. Furthermore, UN reports and databases often lack data on gender-diverse populations; for example, there is no data on the participation of non-binary persons or on how conflicts impact their lives.

During conflicts, men, women, and even children participate in perpetuating violence; however, many also flee. It is estimated that approximately 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees are women and children (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, Parpart, & Lautze in Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, & Parpart, 2005; Pankhurst, 2010). UNSCR 1325 expresses deep concern about the vast majority of civilians, particularly women and children, “who are adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements” as well as the “consequent impact” of this on “durable peace and reconciliation”.⁶²

The resolution recognizes the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective in UN peacekeeping. However, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 remains problematic, as there is a significant gap between the resolution’s intention to mainstream gender and its limited implementation. In my thesis, I explore this critical gap through the lens of peacekeepers’ on-the-ground experiences.

⁶¹ UN Secretary General’s Report on Women, Peace and Security to the United Nations Security Council, dated 24 September 2024, may be seen at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4064287?v=pdf>

⁶² See preambular paragraph 4 of the text of UNSCR 1325 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1325>

Gender Mainstreaming

In this section, I provide an overview of how gender mainstreaming is both central to UNSCR 1325 and elusive, and I discuss some important critiques of it. The agenda for mainstreaming gender has become imperative in UN policies and programmes since the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, often regarded as a Magna Carta for women's rights. Emerging in the 1980s, gender mainstreaming is now used to address the slow progress toward women's equal status, particularly in developing countries and, more broadly, at the global level (Turenne-Sjolander, 2005).

In UN documents, gender mainstreaming is a strategy that requires applying gender perspectives across all programmes and policies to analyze their effects and prevent women's marginalization (Mazurana et al., 2005; True, 2010). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global policy document adopted in 1995 on gender equality, has provided relevant directives for gender mainstreaming. The official definition, developed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations as part of the agreed conclusions of 1997, is as follows:

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 societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.⁶³

⁶³ For more details on ECOSOC's definition of gender mainstreaming, please see: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF>

Scholars have examined both the definition of gender mainstreaming and the challenges of implementing it as a policy to address gender inequality. Feminist scholars in international relations and institutionalism highlight several key issues, including misunderstandings of essential terms, superficial application, lack of accountability, gender essentialism, and the need for more context-specific approaches (Kreft, 2017; Kronsell, 2006; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Simić, 2010; Tiessen, 2015; True and Parisi, 2013). Addressing these challenges is crucial to advancing gender equality effectively in line with UNSCR 1325.

Mukhopadhyay (2004) critiques gender mainstreaming in international organizations as poorly understood and lacking political or professional accountability, because no institutional mechanisms exist to ensure its effective implementation. She distinguishes between two strategies: an integrationist approach that incorporates women into existing structures without altering them, and a transformationalist approach that seeks to reshape institutional frameworks. Building on this, True and Parisi (2013) expand the typology to five models: integrationist, gender-as-difference, intersectional, transformationalist, and resistance. Of these, the integrationist and transformationalist models remain most relevant to peacekeeping. The former reflects the “add women and stir” logic that equates gender with women while leaving masculinist structures intact. In contrast, the latter envisions systemic change by reorienting governance frameworks through a gender perspective. For this thesis, these two models provide the analytical lens for examining gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. While integrationist practices dominate in security institutions, the transformationalist approach, anchored in the principles of UNSCR 1325, offers greater potential to dismantle structural barriers and advance women’s equal participation in peace and security decision-making.

Global Study and HIPPO Report

Fifteen years after its adoption, the United Nations commissioned a review of UNSCR 1325's implementation to identify gaps and challenges, as well as emerging trends and priorities for action.⁶⁴ The review entitled *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, hereafter 'The *Global Study*,' was published in October 2015 by lead author Radhika Coomaraswamy.⁶⁵ The *Global Study* significantly contributes to our understanding of the WPS agenda. It was published in collaboration with a high-level advisory panel. The study examines various aspects, including women's participation in peace processes, the protection of women's rights in conflict zones, and the integration of gender perspectives into peacebuilding efforts. It offers insights into achievements and gaps in advancing the agenda for women's inclusion and empowerment in global peace and security initiatives. The *Global Study* calls for focusing on the centrality of preventing conflict and on strengthening women's participation. It concludes that the implementation of Resolution 1325 has been inconsistent, slow and uneven, providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in this area. Drawing on the *Global Study*'s conclusions, this study investigates realities on the ground.

At the open debate on UNSCR 1325 in 2015, the Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, highlighted some obstacles to implementing the resolution, drawing on the UN Secretary-General's report on implementing the WPS agenda.⁶⁶ She listed political will, financing,

⁶⁴ See The *Global Study* on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 at https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

⁶⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy is a Sri Lankan lawyer, diplomat and human rights advocate requested by the UN Secretary General to lead the *Global Study* on implementing UNSCR 1325 with an advisory panel. Reference: page 6 of the *Global Study*. She served as UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women from 1994 to 2003 and UN Special Rapporteur for Children and Armed Conflict from 2006 to 2012. (Source: Wikipedia)

⁶⁶ Reference: The UN Secretary General's 2015 report on the Women and Peace and Security agenda at

accountability, attitudinal and institutional barriers, and lack of expertise and awareness as the main obstacles.⁶⁷ Furthermore, she mentioned that the *Global study*'s key finding is that "perhaps the greatest but most under-used tool for building peace is the meaningful inclusion of women."⁶⁸ Hence, according to the study, women's participation remains symbolic or low in peace talks.⁶⁹ Among the causes identified by the research and highlighted by UN Women, the most important to consider are attitudinal and institutional barriers within the UN bureaucracy and in peacekeeping missions that impede the implementation of the resolution. This 420-page *Global Study* contains around two hundred recommendations on participation, protection, justice, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, prevention, countering violent extremism, key actors, human rights mechanisms, and financing the WPS agenda. It is also recommended that the WPS agenda be considered a peace and security issue and a human rights agenda.⁷⁰

The *Global Study* recognized the need to halt the growing militarization. It emphasized that relying solely on military force for conflict resolution can perpetuate a cycle of violence. It further highlighted that women worldwide advocate sparing use of military responses to armed conflicts and emphasize the importance of prevention and protection through non-violent means. The

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/806086?v=pdf>

⁶⁷ For details, please see the remarks by the Executive Director of UN Women in 2015 at the UNSC Open Debate on the WPS agenda: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/ed-security-council-speech>

⁶⁸ The finding sounds ironic because, in some ways, increasing women's participation is the easiest action to take, just adding more women. However, the policy implementation needs to be oriented more toward women's meaningful and equal participation, while mainstreaming gender to achieve gender equality.

⁶⁹ For details, please see the remarks by the UN Women Executive Director in the UNSC open debate on the WPS agenda in 2015: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/ed-security-council-speech>

⁷⁰ For further details, please see the Policy brief on mapping of the gender recommendations in the three 2015 peace and security reviews of June 2019 by Louise Allen, global gender, peace and security consultant at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/What%20We%20Do/Peace-security/Policy-brief-Mapping-gender-recommendations-in-the-three-2015-peace-and-security-reviews-en.pdf>

Global Study, therefore, urged the Security Council: “...the United Nations must take the lead in stopping the process of militarization and militarism that began in 2001 in an ever-increasing cycle of conflict. The normalization of violence at the local, national, and international levels must cease” (The *Global Study*, p. 25). While calling for an end to the normalization of violence at all levels, the study advocated expanding and supporting networks of women peacebuilders and peacemakers.⁷¹

The second policy document I consulted is the *High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO) report*, dated 16 June 2015. The report was coincidentally commissioned in the same year by the UN General Assembly, mainly under the agenda item of ‘comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects’, to assess the state of UN peace operations and provide recommendations for their improvement.⁷² The panel examined various aspects, including the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of UN peacekeeping missions in addressing contemporary challenges. It aimed to identify strategies to enhance UN peace operations’ ability to prevent and resolve conflicts, protect civilians, and support post-conflict peacebuilding. The report called for the WPS agenda to be more systematically integrated throughout missions and mandated tasks of peace operations. It also called for greater accountability and resourcing for the agenda.

The report stated, regarding the implementation of UNSCR 1325+, “Despite a robust normative framework for the advancement of women and peace and security, many impediments stand in the way of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the six

⁷¹ Reference pages 25 and 134 of the *Global Study*.

⁷² ‘Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects’ is a regular agenda item in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization Committee) of the United Nations General Assembly, which is the main body where the UN member states adopt peacekeeping policies.

successive resolutions.”⁷³ The report identified several barriers that hinder the full implementation of the WPS agenda. These include the lack of national leadership, insufficient policy, inadequate funding for missions, uneven commitment, inconsistent application of the WPS agenda, lack of gender-sensitive analysis, and irregular outreach to women leaders and civil society. Understanding these barriers is crucial for devising effective strategies to overcome them.⁷⁴ My study examines peacekeeping challenges in missions, drawing on the conclusions of the WPS agenda section in this report.

I consulted the *Global Study* and the *HIPPO report* because both were officially commissioned by the United Nations Secretary-General, as recommended through the intergovernmental processes of the UNSC and the UNGA, respectively, and were prepared by independent panels of scholars and experts. These reports laid the groundwork for advancing peacekeeping policies since 2015. The *Global Study*, featuring the WPS agenda, focuses exclusively on implementing UNSCR 1325 on its 15th anniversary. In contrast, the *HIPPO report* addresses the broader issue of UN peacekeeping, with a small but pertinent section of recommendations on the WPS agenda. While the *Global Study* informs my thesis with an in-depth analysis of the implementation of UNSCR 1325, the *HIPPO report* offers a different perspective on the WPS agenda, considering the broader context of UN peace operations. I draw on the *HIPPO report*’s perspectives on barriers, which is considered one of the most critical documents for policymaking for UN peace operations.

These two reports remain the most current and official sources available at the time of writing this dissertation. They are significant to my thesis because they offer detailed assessments

⁷³ See HIPPO report; paragraphs 257-262 at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/report-high-level-independent-panel-peace-operations>. At the time of the *HIPPO report*, only six subsequent resolutions were adopted in 2015.

⁷⁴ Ibid

of contemporary UN peace operations and the challenges of implementing gender equality measures. Additionally, these reports provide valuable recommendations for improvement. Throughout this thesis, I have extensively referenced the relevant reports recently prepared by the UN Secretary General. I have also considered reports by independent experts to ensure a balanced perspective on the issues. This approach incorporates both the Secretary General's and independent experts' viewpoints. I have used these sources alongside academic sources to frame my thesis, highlighting the numerous barriers faced by UN peace operations and the many challenges encountered by UN peacekeepers. The next chapter offers a scholarly delineation of the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations.

Chapter 3: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Critical Evaluation of UNSCR 1325

Security is a garment that must be woven without seam: if we are not paying attention, the loose threads of women's systemic insecurity will unravel peace for all (Hudson et al, 2009, p. 44).

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) was hailed as a historic milestone for women's participation in peace and security. It called for integrating gender perspectives into conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, and peacekeeping mandates. Yet, after twenty-five years, turning its objectives into reality remains a substantial challenge. Although some progress has been made through subsequent resolutions of 1325+, which have led to more female peacekeepers and increased institutional awareness, gender mainstreaming has often been reduced to a technical task, focusing more on increasing numbers than on transforming the male-dominated structures of international security.

In Chapter 1, I outlined three research questions informed by critiques of UNSCR 1325, which broadly argue that the resolution inadvertently reinforces gender essentialism through the UN's protection doctrines and remains silent on gender relations, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization (Puechguirbal, 2010a; Tiessen, 2015; Parpart, 2017). In Chapter 2, I examined the two UN-commissioned reports, *The Global Study* and the *HIPPO Report*, which identify challenges to implementing UNSCR 1325, primarily attitudinal and institutional barriers, as well as a lack of political will and accountability in mainstreaming gender. Drawing on these reports and relevant literature, I explore the key challenges faced by UN peacekeeping and the reasons they persist. I also investigate socio-cultural issues, including patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, and consider whether these can be addressed through training and competence-building for UN peacekeepers. This chapter examines the politics of gender mainstreaming, the

widespread inequality affecting women, and the intricate relations among gender, peace, and security.

This chapter explicitly links the literature to the three research questions: i) what challenges do UN peacekeepers face when integrating gender equality into peace and security; ii) what socio-cultural challenges influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization; iii) what are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground? This chapter has two main sections. The first examines the theoretical foundations for integrating gender equality into peace operations, as well as the organizational, operational, and individual challenges associated with this integration. The second section discusses concepts such as patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization and their impact on gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study explores five main conceptual frameworks: first, the distinction between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ and how conflating them creates policy ambiguity; second, the protector-protected dichotomy and binary essentialism in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, along with the tension between protection and participation, which leads to dilemmas and the denial of women’s agency; third, the application of UNSCR 1325 as a ‘problem-solving tool’ rather than an ‘analytical tool’, resulting in women’s selective and tokenistic presence in UN peacekeeping; fourth, the transformationalist versus integrationist approach to gender mainstreaming; and finally, the interconnected system of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, which provides a framework for understanding the root causes of the challenges faced by UN peacekeepers in post-conflict contexts.

I conducted a systematic literature review to address the research questions and develop the conceptual and theoretical framework for the empirical study. I examined secondary sources, including published articles and books by scholars in critical studies, security, and peace studies within feminist IR. I reviewed works in feminist institutionalism and analyzed literature on UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and the WPS agenda. Additionally, I examined UN resolutions, reports, statements, press releases, and official websites. Consequently, I employ a three-level analytical framework comprising policy/discourse, institutional delivery, and embodied practice to assess the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This multi-level approach guides the empirical chapters that follow and aligns with the thesis research questions on operational challenges, socio-cultural dynamics, and training/competence for implementing UNSCR 1325.

The theoretical framework draws on five main feminist traditions, beginning with Feminist Security Studies (FSS), which encompasses both critical and post-structural approaches. This literature interprets security as a socially and politically constructed concept, foregrounding how security texts and practices actively construct gendered subjects (Butler, 1999; Enloe, 2000, 2014; Peterson, 1992, 1993; Steans, 1998, 2006, 2013; Tickner, 1992, 2001, 2014; Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011).

Specifically, the post-structuralist wing of FSS offers a fundamental critique of essentialist approaches by challenging the universalist assumptions that have historically shaped gender analysis in international relations (Shepherd, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). These approaches focus on discursive construction, showing how policies such as UNSCR 1325 can unintentionally reinforce gendered hierarchies and constrain transformative change. The emphasis is on how policy texts normalize gendered vulnerabilities and sustain inequality by framing women primarily as passive victims (Enloe, 2000; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). This framework explains why

“gender” must be used as an analytical tool to uncover structures, rather than an instrumental one for simple inclusion, and highlights how the protector-protected dichotomy in UN mandates ultimately diminishes women’s agency and upholds patriarchal, militaristic systems (Tiessen, 2015; Parpart, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010b; Willet, 2010). This perspective, informed by the existing FSS literature, is fundamental to addressing research question (i): What challenges do UN peacekeepers face when integrating gender equality into peace and security? In Chapter 6, this is made explicit by illuminating the systemic and institutional barriers faced by UN peacekeepers and explaining why they struggle to integrate gender equality into peace and security operations. In particular, understanding the deep-rooted nature of these systems exposes the core challenges security institutions and host communities encounter in moving beyond tokenistic gender integration.

The framework also engages with masculinities studies, which explain how hegemonic and militarized masculinities shape institutions and behaviour (Connell, 2002; Duncanson, 2015; Hooper, 2001; Parpart & Zalewski, 2008; Zalewski & Parpart, 1998; Whitworth, 2004). Masculinities studies (hegemonic and militarized masculinities), in combination with analyses of FSS, illuminate the socio-cultural challenges and address research question (ii): What socio-cultural challenges influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization? Chapter 7 of this thesis will directly apply these concepts to the empirical data collected, detailing how these forms of masculinity interact with patriarchy and militarization, creating barriers to integrating gender equality into peacekeeping. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity clarifies how particular masculine ideals secure dominance within states and security institutions, shaping the cultures and practices of peace operations (Connell, 2002; Hooper, 1998, 2001). Militarized masculinity links

these ideals to institutional reward structures, valorizing aggression, control, and hierarchical authority, which in turn normalize hegemonic behaviours, tolerate gendered aggression (including SEA by peacekeepers), and marginalize gender-sensitive practices (Enloe, 2000, 2016; Duncanson, 2015; Whitworth, 2004). Challenging these menaces requires an in-depth understanding of masculinities and femininities, as well as patriarchy and militarization as an interlocking system, as outlined by my study.

Fourth, Feminist Institutionalism (FI) examines how formal mandates and informal norms interact to reproduce or unsettle gendered outcomes within organizations (Ackerly et al., 2006; Basini, 2017; Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010). This approach is crucial for understanding why gender mainstreaming often remains a merely programmatic and top-down endeavour. Institutional incentives, liberal peace frameworks, and weak accountability tend to lead to procedural compliance (e.g., checklist-based approaches) rather than genuine transformative reform (Basini, 2017; Connell, 2002). This framework helps answer research question (iii): What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground? In Chapter 8, these shortcomings and deficits are made explicit. My study aims to uncover the potential for institutional training to foster understanding of gender, organizational, and individual behaviours, as well as transformational change.

Finally, postcolonial feminists such as Spivak (1988), Mohanty (1988), and Razack (2004) highlight how universalist perspectives can mask underlying racial and cultural hierarchies. Building on this critique, Whitworth (2004) and Agathangelou and Ling (2009) argue that UN peacekeeping often reproduces neo-colonial patterns, portraying peacekeepers as imperial saviours while local populations are cast as dependent or passive subjects. This protector-protected

dichotomy can breed distrust and backlash. Local women may also support practices that outsiders view as oppressive, complicating normative interventions. Additionally, the experiences of female peacekeepers are shaped by intersecting racial, national, and class hierarchies, as emphasized by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989). The neo-colonial and intersectional dimensions are vital conceptual frameworks for understanding how peace operations can reproduce imperial hierarchies that obstruct change. Together, these perspectives enable the thesis to analyze discourse, organization, and embodied practice, demonstrating how institutions, masculinities, and local cultures interact to either promote or hinder gender mainstreaming.

It is important to note that peacekeepers typically receive the policy of ‘gender mainstreaming’ through their mandates rather than independently understanding how it works in peace operations. While the top-down dissemination of policy is common in large bureaucracies, the dynamic in peacekeeping is uniquely restrictive because the rigid military chain of command and standardized pre-deployment training prioritize adherence to specific mission mandates over the independent conceptual understanding of gender as a social framework. Peacekeepers follow the programmatic actions and practices outlined in these mandates during their missions. Therefore, my study examines the realities of post-conflict societies from the perspectives of peacekeepers and the dynamics in peace operations related to the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This inquiry seeks to assess the experiences and perspectives of UN peacekeepers in advancing gender mainstreaming within the WPS agenda on the ground.

While the thesis engages with multiple feminist traditions, they are unified by a single multi-level analytical framework that examines the ‘friction’ between policy discourse (strategic level), institutional delivery (organizational level), and embodied practice (individual level). At the strategic level, policy (Discourse) sets the normative expectations and legal commitments. At

the organizational level, the structure of the military/peacekeepers and how they address barriers constitute institutional delivery. At the individual level, how individuals behave and their lived reality constitute embodied practice.

These frameworks are essential because they enable the research to map how gender mandates are transformed as they move from high-level UN rhetoric to the lived realities of peacekeepers. By integrating these frameworks, I provide a holistic analysis of the gendered phenomena of UN peacekeeping, showing how institutional policies and structures, as well as individual behaviours, collectively determine the success or failure of the WPS agenda.

Politics of Gender Mainstreaming

The focus on women's protection and participation in UNSCR 1325 unintentionally reinforces binary essentialism. Feminist scholars argue that the resolution primarily portrays women as victims in need of protection, rather than as active agents capable of influencing peace processes. This framing perpetuates the "protector-protected" dichotomy, which not only diminishes women's agency but also fails to challenge the patriarchal and militaristic systems that sustain gender inequalities (Parpart, 2017; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010). Critics contend that UN gender mainstreaming often reinforces existing power structures by reducing gender to binary roles, with women depicted as vulnerable and men as protectors (Ibid.). It also fails to challenge masculinist epistemologies embedded in peace and security policies (Willet, 2010; Connell, 2002). This approach results in tokenistic inclusion rather than meaningful structural change, leaving issues of gendered violence, exclusion, and unequal decision-making largely unaddressed (Willet, 2010; Strickland & Duvvury, 2003; Cockburn, 2010). Case studies of UN peacebuilding and DDR initiatives reveal that gender mainstreaming is often implemented within a Liberal Peace framework that prioritizes security and economic objectives over the social and psychosocial needs

of women (Basini, 2017; Connell, 2002). Delivery tends to be top-down, inconsistently gender-sensitive, and hampered by inadequate training and poor local adaptation, thereby reproducing institutional masculinity and maintaining pre-conflict gender hierarchies (Basini, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Parpart, 2017; Strickland & Duvvury, 2003).

Implementing a transformative approach that redefines protector/protected relationships is challenging because of the influence of patriarchy, militarization, and deeply ingrained masculinities within institutions (Willet, 2010; Duncanson, 2015; Connell, 2002). Cultural and religious restrictions on male peacekeepers working with local women, systemic barriers to recruiting and retaining women, and the mistaken belief that mainstreaming only involves increasing female numbers all hinder real progress (Basini, 2017; Dharmapuri, 2011; Turenne-Sjolander, 2005). These challenges risk creating an “imagined peace” that either reverts to or worsens pre-conflict gender inequalities and related insecurities (Kaufman & Williams, 2013, 2017; Parpart, 2017).

Within this theoretical framework, existing studies have not adequately examined the gender-power dynamics that peacekeepers themselves face. The interplay of racial, cultural, and gendered hierarchies within peacekeeping missions remains underexplored, despite its significant influence on the success of gender mainstreaming and on the experiences of both male and female peacekeepers (Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). This gap underscores the need for context-sensitive analyses that acknowledge the diverse identities and experiences of peacekeepers.

Furthermore, gender should be treated as an analytical tool for revealing the structures, cultures, and silences that sustain inequality, rather than merely as a label for superficial inclusion (Enloe, 2000, 2014; Butler, 1999; Peterson, 1992). Effective mainstreaming requires transformational strategies that address institutional masculinities, local needs, and the social and

psychological dimensions of post-conflict recovery (Basini, 2017; Connell, 2002; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). The theoretical foundations outlined in the later section will demonstrate that viewing gender mainstreaming as a ‘problem-solving tool’ is highly problematic because it recreates unequal gender power relations, reinforcing patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, and perpetuating further inequalities. The subsequent section further explores the gaps in the existing literature.

Challenges of Gender Mainstreaming at Organizational, Operational, and Individual Levels

Although UNSCR 1325 advocates gender equality in peace operations, its implementation often narrows to increasing the number of women in peacekeeping missions (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a). Gender mainstreaming is rarely central to the UN Security Council’s peacekeeping mandates; peace operations typically prioritize security and stability over challenging social norms related to gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming has been adopted as one of the thematic tasks of peace operations (*Capstone Doctrine*, 2008). Nonetheless, UNSCR 1325 and 1325+ are essential components of peacekeeping mandates. Given the strong link between security and gender, it is crucial to improve conditions for marginalized women and to expand women’s agency in peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Detraz, 2012). However, without effective mainstreaming, efforts to improve women’s conditions and agency remain limited. The literature provides numerous examples of the UN’s pitfalls.

First, the deployment of all-female FPU in Liberia is often celebrated as a success story in UN peacekeeping. However, these units have faced criticism for essentializing women’s roles and perpetuating stereotypes. True and Parisi (2013) argue that while female units can be effective in specific situations, they also risk reinforcing the idea that women are primarily valuable for

addressing issues like sexual violence rather than for participating in all aspects of peacekeeping. This approach neglects the deep-rooted gender inequalities and power dynamics that fuel conflict and insecurity (Pruitt, 2016).

Secondly, the UN has faced significant criticism for peacekeepers' involvement in SEA. Despite adopting various policies and mechanisms to address these issues, SEA incidents persist. The focus on SEA has often overshadowed broader efforts to mainstream gender, reducing 'gender' to a matter of sexual misconduct rather than addressing systemic gender inequalities. This narrow focus can lead to superficial compliance with gender policies rather than meaningful change in gender dynamics within peacekeeping missions (Puechguirbal, 2003).

Thirdly, in many peacekeeping missions, the rise in the number of female peacekeepers has not been matched by efforts to change the missions' gendered culture. A one-size-fits-all policy that focuses solely on increasing the number of women while overlooking deeper gender inequalities creates problems (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a). Women peacekeepers often face discrimination, harassment, and limited support within the missions (Karim & Beardsley, 2017). This environment not only reduces the effectiveness of female peacekeepers but also sustains the inequalities that UNSCR 1325 aims to address (Ibid). Therefore, a transformational approach to gender mainstreaming is essential, as simply including women can be tokenistic and insufficient for meaningful change.

Finally, the failure of peacekeepers to engage with local gender dynamics and the specific needs of women and subaltern men in post-conflict societies, due to a lack of strategies, is a pressing issue. For instance, in the DRC, despite a high prevalence of sexual violence, peacekeeping efforts have been criticized for not adequately addressing the broader socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to such violence, including sexual exploitation and

abuse by UN peacekeepers (Oswald, 2016; Otto, 2007). This oversight can lead to interventions that do not align with the needs of local women and vulnerable communities, thereby limiting the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts. These failures underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming that goes beyond merely increasing the number of women. The question remains how to ensure that the UN's peacekeeping initiatives do not fall short of achieving genuine gender equality and women's empowerment.

It is therefore expected that UN peacekeepers will encounter numerous challenges at the organizational, strategic, and policy levels, as well as at the operational and tactical levels, as they mainstream gender, particularly by integrating gender equality into peace and security. The organizational, strategic, and policy levels cover broader frameworks, policies, and strategic decisions made by the UN and its agencies. The operational and tactical levels involve implementing these policies and strategies in the field, including the daily operations of peacekeeping missions. The individual and collective levels pertain to the attitudes, behaviours, and practices of individual peacekeepers, as well as the collective ethos of peacekeeping units. For female peacekeepers, the challenges can be complex, as additional barriers stem from social institutions, including family and societal gender stereotypes, as my empirical research has demonstrated. The influence of these societal issues on female peacekeepers is substantial, underscoring the need to address them within peacekeeping missions. These challenges can manifest in various ways, from insufficient support for childcare responsibilities to discrimination when pursuing leadership roles (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020).

Additionally, diverse cultures and contexts make gender mainstreaming strategies in UN peacekeeping highly dependent on local conditions. Understanding and respecting local contexts is essential; it is not optional. The UN's multinational peacekeepers are often insufficiently

prepared to address gender inequalities in societies (Strickland & Duvvury, 2003), underscoring the need for local ownership and engagement. Insufficient training for peacekeepers to understand local specificities and gender equality principles creates challenges at both operational and tactical levels (Basini, 2017). Implementing a uniform policy to increase the number of women can be difficult at both organizational and strategic levels. Moreover, peacekeepers may face issues at individual and collective levels due to attitudes and behaviours rooted in persistent gender biases, stereotypes, and personal beliefs (Willet, 2010). Several socio-cultural, local, and neo-colonial factors can complicate implementation, necessitating a more in-depth and comprehensive study, which is currently lacking.

Politics of Identity, Status of Women and Cultural Relativism

The ‘politics of identity’ or ‘identity politics’ refers to the politicization of identities, including gender, race, class, nationality, ethnicity, origin, religion, culture, and ability. Feminist scholars have introduced the concept of subjugation based on gender and other identities, a notion further developed by Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory (1989). My study adopts an intersectional perspective because gender intersects with other identities to shape the experiences of peacekeepers and local communities. For example, female peacekeepers from the Global South may face quite different challenges than their counterparts from the Global North, reflecting both systemic inequalities and cultural differences (Enloe, 2014).

Understanding cultural perspectives and identity politics is essential to grasping local needs and priorities in gender mainstreaming. ‘Cultural relativism’ questions whether gender norms can be applied universally. Fred Halliday (in Grant & Newland, 1991) underscores this: values related to women can vary so widely that it becomes difficult to make broad statements about gender subjugation or oppression across societies (p. 167). ‘Cultural norms’ can hide or justify the

oppression of women; at the same time, women may support practices that outsiders perceive as oppressive. For example, the veil might be seen as oppressive by some Western feminists but as a vital cultural tradition by many Afghan women. Advising Afghan women to remove the veil can be viewed as cultural imperialism and foreign interference.

Scholars in postcolonial studies, such as Said (1979), Spivak (1988), and Mohanty (1988), have shown how cultural and racialized representations of people have been used as tools within colonial and imperial projects. They illustrate how these representations support the dominance and superiority of colonizers. Scholars such as Whitworth (2003, 2004) and Razack (2002, 2004) examine neo-colonial and cultural portrayals in UN peacekeeping, emphasizing that the interaction between cultural context and systems of oppression is highly complex and must be analysed through a gender lens.

Applying an intersectional lens to identity politics reveals how patriarchy and masculinities intersect with race, class, and nationality to shape local gender regimes and peacekeeping experiences. This intersectional perspective is crucial for addressing research question (ii): how socio-cultural factors such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and militarization affect implementation across different mission contexts and determine whether mainstreaming is genuinely effective or merely a checklist.

Cultural and Local Specificity

Culture significantly influences society, law, human rights, and progress. It shapes a society's values, norms, and traditions. Cultural differences are both universal and particular (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). It is unwise to treat all women the same across societies regarding their human rights and freedoms (Steans, 1998). Implementing a single gender mainstreaming policy to promote gender equality across all states and communities is also difficult due to cultural

variations. For example, as shown in my empirical study, what is achievable in Kosovo may not be possible in Darfur, and what can be accomplished in Darfur may not be applicable in Haiti. Nevertheless, comparing different cultures should not lead to categorization. As Zwingle (2013) warns against labelling states as “progressive” or “backward,” and instead advises viewing international norms as ongoing and evolving discourses (p. 113).

The provisions of UNSCR 1325 must be adapted locally, and programmatic actions need to be implemented by experts who understand local specifics and cultural sensitivities. Basini’s (2017) case study in Liberia shows that top-down programming, which ignores local context, can reinforce masculine dominance. Charlesworth (2013) warns about the risks of applying women’s rights simplistically, like ‘crude applications of the concepts’, without taking into account local circumstances, with examples from Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, and Iraq.⁷⁵ Political leaders and local constituencies may perceive outsider interventions as a cultural imposition, which can provoke backlash. Therefore, political objectives can be communicated within specific cultural frameworks to encourage change (Charlesworth, 2013). In practice, programmatic actions under UNSCR 1325 need to be locally designed and co-created; however, determining how to achieve this requires thorough knowledge, appropriate tools, planning, and training. The existing literature seems inadequate in providing comprehensive guidance for this process.

⁷⁵ Charlesworth illustrated this point by citing examples from Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, and Iraq. She cited Sari Kuvu’s study of women in Afghanistan, which found that UNIFEM’s focus on women’s participation and gender mainstreaming sparked backlash because the approaches failed to account for the ‘specificity of the situations’ and treated Afghan women as a uniform group. This highlights the potential for backlash due to cultural insensitivity and underscores the urgent need to consider cultural dynamics in peace operations. In Timor-Leste, political leader Xanana Gusmão described the efforts by international women’s rights experts as “obsessive acculturation to standards” and argued that the women’s right to self-determination “had no natural affinity to East Timorese culture” (Charlesworth in Caglar et al, 2013, p. 29). In Iraq, women were relatively more empowered than in other Arab states due to increased political participation. However, the invasion in 2003 created an environment that, “among other things, has allowed assertive masculine traditionalism to reclaim authenticity and authority” (Ibid, pp. 29-30). The three examples above lead Charlesworth to conclude, “The most valuable aspect of international human rights law as a portmanteau for feminist norms may thus be through the capacity to articulate the particular political goals and engender cultural change” (Charlesworth in Caglar et al, 2013, p. 33).

Furthermore, cultural and local specificities help sustain conditions that perpetuate gender inequalities within traditions and norms. Post-conflict societies often preserve the pre-conflict gender status quo, with few initiatives aimed at dismantling cultural stereotypes and gender biases (Parpart, 2017; Turenne-Sjolander, 2005). As a result, tension arises between respecting local traditions and promoting universal human rights. Porter (2003) argues that cultural specificity should not be used to justify cultural subjugation; when cultural practices conflict with universal rights to equality, those rights should take precedence (p. 252). Policymakers need to distinguish between cultural differences and cultural subjugation and develop interventions that respect diversity while challenging practices that uphold structural oppression. The current state of the literature is insufficient to guide the development of such comprehensive policies.

As is evident, UNSCR 1325 enjoys broad international support and is endorsed by almost every country. Hermoso and Sugawara's (2016) research on the 'impact evaluation' of 1325 revealed additional aspects of the policy process. They argue that the resolution's success depends on strengthening peace constituencies and democratic institutions. However, Barrow (2009) suggests that "post-conflict dynamics are highly politicized, particularly where concepts such as ethnicity, culture and identity intersect with and cut across gender even more acutely" (p. 66). Barrow (2009) also claims that UNSCR 1325 may appear "culturally blind" and "external to the internal dynamics" of different societies, and that it "may not have the capacity to respond to highly contextual settings" (pp. 66-67). As we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, these overlapping ideas of culture, ethnicity, and gender subjugation pose major operational challenges for UN peacekeepers in integrating gender equality and peace in post-conflict societies. Recognizing these challenges is essential for providing practical policy guidance.

Questions on Cultural and Neo-colonial Implications

The question remains whether peacekeepers are adequately trained and capable of managing the diverse cultural and contextual complexities while implementing UNSCR 1325. Studies by Rubinstein (2005, 2003) and Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger (2008) show that culture can influence the performance of integrated peacekeeping missions, both among personnel and within local communities. Rubinstein et al. (2008) further argue that culture affects both ‘horizontal interoperability’ among mission personnel and ‘vertical interoperability’ with local populations.⁷⁶ They stress that peacekeepers’ roles should be ‘anticipated and harmonized’ with local communities’ specific cultural and historical experiences, leading to a ‘mutually respectful and equal partnership in mission planning and implementation’ (p. 551). Moreover, they argue that peacekeepers need to overcome limitations, such as a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity, to effectively navigate the diverse cultures encountered across missions, both horizontally and vertically. After decades of research on peacekeepers in Egypt and other locations, Rubinstein (2016) has shown that culture can influence the success or failure of peacekeeping missions. Gender initiatives are sometimes undertaken without sufficient understanding of local cultural dynamics, leading to resistance or ineffective outcomes (Razack, 2004; Rubinstein, 2003).

Literature examining postcolonial traits across socio-cultural dimensions, especially the masculinized culture prevalent in UN peace operations, is essential to my research, particularly for addressing research question (ii) on socio-cultural challenges. Sandra Whitworth’s *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (2004) highlights the contradictions

⁷⁶ Rubinstein et al. (2008) define ‘horizontal interoperability’ as the interaction among various kinds of international actors participating in peacekeeping, and ‘vertical interoperability’ as the interactions of those actors with local populations. They clarify that the terms ‘horizontal and vertical integration’ are used metaphorically, with no intention of characterizing either the mission or the local population as culturally ‘above’ or ‘below’ or ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than the other.

between the ‘constructs of masculinity’ and the ‘benevolent altruistic peacekeeper’. She provocatively questions the ‘gender culture’ of the UN, noting that it “depends upon the absence of women, the marginalization of gender analyses and the reproduction and reinforcement of militarisation” (p. 140). She further challenges whether UN peacekeeping can be viewed as a ‘colonial encounter’ (Whitworth, 2003). In a similar vein, Sherene Razack (2002, 2004) explores the links between hegemonic masculinity, colonialism, and imperialism within the context of peacekeeping. Agathangelou and Ling (2009) argue, “Peacekeeping is no exception to a neocolonial relationship. ...As always, women’s bodies serve as a convenient outlet for these power relations” (p. 39). Turenne-Sjolander and Trevenen (2010) contend that gender norms are shaped and enforced within a system of white supremacist and capitalist patriarchy, requiring an intersectional understanding of race, class, and nationality (p. 159).

The above dynamics sometimes cast peacekeepers as ‘imperial protectors’ and locals as ‘protected,’ contributing to a neocolonial perception of peacekeeping. This view fosters a sense of superiority among peacekeepers, often leading to the subjugation of local populations (Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). The neo-colonial dichotomy of ‘protector’ versus ‘protected’ is sometimes evident in cases of SEA within UN peace operations (Ibid). Razack (2004) examines the racial dimensions of peacekeeping, particularly highlighting atrocities committed by a small number of Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia. She connects these acts to the ‘dehumanization of others’. She argues that racial hierarchies are rooted in national mythology, stating, “These cultural characteristics have their basis in national mythology, and they emerge out of an underlying racial hierarchy in which Canadians of European origin are positioned as superior to people of colour” (p.135). The racial hierarchy in peace operations, shaped by national mythology, can vary depending on the mission’s makeup and location. The experience of racism among peacekeeping

personnel is context-dependent, influenced by interactions with host communities and the dynamics between peacekeepers from the Global North and the Global South.

On the other hand, the presence of foreign troops may evoke feelings of invasion and subjugation among local communities. Agathangelou and Ling (2009) and Razack (2004) further argue that peacekeeping often reflects elements of neo-colonialism. Postcolonial critiques demonstrate how peace operations can reproduce imperial gender regimes, depicting interveners as ‘imperial protectors’ and locals as passive, thereby undermining legitimacy and prompting resistance that interacts with masculinized mission cultures. Conversely, the ‘benevolent altruistic peacekeepers’ from the Global South are often feminized compared to their masculinized counterparts or those from the Global North (Higate & Henry, 2009). This is a key mechanism through which masculinized institutional norms and neo-colonial perceptions weaken gender mainstreaming on the ground. The current literature lacks sufficient nuance in analyzing the specific context in which masculinities and colonialism interplay on the ground in relation to gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations.

While these scholars highlight links between peacekeeping and neo-colonialism, my focus is on peacekeepers’ experiences implementing UNSCR 1325 as they navigate socio-cultural and political challenges. Shifting cultural patterns, values, and gender relations give rise to distinct ‘gender regimes’ within peace operations. These ‘gender regimes’ reinforce gender inequality and discrimination and often conflict with one another (Carreiras, 2010). Understanding the gender dimensions of peacekeeping culture requires a context-sensitive analysis. However, there remains a notable gap in studies that examine gender experiences on the ground. My study aims to address this gap by focusing on the cultural and contextual experiences shared by peacekeepers. Specifically, I explore how peacekeepers encounter persistent and variable gender inequalities and

how they navigate issues of gender mainstreaming and racial diversity across different contexts and socio-cultural structures, within the framework of postcolonial feminist studies.

Gender Essentialism in Protection Doctrine

Both post-structuralist and postcolonial feminist studies note that when discussing the protection of women serving in peacekeeping missions and in host communities,⁷⁷ we often revert to gender essentialism and the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Parpart, 2017; Razack, 2002, 2004; Shepherd, 2008, 2010, 2011; Tiessen, 2007, 2015; Whitworth, 2004). Even with specific ‘protection’ arrangements, not all women receive the same level of protection in public spaces during the post-conflict rebuilding period. The reasons are manifold, as representations in peace negotiations and processes are highly gendered. Typically, when peace operations begin, men in the host society have recently accepted a ceasefire or exited violent conflicts under specific agreements, and peacekeepers then arrive. Historically, women were completely excluded from peace negotiations. Due to normative changes brought by UNSCR 1325 and 1325+, along with women’s activism, women now have some access to these processes. However, this access is often limited and tokenistic due to various barriers (Ellerby in Gentry et al., 2019, pp. 323-326). Additionally, female peacekeepers, who constitute only ten percent of the total deployment, are often ‘side-streamed’ into ‘specialized spaces’ (Newby & Sebag, 2020) or relegated to ‘safe spaces’ (Karim & Beardsley, 2017).

In *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*, Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley (2017) present empirical research using multinational data on sex-disaggregated participation of peacekeepers and allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and violence (SEAHV). Drawing on original data from the UN mission in Liberia, the

⁷⁷ As noted in the Introduction, my analysis will examine women in the host communities through the perspectives of my interviewees, who are mostly UN peacekeepers. I will address their real-life circumstances indirectly.

authors examine the origins and consequences of these impediments. They argue that ‘gender power imbalances’ between and among genders pose barriers to women’s participation in peacekeeping missions. They maintain that discrimination, relegation of women to safe spaces, and SEAHV continue to restrict progress toward gender equality in UN peace operations. Furthermore, some groups often oppose peace agreements; the UN refers to belligerent rebels against peace processes as ‘peace spoilers’ (Higate & Henry, 2009, p. 77). If these groups are militarized, armed, and not under the control of any party that has consented to peace operations, violence is inevitable.⁷⁸

The possibility of violence cannot be ignored if the arrival of UN troops is perceived as unwelcome or invasive. There have been numerous past incidents in which local rebels attacked UN peacekeepers (Giray, 2023; Salverda, 2013). We have seen peacekeepers brutally murdered, ambushed, and abducted. Similarly, local men and women face brutality at the hands of rebels during ongoing peace processes. Therefore, any UN peace operation must protect its peacekeeping personnel and the civilians of the host communities. My empirical work presents evidence on these risks from peacekeeping experiences in Darfur, the DRC, and the CAR, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

On the other hand, civilians in host communities sometimes feel insecure, even with peacekeepers present. Westendorf (2020) examines how sexual exploitation and abuse have violated peace. She observes,

...interveners in peace operations (including military, police, and civilian peacekeepers; aid workers, diplomats, private contractors, and others) have been implicated in the sexual

⁷⁸ The UN peace operations must adhere to three main principles of peacekeeping, i.e., the consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. For details, please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>

exploitation and abuse of local women and children in nearly every United Nations (UN) peace operation since the end of the Cold War (p. 1).

Olsson and Gizelis (2013) similarly argue, “In addition to addressing women’s security during conflict, in UNSCR 1325 protection was linked to the behaviour of the mission personnel toward the host population and questions of misbehaviour, such as Sexual Exploitation and Abuse” (p. 430).

Peacekeepers are responsible for protecting civilians and maintaining peace, and they should not engage in misconduct or exploitation. In such situations, implementing the WPS agenda is crucial to the success of peace operations in safeguarding civilians. However, this reveals a tension in my argument. I previously noted that women peacekeepers are often seen as necessary only to address cases of gender-based violence. Nonetheless, I use the example of peacekeepers involved in gender-based violence to support the idea that host communities can feel insecure about their presence. I argue that female peacekeepers are especially essential for making host communities feel safe, drawing on the 1325+ resolutions, particularly UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 2122 (2013), which strengthen the connection between women’s participation, community security, trust-building, and operational effectiveness.

UN peacekeepers are tasked with protecting civilians in three primary ways: through dialogue and engagement, providing physical protection, and creating a protective environment.⁷⁹ However, the UNSC’s protection doctrine, as outlined in various resolutions, often falls into the trap of gender essentialism. For example, UNSC Resolutions 1265 and 1270, adopted in 1999, are considered the foundation of the UN’s peacekeeping strategy for civilian protection. Unfortunately, these resolutions group women with children and other vulnerable populations,

⁷⁹ Please see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/un-peacekeepers-day-2019-protecting-civilians-protecting-peace>

while equating women with those who lack agency. Likewise, a more recent UNSCR 1674, adopted in 2006, uses language that echoes the same approach:⁸⁰

Recalling the particular impact which armed conflict has on women and children, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as on other civilians who may have specific vulnerabilities, and stressing the protection and assistance needs of all affected civilian populations, (Preambular paragraph 8, UNSCR 1674).

Reaffirming that parties to armed conflict bear the primary responsibility to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of affected civilians, (Preambular paragraph 9, UNSCR 1674).

In the resolution above, women are further categorized as vulnerable. Surprisingly, the parties involved in armed conflicts are primarily responsible for protecting affected civilians. Similar language appears in recent mandates and resolutions. For instance, in the 2022 mandate given to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) by UN Security Council Resolution 2659 (2022), the language is as follows: ⁸¹

Example 1:

Urges all parties to armed conflict in the CAR, particularly armed groups, to end all violations and abuses committed against children, in violation of applicable international law, including those involving their recruitment and use, rape and sexual violence, killing

⁸⁰ For references, please see:

- i) UNSC 1674 (2006) at [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1674\(2006\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1674(2006))
- ii) UNSC 1270 (1999) at [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1270\(1999\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1270(1999));
- iii) UNSC 1265 (1999) at [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1265\(1999\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1265(1999))

⁸¹ For details of the mandate for the CAR mission, please see [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2659\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2659(2022)).

and maiming, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals, (UNSC Resolution 2659, OP 26, p. 9).

Example 2:

Calls upon all parties to armed conflict in the CAR, including armed groups, to end sexual and gender-based violence, further calls upon the CAR authorities to swiftly investigate alleged abuses and prosecute alleged perpetrators in order to fight against impunity of those responsible for such acts, and to take concrete, specific and time-bound steps towards implementing the UN and government of CAR joint communiqué to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and to ensure that those responsible for such crimes are excluded from the security sector and prosecuted, (UNSC Resolution 2659, OP 27)

Paradoxically, the ‘parties to armed conflict,’ who contributed to civilian insecurity, have negotiated peace agreements and are now part of the transitional government or authority responsible for implementing transitional justice. The language in the resolutions above creates an ambiguous narrative within the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy, as masculine warlords, former combatants, and ex-oppressors are selected to protect unarmed and affected civilians.

Excluding women and other affected civilians from protection arrangements will worsen insecurity and reinforce existing gender inequalities. This exclusion is not explicitly planned but stems from traditional norms and practices that regard women as vulnerable and in need of protection. Therefore, the essentialist language used in UNSC resolutions does not effectively address gender inequality. As Tiessen (2015) states, “In other words, focusing on gender inequality requires more effort than merely identifying women as members of vulnerable groups; it also necessitates an enactment of what might otherwise have been politically motivated rhetorical commitments” (p. 85). However, when a significant socio-political and economic gap exists

between peacekeepers and local citizens, further reinforced by the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy, it becomes difficult for gender mainstreaming-informed political practices to take hold. Policy and practice on gender equality must be coherent (Kent, 2007) and integrated into the securitization, democratization, and development processes of post-conflict societies. To ensure mission-wide success, gender equality policies and practices must be aligned within the peacekeeping unit. This remains a critical point of contention in my systemic analysis.

Sexual Violence and UNSCR 1325+

Due to sexual violence and militarized atrocities inflicted on women and children during post-Cold War conflicts, there was a significant push to adopt a resolution on the WPS agenda in 2000 (Harrington, 2011; Turenne-Sjolander, 2005). The origin of Resolution 1325 highlights the need to recognize sexual and other forms of violence as war crimes and calls for an end to impunity. ‘Impunity’ refers to exemption from punishment or failure to prosecute perpetrators of harmful acts during war and conflict. In this context, UNSCR 1325 states the following,

Emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard *stresses* the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions; (UN Security Council, S/RES/1325 (2000), OP 11, p.3)

In post-conflict societies, those who commit rape and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) are often not brought to justice. Ex-combatants and warlords who commit these acts frequently demand immunity during peace negotiations (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Hudson, 2009; Willet, 2010). Perpetrators are often shielded from punishment to facilitate negotiations and the signing of peace

agreements (Ibid.). However, impunity for sexual violence erodes women's rights and hinders gender mainstreaming.

In due course, UNSCR 1820 was adopted in 2008 under the same WPS agenda to address gaps in UNSCR 1325. The resolution 1820 “*Stresses* that sexual violence, when used or commissioned as a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians...” and “*Notes* that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide...” (Excerpts from OP 1 and 4).⁸² UNSCR 1820 requests the Secretary General and relevant UN agencies “to develop effective mechanisms for protecting from violence, including in particular sexual violence, to women and girls in and around UN-managed refugee and internally displaced persons camps” (Excerpts from OP 10). It further calls upon member states to prosecute those responsible for such crimes and to exclude them from amnesty provisions (OP 4). Additionally, the Security Council, by this resolution, expresses its intention to impose state-specific sanctions regimes through targeted and graduated measures against the ‘parties in armed conflict’ who commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls (OP 5).

Although the resolution calls for more decisive action to prevent sexual violence against civilians, it does not condemn widespread militarization as a root cause of such violence. Some might argue that a policy instrument should avoid engaging in theoretical debates about the role of militarization or its underlying causes. However, a policy instrument must be grounded in reality; otherwise, it risks disconnecting from the actual problem and leading to non-implementation. In the real world, militarization is evident, as observed in the Global Study;

⁸² For reference, please see UNSCR 1820 at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1820>

therefore, its presence must be recognized. Furthermore, UNSCR 1820 demonstrates the following:

Deeply concerned also about persistent obstacles and challenges to women's participation and full involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts as a result of violence, intimidation and discrimination, which erode women's capacity and legitimacy to participate in post-conflict public life, and acknowledging the negative impact that has on durable peace, security and reconciliation, including post-conflict peacebuilding (preambular paragraph 11, UNSC resolution 1820, 2008).

Through the above resolution, the Security Council acknowledges that women face barriers to meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution, which undermines the sustainability of peace. However, even eight years after adopting UNSCR 1325 and its implementation, UNSCR 1820 continued to depict women and girls as the 'main victims', reinforcing a "one-dimensional constructed identity of the woman" (Zürn in Scheuermann & Zürn, 2020, p. 19-20). For instance, in Resolution 1820, OP 8, 9, 10, and 11 highlighted the need to protect civilians, including women and girls, from sexual violence, while OP 13 focused on providing "sustainable assistance to victims of sexual violence in armed conflict", who are mostly women and girls. OP 15 also called on the Secretary General to submit a report to the Security Council, which includes a "proposal for strategies to minimise the susceptibility of women and girls to such violence as well."

Nevertheless, protecting women and girls from sexual violence remains a vital goal, and my intention is not to dismiss that need. However, framing women solely as victims in resolutions like 1820 risks overshadowing their agency and broader roles in peace processes, which 1325 aimed to address. We can manage this tension by balancing the need for protection with the

importance of recognizing women's participation and leadership. It is true that women and children are the primary victims of sexual violence, and the UN should state this explicitly in the resolutions, even if it emphasizes women's victim status. Mentioning sexual violence against women and girls should not automatically reduce them to victims. Nonetheless, UNSC resolutions must also focus on women's agency and promote equal participation in peace processes. My main point is that, while recognizing women as victims of sexual violence is essential (as in UNSCR 1820), resolutions should also explicitly link protection to agency, such as empowerment and participation, to avoid a one-sided portrayal.

SEA undermines the spirit of UNSCR 1325 and 1325+. Vanessa Kent's chapter, "Protecting civilians from UN peacekeepers and humanitarian workers: Sexual exploitation and abuse," in Aoi, De Coning & Thakur (2007), shows that insecurity arises with peacekeepers, primarily through the trafficking of women and children. She notes that "...the arrival of peacekeepers increases the demand for prostitutes substantially" (p. 45). According to the UN's policy, peacekeepers must adhere to the highest standards of conduct, including respecting local laws, customs, and practices; treating host communities with respect, courtesy, and consideration; and acting with impartiality, integrity, and tact. However, cases of SEA by peacekeepers have been reported in locations such as Somalia, Haiti, Mozambique, East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Cambodia (Kent, 2007, p. 45). This highlights a clear gap between policy and practice, which remains a significantly under-researched area.

Furthermore, UNSCR 1820 recognizes the use of 'rape' as a tactic of war. It condemns "in the strongest terms all sexual and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflict, in particular women and children" (preambular paragraph 7 of UNSC Resolution 1820,

2008).⁸³ After depicting women and girls as victims in need of protection and support, there are no policy guidelines on how they should actively participate in resisting sexual violence through empowerment and agency. As a result, these gendered narratives influence policy implementers' perceptions, embedding the perpetuation of 'gender inequality' as a normative process within UN peace operations at the tactical level. Evidence of this impact can be seen in various UN missions, where the 'protector-protected' divide persists, often marginalizing women's agency. For example, research indicates that peacekeeping missions often assign female peacekeepers to specialized or 'safe' roles rather than positions of authority or direct operational responsibilities, reinforcing traditional gender roles and restricting their influence on the mission's overall success (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020). Consequently, changing the language, as recommended by Tiessen (2015), and challenging these deep-rooted narratives at both strategic and tactical levels are essential for promoting gender equality in UN peace operations, which still require further research to develop effective interventions.

Theoretical Analysis of Patriarchy, Masculinity and Militarization

Concepts of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization are central to my thesis. The complex interplay of these three elements helps analyze the organizational, operational, and individual challenges faced by peacekeepers. Exploring how patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization relate enhances our understanding of gender power imbalances. It also highlights the difficulties of applying gender mainstreaming within UN peace operations and the challenges faced by UN peacekeepers.

Gender encompasses both masculinity and femininity, with these terms interconnected and their meanings clarified in relation to one another (Peterson, 2010). As with women and

⁸³ UNSCR 1820 may be seen at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1820>

femininities, there are various types of men and masculinities. Different cultures can produce diverse masculinities and femininities (Hooper, 1998). Feminist scholars often do not focus solely on individual women but instead see 'gender' as a category of analysis within power relations. They examine masculinities and femininities within social hierarchies, which are expressed through embedded social and cultural practices such as 'patriarchy' (Hooper, 2001).

Patriarchy is often understood as male dominance and the authority associated with 'masculinity,' commonly regarded as the leading cause of women's subjugation in society. However, it would be a mistake to assume that all women are victims and all men are oppressors. Some men do not use violence against women to gain control, and some women may use violence and display masculinity to assert power.

Despite significant progress, disparities between men and women persist across nearly every aspect of life. Peterson (1992) identifies three dichotomies that shape male dominance in everyday practices. First, the division between public and private spheres; second, the production and reproduction dichotomy, which devalues women's work; third, the 'protector-protected' dichotomy (re)produces ideas of masculine protection and feminine dependence and misrepresents the complexity of our security systems (Peterson, 1992, pp. 54-56). This system of domination is rooted in social dependencies and the ongoing interconnectedness of oppression (Ibid). In many societies, women remain dependent on men for their livelihoods, social security, and protection. This societal reliance establishes hierarchical relationships that reinforce patriarchy and masculinity.

Post-structuralist feminist critiques, such as those by Peterson (1992, 2010), Shepherd (2010, 2011), Tickner (1992, 2014), Parpart & Zalewski (2008), and Zalewski & Parpart (1998), show that security and peace are closely linked to gender. In peacetime, gender inequalities often

seem normal because they are justified by ideologies, traditions, and social, cultural, and religious practices that validate both direct and structural violence as normal (Hudson et al., 2009). During wartime, gender inequalities tend to become more extreme because of increased violence; however, they are still normalized through militarized ideals and the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Violence against women during conflicts can also be seen as part of a larger continuum of violence affecting their daily lives (Manchanda, 2005; Sjoberg, 2017). Although some progress has been made towards achieving women's equality worldwide, violent patriarchy remains a persistent cultural norm, described as "an enduring component of relations between men and women" (Hudson et al., 2009).

Developing a deeper understanding of gendered power relations in the militarization of societies in transition is crucial, without overgeneralizing the roles of men and women in war and conflict (Pankhurst, 2008). In simple terms, we should examine the masculinities and femininities within gendered power dynamics during both war and peace, as well as the influence of hegemonic masculinities, to better understand and analyze issues related to gender mainstreaming in post-conflict transitions (Parpart, 2017). Furthermore, gendered hierarchies can complicate conflicts and create insecurity for women, some men, and visible minorities due to their positionalities and differences, such as intersectionality. Intersectionality, which links various identities, serves as a vital conceptual tool for highlighting gender inequalities and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Heathcote & Otto, 2014; Runyan & Peterson, 2014; Shepherd, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 6, women with specific ethnic and socio-economic identities often experience gender subjugation; for example, impoverished women with particular ethnic backgrounds are more vulnerable because of their intersecting identities. Additionally, female peacekeepers from developing countries will face inequalities related to gender, race, and citizenship.

The above theoretical analysis can be applied to the provisions of UNSCR 1325. Gender mainstreaming, as outlined in UNSCR 1325 and its subsequent resolutions 1325+, involves increasing women's participation in UN peacekeeping efforts and recognizing the vulnerability and protection needs of local women. However, it remains "silent about the underlying gender roles that celebrate masculine aggression and condone violence against women, as well as gendered socio-economic inequalities that make women more vulnerable..." (True, 2011, p. 84).

Regarding the implementation of UNSCR 1325 as a challenge, Turenne-Sjolander (2005) argues:

While resolution 1325 is one piece of the puzzle regarding the horrors faced by women in armed conflict, its program does not provide the framework for transforming the social order to make better peacebuilding the inevitable consequence of applying its recommendations (p. 32).⁸⁴

UNSCR 1325 is therefore limited in its mandate to advance a transformative agenda. As Turenne-Sjolander (2005) notes, the resolution is "one piece of the puzzle" among the myriad women's issues in armed conflicts. Many efforts have been made to implement 1325. However, these efforts have had limited success because the resolution did not go far enough to transform the social order.

A key issue is that the resolution remains silent on patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. However, UNSCR 1325 cannot address every structural problem. Its transformative potential is limited, in part, because it avoids explicitly naming patriarchy, militarism, and masculinity, which are critical drivers of the inequalities it aims to dismantle. While other 'puzzle pieces' are needed, the resolution's silence on these systemic barriers weakens its ability to inspire more profound change. Unfortunately, the existing literature does not adequately highlight this

⁸⁴ Free translation from the original French text.

important point. In the next section, we will explore how patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization operate within societies during both war and peace, creating obstacles to women's participation in peacekeeping and peacebuilding through subjugation, exclusion, and violence.

Power, Patriarchy, and Masculinity

Feminist post-structuralist scholarship on power, patriarchy, and masculinities helps analyse how militarized and hegemonic masculinities shape culture, decision-making, and operational challenges within UN peace operations. I use these theories to examine how gendered power dynamics affect peacekeeping effectiveness, troop behaviour and attitudes, training, and institutional reforms within the UN system. These theories are therefore essential to my thesis.

Power in international relations is often associated with domination, aligning with traditional ideas of masculinity (Tickner, 2014). In the modern nation-state, sovereignty and power embody masculine ideals, which are also tied to 'objectivity' and are valorized in contrast to 'feminine subjectivity' (ibid). Liberal feminism, emphasizing individualism, describes the world as consisting of two separate spheres: public spaces for men and private spaces for women. It aims to dismantle barriers that restrict women's participation in the public sphere and men's involvement in the private sphere (Peterson, 1992). It also argues that women's subordination results from obstacles created by customary laws (the Law of Nations or legal norms),⁸⁵ initially derived from social traditions, practices, and beliefs (Fellmeth, 2000).

On the other hand, radical feminists challenge the idea of a strict division between public and private spheres, arguing that this benefits men and maintains men's dominance over women through hegemonic control in the public realm, including government, warfare, and legal systems.

⁸⁵ The Law of Nations or legal norms are both codified and uncoded. The law of war, which was customary law, was not codified until the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. Reference at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907>

As a result, the law tends to be male-biased, largely shaped by men influenced by traditions of imperialism and colonialism, and it often favours certain men based on gender, race, class, and colour. Consequently, women frequently lack adequate and impartial legal options to address rights violations (Fellmeth, 2000). The law also fails to acknowledge that violence against women, for distinct reasons, is linked to ‘macho masculinity’ (Manchanda, 2005).

In contrast, international law, particularly through frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Rome Statute,⁸⁶ and UNSCR 1325, offers progressive standards for gender justice. However, enforcement remains inconsistent due to state sovereignty and political resistance. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as international tribunals (e.g., ICTR and ICTY)⁸⁷ and truth commissions, can leverage these international norms to challenge patriarchal legal legacies in post-conflict societies. Nevertheless, their success depends on local ownership and feminist advocacy to ensure that reforms move beyond symbolic gestures. This theoretical approach helps analyze ‘transitional justice’, a concept that addresses past human rights abuses in post-conflict societies, as discussed in Chapter 6.

According to FSS scholars such as Davies and True (2015), state and non-state actors exploit women’s subordination, economic precarity, and cultural ideas that treat women’s bodies as objects to commit sexual violence (p. 506). In post-conflict settings, weakened institutions often

⁸⁶ Although the Statute has a narrow definition of gender, limited to male and female, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in its Rome Statute (1998) lists rape as a crime against humanity, which does not require the presence of conflict or war to convict perpetrators (Davies & True, 2015). In addition, "sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity" are considered crimes against humanity as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population. The ICTY (1992) and ICTR (1994) stipulate the same. The United Nations uses this list of offences to define conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as a tactic of war, as well as terrorism, and expresses grave concern about its rising trend worldwide. Please see the United Nations Secretary General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2017/249) dated 15 April 2017 at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4014201?v=pdf>

⁸⁷ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

fail to protect rights, and fear of backlash inhibits women from seeking justice for wartime sexual violence (Pankhurst, 2008). Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can be used to shame and dominate communities, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and social hierarchies. The world has witnessed this phenomenon in Bosnia, Kosovo, Liberia, the DRC, and Darfur (Dharmapuri, 2011, pp. 63-64). My empirical study traces this phenomenon through the experiences of UN peacekeepers.

Shekhawat's (2018) study of Kashmiri women highlights the persistence of patriarchy as the primary obstacle to implementing UNSCR 1325. Women experienced the conflict as victims, survivors, peacebuilders, and even perpetrators, yet their exclusion from peace processes reflects deeply rooted sociocultural and political structures. She concludes that without dismantling these patriarchal norms, international resolutions will remain merely symbolic and ineffective. She emphasizes that patriarchy is the fundamental cause of the failure to achieve change through international resolutions and notes the following:

At the national and international levels, gendered discrimination is clearly perceptible, and, hence, expecting a drastic change in the societal set up through a series of international resolutions and documents may appear a chimera. The root cause, hence, is not a lack of political will but the deep-rooted patriarchy that underlines all sociocultural and political structures. It is deep-rooted patriarchy informing sociocultural and political structures. (Shekhawat, 2018, Chapter 14, pp. 254-255).

Shekhawat argues that patriarchal norms are both insidious and widespread, asserting that "Until this skewed social construction is challenged to the core and addressed," UNSCR 1325 will not be effective (Ibid., p. 260). She concludes that a "masculinized political structure" hinders the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and stresses the urgent need for strong political will to challenge

and dismantle patriarchy, which “produces and reproduces sociocultural and political constraints” (Ibid., p. 265, 264). Her statement contrasts slightly with the *Global Study* and the *HIPPO report*, both of which identify a ‘lack of political will’ as a key root cause. My empirical research incorporates both perspectives to examine the failure to implement UNSCR 1325.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Patriarchy

Understanding gender dynamics is crucial for analyzing power relations, especially the link between masculinity and authority. R.W. Connell’s concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is particularly relevant to peace and security. It holds that masculinity is shaped in relation to ‘subordinate masculinities’ and in opposition to femininity (Hooper, 1998). Studying masculinities, including hegemonic forms, is important for understanding the connection between war and diplomacy, offering deeper insight into power structures and gender hierarchies. Connell’s idea of hegemonic masculinity also highlights the challenges of advancing the gender, peace, and security agenda.

Androcentric features shape the ‘male work culture’ within organizations and institutions, including those in the peace and security sectors, where decision-making often conforms to the norms of a ‘patriarchal gender order’ (Braunmühl, 2013, p. 171). This dynamic creates gender hierarchies and hinders women’s meaningful participation in these institutions. Furthermore, the hierarchical division between ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ distorts the broader concept of security, particularly regarding human interdependence (Peterson, 1992, pp. 54-55). Therefore, examining ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is essential for understanding the limitations of UNSCR 1325 and for uncovering the organizational, operational, and personal obstacles faced in peacekeeping efforts.

Gender inequality is closely linked to the power structures of hegemonic masculinity. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity holds that masculinities develop in relation to

subordinate masculinities and in opposition to femininity (Connell, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity justifies male dominance and sustains patriarchal systems (Messerschmidt & Quest, in Scheuermann & Zürn, 2020; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Together, patriarchy, militarization, and hegemonic masculinity reinforce widespread gender inequality in society and its institutions, including UN peacekeeping (Enloe, 2000; Kronsell, 2006; Higate & Henry, 2009). Turenne-Sjolander and Trevenen (2010) described ‘military’ as the “bastion of masculinity” (p. 173). Kronsell (2006) echoes Connell (1995), observing that military, defence, and security-related institutions embody hegemonic masculinity not only because “male bodies dominate in them” but also because “Simultaneously, they represent and reify specific gender relations,” even when women are present in these institutions (Kronsell, 2006, p. 108). Patriarchy nurtures a deep-rooted sense of masculinity, which is then expressed through militarization (Enloe, 2000; Kronsell, 2006). Consequently, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization together sustain entrenched gender inequality within society and its institutions, including UN peacekeeping (Shekhawat, 2018; Higate & Henry, 2009).

Patriarchy constructs militarized masculinity by valorizing traits such as aggression and domination, which in turn shape institutional cultures, including those within UN peacekeeping, where male dominance is normalized (Enloe, 2000; Higate & Henry, 2009; Kronsell, 2006; Shekhawat, 2018). This triad (patriarchy, masculinity, militarization) maintains gender hierarchies by excluding women from decision-making roles and tolerating hypermasculine behaviours that facilitate SEA within peace operations (Karim & Beardsley, 2017). To address this issue, critical feminist scholarship argues that dismantling militarized masculinity requires systemic reforms in recruitment, training, and accountability mechanisms to challenge the patriarchal logic ingrained in peacekeeping institutions (Whitworth, 2004). However, the methods and strategies for

dismantling existing structures and challenging militarized masculinity within peacekeeping institutions remain a critical question that warrants further exploration. These insights are essential to my analyses in Chapters 6 and 7 and answer research question (ii) on the socio-cultural challenges that influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization.

Mackay et al. (2010) advocate developing FI as a vital framework for understanding how institutions are deeply influenced by, and in turn sustain, gender norms and power relations. FI emphasizes that traditional new institutionalism often overlooks these deeply embedded, gendered aspects, leading to an incomplete understanding of how institutions function and evolve. By incorporating a gender perspective, FI seeks to uncover the subtle ways institutions reinforce gender inequalities, offering a more comprehensive analysis of political outcomes and encouraging meaningful progress toward gender equality.

Chappell and Waylen (2013) argue that understanding institutional change requires a deeper analysis of how it is “gendered,” moving beyond explicit gender policies to examine subtle, often hidden, gender biases within institutions. They assert that both formal and informal rules, norms, and practices within institutions are imbued with gendered assumptions that influence political outcomes and can hinder efforts toward gender equality. The authors advocate a feminist institutionalist approach to expose these hidden dynamics and clarify how to promote more gender-inclusive institutional change. The application of FI remains an underused framework for addressing challenges in gender mainstreaming. I have employed this theory to respond to research question (iii) on enhancing the training and competence of UN peacekeepers in Chapter 8.

Gender inequality is a core issue, worsened by patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, and reinforced by violence and conflict. This inequality is also connected to the ongoing cycle of

societal violence. Mary Caprioli's quantitative analysis of gender inequality across political, social, and economic levels shows a link between state militarism and domestic gender inequality, asserting that "violence begets violence" (Caprioli, 2000, p. 57). Hudson (2009) supports this connection through her studies in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire. Additionally, Cynthia Enloe (2005) notes that "patriarchy – in all its varied guises, camouflaged, khaki clad, and pin-striped – is a principal cause both of the outbreak of violent societal conflicts and of the international community's frequent failures in providing long-term resolutions to those violent conflicts" (p. 281). From these scholarly insights, it is evident that an inextricable link exists between gender inequality, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, which can negatively affect the implementation of UNSCR 1325. However, the existing literature has not yet sufficiently explored this phenomenon.

Militarization and Militarized Masculinity

Militarization is "the process of emphasizing military values, policies, and preparedness" (Reardon, 1996, p. 14). Naidu (1985) explains that power has both material and psychological dimensions: while military forces and weaponry are its tangible expressions, militarization also includes cultural and attitudinal elements. He distinguishes militarism as the psychological aspect, comprising values, behaviours, and beliefs that glorify soldiers, weapons, and wars as noble tools for achieving national goals. Militarism promotes public support for military expansion, which in turn often reinforces the militarist mindset. Together, they produce varying degrees of militarization. Therefore, militarization is not limited to weaponry and troops; it reflects the interaction of material capacity and socio-psychological factors that shape power and significantly influence society.

FSS scholars highlight strong links among militarization, gender, and violence. Enloe (2016) describes militarization as a gradual social, political, and psychological process that internalizes militaristic ideas and is heavily shaped by gendered assumptions. Although national security could focus on citizens' well-being, militarization turns policymaking into a masculine-dominated space that sidelines women and feminine perspectives (Hooper, 1998; Duncanson, 2009, 2015). Militarism, as Steans (2006) explains, functions as both an ideology and a social practice that justifies state violence in war and peace, while Mackenzie (2010) highlights its role in normalizing violence more broadly. Reardon (1996) connects militarization to patriarchy, describing the military as “the distilled embodiment of patriarchy” (p. 15), where hierarchical gender relations are reinforced and social justice is undermined. These patterns are also evident in UN peace operations, where militarized masculinities sustain gender inequalities in post-conflict settings.

The pervasive nature of gender inequality can be examined through the concept of ‘the continuum of violence,’ as defined by Cynthia Cockburn (2012). She highlights that “... when violence is our concern, episodes of armed conflict and periods called peace cannot and should not be considered entirely separate and different” (p. 254). Incidents of homicide, torture, and extrajudicial killings in any setting indicate militarization (Cockburn, 2012), although it often manifests in more subtle ways. In post-conflict societies, militarization significantly contributes to the persistence of violence during peace processes. However, militarization is not limited to “khaki”—militaries, armed groups, and weaponry. It is “a far more subtle process,” influencing all facets of human life, from politics to socio-economic development and psycho-social and cultural spheres (Enloe, 2000, p. 2). Enloe states, “[m]ilitarization does not always take on the guise of war” (Ibid.). Both war and peace can be militarized. Therefore, demilitarization would

require not only policy changes but also a fundamental shift in social values, an area that remains insufficiently examined.

UN peace operations have militarized the concepts of ‘peace’ and ‘security’. When peace is negotiated, militarized combatants serve as negotiators; when peace is signed, warlords are the signatories; and when peacekeeping forces arrive, they embody the militarization of the troop- and police-contributing countries. Peacekeepers are often members of the armed forces and police from contributing nations, predominantly men (95 percent). Similarly, SSR and DDR processes uphold militaristic values and principles and tend to target masculinized, military men. As Willet (2010) notes, these processes are “not so much for genuine and effective demilitarization, but for a reordering of the security sector in the image of the liberal peace that reinforces the privilege of masculinized military elites and the subordination of the protected - women and children” (p. 147). All these aspects are crucial to my thesis, which aims to examine militarization in UN peacekeeping operations and to analyze the gender inequality that results from militarization and the perpetuation of traditional masculinity.

To examine the relationship between individuals and the structural elements of militarized masculinity in peacekeeping, I analyze how peacekeepers embody and negotiate these structures within the mission context (Enloe, 2000). Their agency, while constrained by institutional norms and gendered expectations, can either reinforce or challenge dominant forms of militarized masculinity through everyday interactions and choices. For example, peacekeepers might display hypermasculine behaviours, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, violence, and the use of force, to meet group expectations, even when these contradict UN norms, further demonstrating how structure influences individual actions (Razack, 2002, 2004).

Nevertheless, individuals also reproduce these structures by reinforcing gendered hierarchies within missions. To better understand these dynamics, peacekeepers often face a tension between institutional demands for militarized discipline and the UN's declared ideals of gender equality, a contradiction that can cause psychological dissonance or lead to opportunistic abuses (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Whitworth, 2003, 2004). Simultaneously, whistleblowers or gender-sensitive personnel who challenge these norms risk marginalization. Understanding this dynamic requires examining how personal experiences and actions intersect with the broader gendered structure of peacekeeping operations (Ackerly et al., 2006). Drawing on these theoretical and methodological approaches, I have incorporated peacekeepers' perspectives on the challenges of peacekeeping, socioeconomic and cultural realities, transitional justice, local ownership, and the opportunities and obstacles in training into the discussion chapters.

Gaps in Literature

My dissertation builds on the literature reviewed above to examine the gendered assumptions of the WPS agenda as reflected in UN peacekeeping operations. This review reveals that UN peace operations are complex and substantial efforts. The *Capstone Doctrine* has assigned a thematic task to UN peace operations under UNSCR 1325. According to this organizational policy, mainstreaming gender can be achieved through various methods, including both integrationist and transformationalist approaches. In practice, however, these methods and approaches can diverge from the policy's objectives, creating a significant gap between the policy and its implementation.

While much of the scholarly discourse in feminist security studies offers valuable theoretical and analytical insights, it often fails to fully capture the everyday realities of peacekeepers and the contextual challenges they face across different mission settings. My

research aims to bridge this gap. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, peacekeepers operate in complex, high-stakes environments where cultural norms, local power structures, and resource constraints strongly shape the success or failure of gender mainstreaming efforts. Additionally, much of the existing literature from post-structural and institutional feminism remains centred on policy frameworks, institutional goals, and normative principles, with limited attention to how these are applied in practical field strategies. For instance, peacekeepers often work within patriarchal communities, an intricate aspect of cultural differences and multifaceted barriers that remains insufficiently explored, especially in recent studies.

Cultural factors are essential to how gender mainstreaming is implemented. While academic research in FSS, along with feminist postmodern and post-structuralist approaches, provides detailed analysis, it often overlooks practical issues, particularly the socio-cultural effects of implementing UNSCR 1325, which vary across societies. The connections among the socioeconomic environment, local ownership of peace processes, and militarized masculinities, and how they influence mission outcomes, remain insufficiently examined. Obstacles to peacekeepers' effectiveness include inadequate training in gender-sensitive approaches, limited resources for developing gender-focused programs, and a lack of operational guidelines for managing complex cultural settings. In this regard, "UNSCR 1325 has only been sparsely and inconsistently implemented due to lack of political pressure and resource scarcity" (Olsson & Gizelis, 2013, p. 425). However, the reasons for the failure to implement UNSCR 1325 remain unclear. There is a disconnect between FI and other branches of feminist studies, such as critical and post-structuralist approaches, which hampers a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of the inconsistent implementation of UNSCR 1325. The study therefore investigates the knowledge gaps in understanding the reasons behind these shortfalls.

I have adopted a feminist multi-methods approach to examine the implementation of UNSCR 1325 from a gender perspective within UN peace operations. I used a case study to conduct detailed, context-specific analyses of Bangladeshi peacekeepers' participation in selected UN missions. Additionally, I included personal reflections that encompass the researcher's experiences and viewpoints, as well as those of the interviewees, bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world practice. The study highlights the limitations of current frameworks by examining how global gender norms intersect with local cultural contexts and the practical challenges peacekeepers face. It also explores how peacekeepers navigate the intersection of organizational mandates and local sociocultural realities to deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities of gender mainstreaming in peace operations. It further offers valuable insights to promote more effective and inclusive gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations.

Conclusion

The literature review in this chapter focuses on three central claims guiding the thesis: (1) gender mainstreaming often stalls because policies reproduce gender binaries and institutional masculinities rather than challenging them (Basini, 2017; Parpart, 2017; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010); (2) patriarchy, hegemonic and militarized masculinities, and neo-colonial logics influence both host societies and peace operations, leading to different and often adverse gender outcomes (Connell, 2002; Enloe, 2000; Razack, 2004); and (3) training and institutional reform are necessary but insufficient unless combined with accountability, contextual adaptation, and efforts to change masculinized organisational cultures (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Kronsell, 2006; Mackay et al., 2010). By integrating these insights, the thesis examines how UN peacekeepers navigate the practical tensions between protection and participation, addressing research question

(i). It further explores how socio-cultural power operates across various sites, addressing research question (ii), and which training and institutional reforms can help transform gender mainstreaming from empty rhetoric into real change, addressing research question (iii). This chapter reviews the relevant literature and conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to my study. The next chapter will explore the significance of the case study selected for this research.

Chapter 4: UN Peace Operations and Significance of the Bangladesh Case Study

In Chapter 3, I reviewed feminist scholarship on the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping, as well as the impacts of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. In this chapter, I portray UN peace operations as a complex process, drawing on the theoretical framework. It also discusses the context of women's participation, including the persistent underrepresentation of women. Furthermore, this chapter emphasizes the significance of Bangladeshi peacekeepers' participation as a case study.

UN Peace Operations: A Complex and Gendered Process

Contemporary peace operations involve multinational forces comprising military, police, and civilian personnel engaged in political, humanitarian, and human rights activities. The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) oversees these peacekeeping personnel and provides political and operational guidance to resolve conflicts and rebuild societies after conflict. For my thesis, it is vital to understand the goals behind deploying forces for peace operations. These missions primarily aim to end conflicts, support peace, and ensure civilian safety in countries affected by conflict. Since their inception during the Cold War, the nature of UN peacekeeping has evolved significantly. These operations now reflect the increasing complexity and scope of UN efforts. Traditional missions focused on monitoring ceasefires, while today's multidimensional peacekeeping emphasises rebuilding societies after conflict. This underscores the importance of including gender perspectives and addressing women's specific challenges within these efforts. Their work involves many development-related tasks, such as rebuilding social and educational institutions, improving social and healthcare services, delivering

transitional justice, and implementing the WPS agenda. Therefore, integrating a gender perspective remains crucial in modern peacekeeping.

The UN Security Council sets specific mandates for peace operations. These mandates are agreed upon by the main warring parties in conflict zones or territories and commit them to a political process. They are issued under Chapter VI of the UN Charter on the Pacific Settlement of Disputes or under Chapter VII on the Enforcement of Peace.⁸⁸ These mandates are guided by three core principles: the consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence and in defence of the mandate.⁸⁹

In some cases, peace is enforced through robust military operations under Chapter VII of the Charter, particularly in situations of ‘fragile peace’⁹⁰ or humanitarian catastrophes, terrorism or violent extremism. Examples of such missions include the UN’s past missions in Somalia and Mali. These robust operations underscore the UN’s commitment to maintaining peace and security in the most challenging and volatile environments. Unlike peacekeeping, peace enforcement does not require the consent of the main parties to the conflict. However, any UN military intervention requires authorization from the Security Council, even without the consent of all warring parties. To enforce peace, the Security Council has the power to authorize various coercive measures, including economic, diplomatic, and military measures, to restore and maintain international peace and security.⁹¹ Sometimes, peacekeeping fails to establish peace and security because violence

⁸⁸ For further details please see the full text of the UN Charter at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

⁸⁹ For more information please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>

⁹⁰ Ibid. ‘Fragile peace’ can be defined as a volatile peace process influenced by several factors, including the absence of universal consent from all warring parties, the lack of local consent (often controlled by independent armed groups), and the weakness and corruption of state machinery, which hampers the consolidation of peace and security.

⁹¹ See Chapter VII (articles 39-51) of the Charter and [Principles of peacekeeping | United Nations Peacekeeping](#)

against civilians continues even after ceasefire agreements and during peace processes (Braunmühl, 2013; Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006). There have been cases where peacekeepers themselves have become perpetrators, engaging in gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of local populations (Oswald, 2016; Otto, 2007; Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). Conversely, peacekeepers in some regions have been targeted by armed groups and extremist violence (Giray, 2023; Salverda, 2013).

Managing peace operations has become increasingly complex in the post-Cold War era, as conflicts are not only intricate and gendered but also sporadic and widespread, occurring in diverse locations such as Haiti, Timor-Leste, Kosovo, and the DRC. These countries have notably different political, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. While some similarities exist, the histories of conflict in these nations are not uniform. This diversity complicates peacekeeping efforts, which require tailored strategies for each context. Gender relations within populations affected by conflict often differ significantly. As a result, the character of gendered conflicts varies greatly, highlighting the need for nuanced security and peace policies. By exploring these complexities, my research aims to understand how gender dynamics shape peace operations and the effectiveness of policies designed to promote peace and security across diverse conflict environments.

As previously noted, modern-day peacekeeping encompasses not only SSR and DDR but also peacebuilding efforts that include humanitarian activities, democratic reforms, electoral processes, judicial reforms, human rights advocacy, and socio-economic development (Heathcote & Otto, 2014; Shepherd, 2014a). Across these areas, gender plays an increasingly crucial role. For instance, even in SSR, peacekeepers might train local police to foster community-based policing and raise awareness of gender equality, which can vary across societies. Police must understand that rape can be committed for political or communal reasons and may be directly connected to

security issues. In DDR, they may need to work with former combatants to determine eligibility for rehabilitation benefits, including establishing who qualifies as a combatant and who does not. According to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Databases, the definition of combatants differs. In most states, combatants include all members of the armed forces except medical and religious personnel. Peacekeepers need to be familiar with these nuanced definitions and approaches when identifying actors and community members, often applying a gendered perspective. In some cases, they might have to conduct a gendered analysis of these definitions and parameters to respond effectively to local needs.

To illustrate this further, DDR is the main focus of peacekeeping efforts. Due to gender bias, marginalized men and women fighters, as well as child rebels, are often excluded from DDR or peace processes because they do not fit the typical definition of combatants. Victims are also excluded, so the issue is not only about who qualifies as a combatant. DDR involves a rehabilitation package that offers financial benefits. Therefore, classifying ‘combatants’ is essential for peacekeeping missions to carry out the DDR process and distribute financial aid. Exclusion can be highly gendered, based on identity and on different definitions of combatants. Such exclusion risks reinforcing existing power structures and gendered social norms, potentially causing disillusionment among populations whose participation in peace processes is crucial (Basini, 2013; Kaufman & Williams, 2013). Peacekeepers must navigate these post-conflict scenarios and address the complexities of various gendered identities, including race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and nationality, during post-conflict rebuilding.

Regarding the geography of deployment, apart from a few missions in Europe, most peace operations are deployed in developing countries⁹², such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo

⁹² For reference, please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate>

(DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Haiti⁹³, South Sudan, the Middle East, India, and Pakistan, all of which have been colonized at some point in their history. Uniformed personnel for these peace operations come from 121 UN member states. The most significant contributors of troops and police are developing countries, such as Nepal, India, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Senegal, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia.⁹⁴

As of 31 August 2025, there are eleven active missions, approximately sixty-eight thousand peacekeepers, and an approved annual budget of US\$5.6 billion for the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.⁹⁵ More than seven thousand civilian personnel are working in various UN peace operations. Uniformed personnel, including military and police troops as well as staff officers, total 61,049, comprising 54,802 males and 6,247 females, and were deployed by 121 countries as of 31 August 2025.⁹⁶ It is encouraging that the percentage of female peacekeepers has steadily increased. By the end of August 2025, 10 percent of uniformed peacekeepers (military and police combined) were female, up from 7.9 percent in June 2022, 6.4 percent in June 2020, 5.3 percent in February 2019, 5.1 percent in October 2018, and 4.7 percent in April 2018.⁹⁷ About 90 percent of troops come from the national military, while only 10 percent of police are deployed by the national police.

⁹³ The UN's mission in Haiti has been closed since 15 October 2019. For details see: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13987.doc.htm>

⁹⁴ For reference, please see https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_70_january_2024.pdf

⁹⁵ Please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data>

⁹⁶ For further details, please see: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07-gender_statistics_89_august_2025.pdf

⁹⁷ I recorded and preserved data on the increase in the number of female peacekeepers during the writing of this thesis in order to analyze the trend. Reference: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender>

In 1993, women made up of only 1% of deployed uniformed personnel in UN Peacekeeping missions. By 2020, this had risen to 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units. The UN, through its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028, aims to significantly increase women's participation in peacekeeping missions.⁹⁸ This ambitious policy goal seeks to create a more inclusive and balanced UN peacekeeping force, potentially enhancing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations.

The responsibility for deploying female peacekeepers rests with the UN member states.⁹⁹ According to the UN, increasing the number of women in peacekeeping is not only about gender equality but also improves the effectiveness of operations by enhancing decision-making and planning. This policy leads to greater diversity and a wider range of skills. Women peacekeepers are believed to have better access to communities, promote human rights, build trust, and serve as role models, which helps prevent and reduce conflict. This, in turn, ensures better protection of civilians and encourages local women's participation in peace and political processes.¹⁰⁰

The Security Council resolution outlines the mission's mandate and size, specifying its responsibilities.¹⁰¹ Although peacekeeping mandates set limits on the number of military and police personnel, there is no specific guidance on deploying female peacekeepers. While UN resolutions call for greater inclusion of female peacekeepers, there is no strategic policy or programme to ensure that at least 20 percent of troops are female. Nonetheless, involving female peacekeepers in peace operations remains vital to fostering gender inclusiveness and balance in

⁹⁸ By 2028, the targets are set at 15 percent for women in military contingents, 25 percent for military observers and staff officers, 20 percent for formed police units, and 30 percent for individual police officers. For the full strategy, please see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-2018-2028.pdf>

⁹⁹ For reference, please see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ For reference, please see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/deploying-peacekeepers>

UN peacekeeping efforts and to meeting the criteria of UNSCR 1325. Further details are provided below.

Gender Mainstreaming and the Presence of Female Peacekeepers

The presence of female peacekeepers is often viewed as a sign of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. As noted in Chapter 1, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1997) defines gender mainstreaming as a strategy that integrates the concerns and experiences of both men and women as essential components of policies and programmes, ensuring that both benefit equally. The primary aim of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.¹⁰²

Through UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions (1325+), the UN has emphasized the importance of expanding women's roles in its operations, including the deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers. The A4P (Action for Peacekeeping) and A4P+ initiatives, vital in this context, highlight the WPS agenda as crucial for improving peacekeeping performance by supporting women's participation in peace processes and increasing their representation in peacekeeping roles. The UN Secretary-General's launch of A4P in March 2018, focusing on the following key areas, marked a significant step in strengthening peacekeeping. The eight priority commitment areas are politics; women, peace and security; protection, safety and security; performance and accountability; peacebuilding and sustaining peace; partnerships; conduct of peacekeepers; and peacekeeping operations.¹⁰³

A4P+ is a follow-up initiative launched by the UN Secretary-General in March 2021. The initiative incorporates WPS as a core theme. Embedding the WPS agenda throughout A4P+ creates

¹⁰² For details, please see page 2 of <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF> from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gender-mainstreaming>

¹⁰³ Reference <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>

a positive multiplier effect by ensuring women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace and political processes. This comprehensive integration of the gender and WPS agenda across all aspects of peacekeeping is considered vital to improving operational efficiency and maintaining long-term peace.¹⁰⁴

A4P+ does not replace A4P; instead, it reinforces the original initiative. The seven A4P+ priorities are collective coherence behind a political strategy, strategic and operational integration, capabilities and mindsets, accountability to peacekeepers, accountability of peacekeepers, strategic communications, and cooperation with host countries. The Declaration of Shared Commitments has been endorsed by 150 Member States, including Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, South Africa, the UK, and Germany, which have explicitly championed its implementation.¹⁰⁵

In August 2020, the UNSC unanimously adopted resolution 2538, urging member states to support efforts to increase the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in all roles, including senior leadership (UNSCR 2538, 2020, preambular paragraph 5). While the resolution promotes equal access and participation for women peacekeepers and encourages member states to remove barriers to their full involvement, it does not explicitly mention 'gender equality.' The resolution recognizes that "the presence of women and a better balance between men and women among peacekeepers contribute to, among others, greater credibility of the missions among the populations, more effective community engagement, and enhance protection responses" (preambular paragraph 6).

Resolution 2538 further underscored the importance of increasing the number of women in the military and police by highlighting the unique contributions women can make to the mission.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Reference at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>

However, this perspective reflects gender essentialism and overlooks the need for equal opportunities for women peacekeepers. Consequently, there is tension over how to increase the number of female troops. Some might argue that gender essentialism could serve as a useful strategy for promoting gender equality in challenging environments. They may adopt an approach that emphasizes women's unique contributions, encouraging more women to join the forces and serve as role models within their communities.

Peacekeeping missions are not designed to recruit a set number of female peacekeepers to serve as role models for women in host or sending communities. However, the presence of female peacekeepers can positively influence these communities. This has been demonstrated by the A4P and A4P+ initiatives, which aim to renew commitment to UN peacekeeping operations, strengthen civilian protection, improve peacekeeper performance and accountability, and enhance their safety and security. Furthermore, UNSCR 2242 (2015) and UNSCR 2538 (2020) encouraged stakeholders to increase the number of female peacekeepers in UN peace operations through targeted strategies and incentives. UNSCR 2242 (2015) highlighted “the need for greater resourcing, accountability, political will and attitudinal change” to promote women's meaningful involvement in sustainable and effective post-conflict reconstruction, while UNSCR 2538 (2020) called for “a strategy to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peacekeeping.” These resolutions underscore the importance of systemic reforms to achieve gender equality in peacekeeping operations.

The narratives above examine women's recruitment strategies from strategic, policy, and organizational perspectives. At the strategic and policy levels, representatives from UN member states and UN Headquarters staff participate in decision-making. Resolutions negotiated among member states provide strategic direction for UN officials to develop policies. However,

operational levels of peacekeeping missions can differ significantly. Recruiting women solely to meet gender mainstreaming quotas as a ‘problem-solving tool’ can be problematic. As noted in Chapter 3, this approach highlights the challenges of effectively implementing UNSCR 1325. These challenges include limited resources and training for female peacekeepers, persistent gender stereotypes and discrimination, and the difficulty of integrating gender perspectives into the mission’s daily activities.

Despite the challenges, mainstreaming remains crucial for women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding. Female peacekeepers can serve as role models within their communities, fostering cultural shifts and challenging stereotypes, thereby empowering local women in host areas. Although their roles as UN staff may not ensure substantial societal change towards gender equality, they exemplify empowerment for local women. The advancement of local women and girls largely depends on support from host communities. If communities do not endorse this approach, the goals of UNSCR 1325 will remain unmet, and gender inequality will persist. These insights have been valuable for my thesis and are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Significance of the Case Study of Bangladeshi Peacekeepers

As mentioned earlier, I have adopted a case-study methodology and selected Bangladeshi peacekeepers as the subjects of my study. Bangladesh’s armed and police forces are predominantly male in absolute numbers, authority, seniority, and rank. However, the country is committed to increasing the number of female troops in its peacekeeping contingents.

Since 2005, more than 3,645 female peacekeepers from Bangladesh have served in UN peace operations through April 2025.¹⁰⁶ The country has deployed All-Female FPU to Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the DRC (MONUSCO). In 2016, it sent its first military (medical) contingent

¹⁰⁶ Reference: [UN Day Journal 2025 .pdf](#)

led by a female commander to Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).¹⁰⁷ In 2017, Bangladesh sent two female combat pilots to the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) for the first time. This event was widely highlighted across the UN as a breakthrough in challenging gender stereotypes. The poster featuring two uniformed female pilots in front of their helicopter has long been used as a symbol of women's participation in UN peacekeeping.¹⁰⁸ In January 2019, the Bangladesh Army sent its first-ever Female Engagement Team (FET), consisting of female Army officers and soldiers, to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).¹⁰⁹ Beyond South Sudan, Bangladesh also deployed a 122-member FET to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2021.¹¹⁰ Despite the importance of FETs, there is no publicly accessible evaluation of their performance that assesses their achievements and challenges.

The case study of Bangladeshi peacekeepers offers a compelling opportunity for several reasons. First, it provides a platform to examine how peacekeeping personnel interpret gender mainstreaming and how this understanding shapes their roles under the protection of civilians (POC) mandate. Second, it allows an exploration of how these peacekeepers perceive gender equality (and inequality) within the communities they serve and the nation they represent, as well as the challenges they typically face in unforeseen situations involving gender disparities and cultural differences, which may also be gendered. Finally, the study examines peacekeepers'

¹⁰⁷ Reference: <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/first-female-officer-leads-contingent-783856>

¹⁰⁸ Please see <https://minujusth.unmissions.org/en/pk70-7-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-participation-women-peacekeeping-operations>

¹⁰⁹ For reference, please see <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/03/11/female-army-officers-get-commendation-for-their-role-in-un-mission> and <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/female-bangladeshi-peacekeepers-inspire-women-of-wau-to-join-security-forces> and <https://afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/female-participation>

¹¹⁰ For reference, please see: <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/562615/Bangladeshi-female-peacekeepers-play-vital-role-in-UN-missions>

experiences implementing UNSCR 1325 in the field, as well as their views on the significance and challenges of the WPS agenda.

Furthermore, as noted in the Introduction, Bangladesh's leadership in advocating for the adoption of UNSCR 1325 at the Security Council was vital. With a strong policy commitment at the UN Headquarters in New York, practical implementation becomes even more important. Although the country has played a key role in initiating the WPS agenda and supporting UNSCR 1325, transforming this high-level dedication into a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy remains an ongoing effort. High-level diplomatic commitment within the UN marks a significant step forward. However, full implementation on the ground requires overcoming structural challenges within traditionally masculinized institutions such as the military and police. I discuss some of these challenges in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

The theories presented in Chapter 3 suggest that the UN often struggles to effectively mainstream gender at the operational level when it focuses solely on counting women and treats UNSCR 1325 as a simple problem-solving tool (Detraz, 2012; Dharmapuri, 2011; Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Valenius, 2007). However, these theories have limitations; they do not offer insights into the actual challenges encountered in the field. Gaining such insights is crucial for improving peacekeeping effectiveness, particularly in advancing gender mainstreaming, incorporating gender perspectives into civilian protection, and preventing CRSV, SEA, and communal violence or ethnic cleansing. These insights are also vital for planning peacebuilding efforts that follow successful ceasefires, DDR, SSR, and peace consolidation. Direct engagement with peacekeepers to learn about their experiences was essential for developing a clearer understanding of the situation on the ground. While these theories inform my work and

understanding, their limitations become apparent when trying to grasp the realities of UN peacekeeping missions, especially regarding the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the field.

The case of Bangladesh is particularly compelling, as the first generations of its peacekeepers brought to UN peace operations experiences from the country's colonial past, armed struggles, the 1971 liberation war, and post-war reconstruction. These peacekeepers observed similar processes in different contexts during their missions. Meanwhile, younger generations of Bangladeshi peacekeepers grew up witnessing a military regime, followed by the restoration of democracy in 1990 through a series of peaceful and violent mass movements over the decades. They have also witnessed the remnants of insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the subsequent CHT Peace Treaty with ethnic minority groups. Additionally, they have encountered sporadic social violence, intermittent political unrest, and challenges in mitigating natural disasters.¹¹¹ The Bangladeshi peacekeepers I interviewed demonstrated a deep understanding of the socio-political complexities of post-conflict situations and provided valuable insights that have been integrated into this thesis.

Despite being one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs), Bangladesh's experience in UN peace operations remains under-researched, making it a compelling area for further study. My case chapters do not position Bangladesh itself as a central explanatory variable. Instead, the focus is on the unique perspectives and experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers and policy practitioners, which are shaped by their lived experiences within the national context. Bangladesh's history, policymaking, and training frameworks provide the backdrop that informs their approaches and worldviews, even if my analysis does not explicitly highlight the country as a peacekeeping nation or entity. In this sense, while Bangladesh as a

¹¹¹ These perspectives were shared by one of my interviewees, retired Colonel Nesar of the Bangladesh Army. Some of these perspectives also stem from my lived experience growing up in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

TCC/PCC is not emphasized, the interviewees' origins matter to some extent because they influence their professional ethos, decision-making, and operational practices. This nuanced connection underscores how the national context indirectly shapes peacekeepers' contributions, even when the focus is on their individual or collective experiences rather than the country itself. This approach aligns with feminist slogans: *personal is political* and *personal is international*, as their experiences extend beyond national boundaries into international peacekeeping (Enloe, 2014).

Finally, examining the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers enhances the existing literature on gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations and on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.¹¹² Despite the absence of a national policy or official strategy for participation in UN peace operations and for gender mainstreaming within these missions, Bangladeshi peacekeepers, both individually and collectively, navigate their mandates and roles, including advancing the WPS agenda. Their shared experiences, along with the opportunities and challenges they have encountered, provide a unique and insightful perspective for this thesis.

Low Presence of Female Troops

One of the main challenges to gender mainstreaming in Bangladesh's peacekeeping efforts is the shortage of female troops. My respondents emphasized that the presence of female troops positively influences UN peace operations in many meaningful ways. However, recruiting more women for peacekeeping missions is often difficult because national armed and police forces lack enough female officers and troops to deploy. National governments and authorities of troop- and police-contributing countries face limits on sending more women due to insufficient numbers of

¹¹² Bangladesh's NAP on 1325 may be seen here: <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/bangladesh/>

female military and police personnel in their ranks. In some countries, women are not recruited at all, while others have only recently begun enrolling women in their military and police forces.

As discussed in the previous section, one way to advance the goals of UNSCR 1325 is to support the integration of women into the military and police.¹¹³ In Bangladesh, the Army began recruiting female officers in 2000 and female soldiers in 2013. Prior to this, women were recruited into the Bangladesh Army only as doctors and nurses.¹¹⁴ Although Bangladesh has been one of the largest troop-and police-contributing countries, the participation of female peacekeepers has remained low. As of August 31, 2025, Bangladesh had 5,696 peacekeepers deployed, ranking third among troop contributors.¹¹⁵ As of April 2025, only 3,645 female peacekeepers have served in UN peace operations out of 2,00,558 troops deployed from Bangladesh over the past 30 years.¹¹⁶ In April 2024, the number of female peacekeepers deployed in UN peace operations rose to 493 from 284 in March 2021. In April 2025, this number was 444.¹¹⁷

Over the past thirty years, the share of female peacekeepers from Bangladesh has remained at just 1 percent, gradually rising to about 8.5 percent by April 2024. Nevertheless, this figure still falls significantly short of the UN targets for women in military contingents, which aim for 15% for military personnel, 25% for military observers and staff officers, 20% for formed police units,

¹¹³ Reference the UN website on Women in Peacekeeping at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>

¹¹⁴ For details, please see: <http://m.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/133628>

¹¹⁵ Please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

¹¹⁶ There is currently no official data available on the deployment of female peacekeepers from Bangladesh. As of 30 April 2025, Bangladesh had 444 female peacekeepers deployed by the UN. Of the 444 female peacekeepers, 358 are from the Army, 08 from the Navy, 07 from the Air Force, and 71 from the Police. The Source of data is the UN Day Journal of the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh at [UN Day Journal 2025 .pdf](#)

¹¹⁷ References: UN Day Journal of the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh at [UN Day Journal 2025 .pdf](#) and UN's peacekeeping website at [Troop and police contributors | United Nations Peacekeeping](#)

and 30% for individual police officers (IPOs) by 2028, underscoring the need for further progress.¹¹⁸ Bangladesh has not yet reached these targets.¹¹⁹

The UN does not set limits or specific percentages for deploying female peacekeepers across its mandates. Instead, it encourages TCCs and PCCs to increase women's participation in peace operations. While the UN sets targets for gender equality, it cannot compel a member state to deploy a specific percentage of female peacekeepers, as it is a supranational body that must respect its member states' sovereignty.

Since peacekeeping missions began in 1948, more than 1 million men and women have served as peacekeepers in military, police, and civilian roles. As of August 30, 2025, a total of 4,451 peacekeepers have sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of peace,¹²⁰ and 1,135 of these deaths resulted from malicious acts, in addition to 1,414 from accidents and 1,649 from illness.¹²¹ Furthermore, many others were injured. From Bangladesh, 168 peacekeepers made the ultimate sacrifice. The casualties from Bangladesh occurred primarily in UN peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Liberia (UNMIL), Mali (MINUSMA), the DRC (MONUC), the CAR (MINUSCA), South Sudan (UNMISS), and Darfur (UNAMID).¹²²

Violence against peacekeepers is a serious issue, and the UN has legitimate concerns about the security of its personnel. However, fatality data is not gender-disaggregated, making it

¹¹⁸ Source UN website at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>

¹¹⁹ Source: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender>

¹²⁰ For details, please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Reference: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/stats_by_nationality_mission_2_112_june_2025.pdf. Out of 168 casualties from Bangladesh, 131 were from the Bangladesh Army, 04 from the Navy, 09 from the Air Force and 24 from the Bangladesh Police. Please see: [UN Day Journal 2025 .pdf](#)

impossible to determine the number of female peacekeepers' fatalities. Given the small number of female troops in UN peace operations and the special protective regime for female peacekeepers, this data is likely to be limited. Furthermore, troop- and police-contributing countries reportedly fear a decline in public support for peacekeeping if data on female peacekeepers' fatalities are published (Huber, 2022).¹²³

Conclusion

Despite more opportunities for women to serve in the military since 2000, the number of female recruits in Bangladesh's armed forces remains much lower than that of their male counterparts. Both male and female recruits must complete two to three years of training to prepare for national deployment or potential UN peacekeeping missions. Recruits must meet specific eligibility criteria to be considered for peacekeeping duties; training female soldiers alongside their male peers for these missions is a lengthy process. There is no substitute for thorough preparation when training soldiers; shortcuts are unacceptable.

While the number of female peacekeepers is a key factor for both the UN and TCCs and PCCs in fulfilling their obligations under UNSCR 1325, it is not the sole consideration. Candidates must demonstrate professional, physical, and mental fitness to qualify as peacekeepers. Recruits must pass multiple assessments, including military or police tactics, shooting, driving, and language tests, to establish eligibility. Delivering quality service across diverse UN peace operations is a critically important goal. However, female peacekeepers encounter various

¹²³ Gender-disaggregated data on fatalities could help determine the sacrifices made by women. However, I do not suggest that women are the targets of malicious attacks. Since the number of female troops is small, their fatalities would be minimal or nonexistent. The point is that the exact data on the fatalities of female troops is not known. Women peacekeepers help garner public support as they are perceived as role models for women's rights by challenging stereotypes. However, there is a belief that the death of women peacekeepers may contribute to declining public support for peacekeeping. That could be why they are protected, or the data on their fatalities is not publicized. (Huber, 2022).

(Reference: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IPI-E-RPT-Impact_of_Women_Peacekeepersweb.pdf)

professional and personal challenges. My findings on training issues and barriers faced will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. These challenges, including the low representation of female peacekeepers, highlight the need to mainstream gender in UN peace operations. The necessity of addressing socio-cultural obstacles has significantly influenced my methodological framework and choices, which are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Methodological Reflections and Methods

From a methodological perspective, studying the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in UN peacekeeping can be a complex feminist undertaking when viewed through a gender lens. I have examined some of these complexities from theoretical perspectives in Chapters 2 and 3. First, I discussed how gender is often equated with women and how gender mainstreaming is misunderstood as simply adding women to UN peace operations. Simultaneously, peacekeeping missions operate in post-conflict environments where gender inequality can become normalized (Butler, 1999; Detraz, 2012; Dharmapuri, 2011). This normalization complicates data collection because such disparities can neither be observed nor documented. Second, from a security perspective, dangerous conditions in post-conflict peacekeeping may pose various challenges to the implementation of the resolution. These challenges include violence, armed attacks, rape culture, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), among others (Puechguirbal, 2010a, 2010b; True, 2010; True & Parisi, 2013). Data on these incidents remains fragmented due to socio-political challenges and stigma. Third, the gender dynamics in post-conflict societies may reinforce patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, creating obstacles to women's equal participation in peace processes. These obstacles are not sufficiently addressed, as post-conflict societies tend to maintain the status quo in gender power relations (Parpart, 2017; Shekhawat, 2015, 2018; Turenne-Sjolander, 2005; Willet, 2010). Data on these obstacles is also obscure.

In Chapter 3, I examined feminist scholarship on the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping, focusing on the impact of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. Drawing on this theoretical background, this chapter outlines methodological reflections, the approach, and the methodological choices guiding my research project. At the beginning of

Chapter 1, I outlined the following research questions: i) What challenges do UN peacekeepers face when integrating gender equality into peace and security? ii) What socio-cultural challenges influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization? iii) What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground?

To answer these questions, I selected peacekeepers, policy practitioners, and experts with experience and knowledge of UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and gender mainstreaming. I used case study methods to explore these questions, drawing on participants' deployment experiences. The decision to focus on peacekeepers and policy practitioners from Bangladesh as a case study is significant given their notable contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, especially in promoting the participation of female peacekeepers and in addressing the unique challenges and opportunities they face in implementing UNSCR 1325.

During this process, I developed interview guidelines that included open-ended questions, enabling an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives. After collecting the data, I used a qualitative data analysis approach to interpret the information and identify recurring themes and patterns. This involved coding the data, categorizing responses, and systematically analyzing the emerging themes that arose during the interviews. The data collected help to understand the challenges faced in missions, as well as the complexities and nuances of implementing UNSCR 1325 within the context of peacekeeping. The details of this process are outlined in this chapter, demonstrating how these methodological choices and analytical techniques helped reveal the multifaceted challenges and opportunities involved in participating in UN peace operations and implementing UNSCR 1325 within these contexts. The background information, research

questions, and methodology presented above prepare readers for the subsequent discussion chapters.

Methodological Reflections

This study is grounded in feminist epistemology, which emphasizes lived experience, reflexivity, and the critical examination of power structures. I draw on post-structuralist and postmodern feminist scholarship to deconstruct dominant discourses that shape gendered knowledge in peacekeeping, challenging taken-for-granted categories such as “gender equality” and “empowerment.” This framework highlights how power, language, and institutions construct and constrain women’s participation, while keeping my analysis critically self-aware and attentive to the meanings and representations of these discursive structures (Butler, 1999; Shepherd, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014a, 2014b).

Feminist security studies (FSS) offer a lens for examining the militarization of peacekeeping, as well as the institutional portrayal of ‘men as protectors’ and ‘women as protected’ (Cohn 2004, 2008, 2013; Enloe, 2000; Parpart, 2017; Peterson, 1992, 2010; Peterson & Runyan, 1993; Runyan & Peterson, 2014; Steans, 1998, 2006, 2013; Tiessen, 2007, 2015; Tickner, 1992, 2001, 2014). FSS reveal how gendered identities are constructed and how masculine ideas influence policy (Ibid.). Methodologically, FSS shaped how I developed interview questions and interpreted narratives. For example, questions asked peacekeepers how they understood gender mainstreaming and perceptions of women’s roles within missions. The responses were analyzed not only for content but also for the discursive framing of women as agents or victims. In this way, I used FSS to uncover how UNSCR 1325 has been depoliticized into technocratic inclusion rather than a genuine transformative agenda.

Masculinity theory (Connell, 2002; Duncanson, 2015; Hooper, 2001; Whitworth, 2004) informs the analysis of peacekeeping cultures, showing how dominant and militarized masculinities are sustained within missions. Connell's (2002) concept of hegemonic masculinity and Duncanson's (2015) studies of militarized masculinity offer key insights into how peacekeeping institutions promote aggression, hierarchy, and control. Whitworth (2004) also notes that UN peacekeeping cultures often reproduce militarized masculinities, making them resistant to feminist reform. These insights shaped my methodological approach in two important ways. First, they guided the development of the coding framework: interview transcripts were examined for references to hierarchy, authority, discipline, and aggression as indicators of masculinity. Second, they informed case selection. Bangladesh, as a major TCC/PCC, offers a valuable perspective on how masculinities circulate across national and international levels, primarily through the experiences of female peacekeepers navigating patriarchal military structures at home and abroad.

Feminist institutionalists, such as Ackerly et al. (2006), Basini (2017), Caglar et al. (2013), Chappell and Waylen (2013), and Mackay et al. (2010), help explore organizational structures and implementation methods. This approach emphasizes how formal rules and informal norms interact to produce gendered outcomes. In peacekeeping, gender mainstreaming is often treated as a checklist exercise, driven by institutional incentives rather than transformative reform (Basini, 2017). Methodologically, this approach prompted me to examine organizational contexts. Policy review and content analysis were guided by questions about how UN resolutions, mandates, and training manuals encode gender. Interview questions likewise examined institutional support, leadership commitment, and accountability mechanisms (Braunmühl, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2004). FI, therefore, shaped the empirical investigation into how gender policies are implemented or undermined.

Postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty (1988), Spivak (1988), and Razack (2004) warn against universalist assumptions that obscure cultural and racial hierarchies. Whitworth (2004) and Agathangelou and Ling (2009) extend this critique to UN peacekeeping, showing how missions can perpetuate neo-colonial dynamics by portraying peacekeepers as ‘imperial defenders’ and local populations as ‘passively protected’. This perspective was methodologically significant in two ways. First, it underscored the need for reflexivity about my position as a former Bangladeshi diplomat and feminist researcher. Second, it shaped how I interpreted interview data, especially when peacekeepers described interactions with host communities. I treated these narratives not as objective truths but as perspectives shaped by national identity, race, class, and gender. Additionally, choosing Bangladesh, a contributor from the Global South, as a case study aligns with postcolonial feminist critiques that advocate decolonizing knowledge production and prioritizing perspectives from the Global South (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality emphasizes how gender intersects with race, class, nationality, and other axes of identity. In peacekeeping, female peacekeepers from the Global South often encounter forms of discrimination distinct from those faced by their counterparts from the Global North (Razack, 2004). Methodologically, this involved examining not only gender but also how race, class, and nationality shaped peacekeepers’ experiences. For example, Bangladeshi women peacekeepers navigate both the masculinized structures of the UN and the gendered expectations of Bangladeshi society. Intersectionality therefore guided the coding categories and thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

Furthermore, my thesis is a feminist project, and I have followed feminist methodology throughout. However, I have not adhered to a single, specific feminist methodology. Instead, I have adopted a range of feminist approaches. According to Tickner (in Ackerly et al., 2006),

“Feminist inquiry is a dialectical process...” (p. 21). She identifies four key methodological perspectives: first, feminist research asks feminist questions; second, it uses women’s experiences to design research that benefits women; third, it employs the theory of reflexivity; and fourth, it considers knowledge as a means of emancipation (Ibid., pp. 21-29). These perspectives have guided my research and motivated me to ask meaningful questions, design research that benefits women, critically reflect on my own positionality, and view knowledge as a tool for emancipation. This feminist lens, which I have consistently applied, has shaped my work and inspired me to contribute to the broader feminist goal of achieving gender equality and social justice.

While feminist scholars may adopt different approaches, they share a common goal: gender emancipation (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). In this research, gender emancipation means freeing individuals from gender-based discrimination and fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. I incorporated Tickner’s methodological perspectives into my study by asking feminist questions in interviews and embedding ‘reflexivity’ in my research design. These feminist questions aimed to uncover gender dynamics within peacekeeping operations and the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing UNSCR 1325. Additionally, I drew on my lived experiences, insights from my time at the UN Headquarters and elsewhere, and findings from literature reviews to shape my research and interview questions. For example, to address my research questions, I asked about female peacekeepers’ experiences in the field, the barriers they face, and the strategies they use to overcome them.

Additionally, I inquired about institutional support for gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations and the effectiveness of current policies in promoting gender equality. My approach aligns with efforts to advance gender equality in UN peace efforts. By focusing my research on women’s experiences, I aimed to keep my findings relevant and beneficial to women

and other marginalized groups. Therefore, my research supports the feminist view of knowledge as emancipation by providing insights that can enhance peacekeeping policies and practices. For instance, by exploring the challenges faced by female peacekeepers, I sought to shed light on their realities and inform potential policy changes by national authorities or the UN. These experiences directly address my research questions about the challenges peacekeepers face and the issues they observe in host communities and during peacekeeping training.

The feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ underpins my research project. This principle underscores the connection between individual experiences and larger social and political structures. The phrase ‘the personal is political’ indicates that personal experiences are not merely private; they also reflect broader political and social issues shaped by social dynamics. In this study, my interviewees share their firsthand experiences, which, while deeply personal, also highlight broader themes such as identity politics, gender dynamics, social crises, gender subjugation, discrimination, sexual exploitation and abuse, and the challenges of maintaining peace and security. These stories are not merely data points but form the core of my research, offering a human perspective on the complex issues of peacekeeping and gender relations. They illustrate how personal stories are embedded within and shaped by broader political contexts.

Building on feminist IR scholarship, I also embrace the idea that the personal is international, a concept rooted in feminist consciousness as articulated by Enloe (1990, 2014). This perspective recognizes that local and national politics, as well as international structures and processes, shape individual experiences. Structures related to UN peacekeeping missions include institutional frameworks, policies, and decision-making bodies such as the UN Security Council, the DPO, troop-contributing countries, and host communities, which collectively influence mission design, deployment, and overall peacekeeping governance. Processes include operational

mechanisms such as mandate formulation, rules of engagement, deployment, and mission evaluation, which determine how peacekeeping forces are recruited, trained, and deployed, and how they interact with host communities.¹²⁴ These international structures and processes involve direct engagement with local communities to implement ceasefires, protect civilians, conduct humanitarian interventions, establish the rule of law, and reform the electoral process, among other objectives.¹²⁵ These interactions can have a personal impact on individuals and communities through direct engagement, cultural exchange, and communication between peacekeepers and community members. By internalizing the dual awareness that the personal is political and the personal is international, my research aims to bridge the gap between personal narratives and global political dynamics through feminist methodologies. Ultimately, by combining feminist theory with qualitative research, this study shows how personal stories develop into political and international narratives, revealing the deeply gendered dynamics behind UN peacekeeping practices.

Tisdell, Merriam & Stuckey-Peyrot (2025), in *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, state, “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 19). They further identify four characteristics of qualitative research: “...the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive” (Ibid). My research methodology aligns with the qualitative approach described by Tisdell et al. (2025), as it seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning from their

¹²⁴ Reference: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/departments-of-peace-operations>

¹²⁵ Reference: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-we-do>

experiences within the context of UN peacekeeping and gender processes. I draw on interviews, policy documents, and personal observations to develop a nuanced understanding of the subject. My findings are richly descriptive and capture the complexities of gendered experiences in peacekeeping through detailed narratives and thematic analysis.

Moreover, reflexivity enabled me to critically evaluate my own position and its impact on the research process, fostering a more thoughtful and empathetic perspective. I employed ‘reflexivity’ throughout the research, regularly reflecting on and understanding my identity as both a researcher and a professional trained as a civilian peacekeeper. This dual role helped me approach the research with greater awareness of my biases and assumptions. Additionally, I drew on my personal stories, using my lived experiences to contextualize interview data in this thesis. The background and its influence on my research approach are discussed later in this chapter.

Methodological Framework

I used a multi-methods approach, including policy reviews, in-depth semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and a case study. My literature review highlighted issues related to gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations and gender discrimination in local communities hosting peacekeeping missions. My primary focus was on peacekeepers’ experiences, who shared their observations of the communities they worked with. However, I did not interview community members, so my findings rely solely on peacekeepers’ perspectives. These results illustrate how socio-cultural and political factors, such as patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, limit women’s roles in peace and security and reinforce structural inequalities. Given the topic’s broad and complex nature, I concentrated on the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

Feminist methodology and epistemology align with postpositivist and critical studies frameworks, which focus on “studying up” by examining the powerful and their institutions rather

than disadvantaged groups (Harding & Norberg, 2005, p. 3). By analyzing how power structures shape social relations, feminist research aims to promote social change. This approach seeks practical outcomes that improve the lives of women and other marginalized groups (Ibid.). In my study, I implicitly examined the power dynamics among peacekeepers and their gendered experiences within the social frameworks of UN peacekeeping missions. In this context, power dynamics refer to hierarchical interactions among male and female peacekeepers, between peacekeepers from the Global North and the Global South, and among all peacekeeping personnel when they act as a neocolonial force towards local communities (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). These dynamics can manifest as male dominance among peacekeepers and as the perceived superiority of peacekeepers from the Global North, along with power imbalances and cultural insensitivity towards local communities (Ibid.). By analyzing narratives from my interview data, I aimed to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, particularly female peacekeepers and local women, as expressed through my interviewees' perspectives.

I employed a feminist standpoint methodology to examine women's participation and agency in UN peace operations. Standpoint methodology, as proposed by feminist scholars, emphasizes research practices that are ethically and intellectually accountable to marginalized groups and that address their specific needs (Weldon in Ackerly et al., 2006, pp. 64-68). Weldon argues that a feminist standpoint is not a fixed theory but a collective, evolving agenda, shaped by women's shared efforts to challenge subordination and grounded in both empirical experience and critical reflection (Ibid). Using a standpoint methodology, my feminist approach explores the challenges of gender mainstreaming under UNSCR 1325 and the realities UN peacekeepers face in the field during their deployments. I employ standpoint methodology to investigate the

subjugation of female peacekeepers through theoretical reflections and the narratives of the peacekeepers I interviewed (Hesse-Biber, 2014). While my study aims to reveal the subjugation of local women within host communities through the experiences and observations of peacekeepers, the lack of direct engagement with these women limits the ability of standpoint methodology to be fully and authentically applied.

Most feminist theorists argue that without actively engaging those affected, the analysis risks reinforcing the very power dynamics it aims to challenge. However, the insights of peacekeepers who have closely observed these situations and shared their experiences with me should not be dismissed as mere second-hand knowledge. While this information is not directly sourced from the affected individuals, it comes from those who have interacted closely with them and observed the context first-hand. This perspective is crucial because it captures a vital part of on-the-ground experiences and illuminates the real, local-level challenges. Nevertheless, feminist standpoint theory has been criticized by supporters of feminist critical theory and postmodernism, who argue that relying solely on women's experiences may not fully capture the complexities of gender (Turenne-Sjolander, Smith & Stienstra, 2003, p. 8). To address this, I incorporated feminist critical theory to explore the emancipatory potential of gender mainstreaming and the vulnerabilities faced by female peacekeepers in UN peace operations. For example, I used feminist critical theory to critique how gender mainstreaming is applied in UN peace operations, questioning whether it genuinely challenges patriarchal norms or merely 'adds women' without addressing more profound structural inequalities (Dharmapuri, 2011). I also highlighted the specific challenges faced by female peacekeepers, such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and limited opportunities for professional growth. Furthermore, I employed feminist postmodernism to better understand the evolving identities of female peacekeepers and local women in host

communities (Turenne-Sjolander, Smith & Stienstra, 2003). For instance, I examined how the identities of female peacekeepers in all-female FPU in Haiti and the DRC, as well as in military units in the CAR, are continually negotiated within the hierarchical and often masculinized environment of peace operations. I also explored how gender inequality remains particularly pronounced in post-conflict societies, especially regarding efforts to seek redress for SEA or transitional justice.

In Chapter 2, I identified various models of gender mainstreaming, particularly integrationist and transformationalist approaches, and their impacts on UN peace operations (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; True & Parisi, 2013). I also examined gaps in gender mainstreaming, noting that treating it as a ‘problem-solving tool’ rather than a ‘conceptual tool’ (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010) may inadvertently reinforce gender essentialism and the ‘protector-protected binary’ (Braunmühl, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010). Empirical research reveals a range of challenges shaped by contextual factors, including cultural norms and local expressions of gender discrimination, which also relate to research question (i).

Scholars in masculinities studies, including Duncanson (2009), Hooper (1998, 2001), Parpart and Zalewski (2008), and Zalewski and Parpart (1998), as well as critical feminist scholars such as Porter (2003) and Shekhawat (2015, 2018), have thoroughly documented issues associated with patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. In the context of peacekeeping, I examined how violence against women becomes normalized (Manchanda, 2005; Oswald, 2016; Simić, 2010), with a specific focus on SEA incidents reported by my interviewees that relate to research question (ii) on socio-cultural challenges. I briefly examined attitudinal and institutional barriers, highlighting their interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement. These insights are drawn from

the *Global Study*, the *HIPPO Report*, and subsequent UN reports and resolutions, which highlight the systemic and practical challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming. They also provide a deeper understanding of how these barriers are maintained within peacekeeping, especially through training. My study emphasizes the importance of overcoming these obstacles to improve peacekeeping and peacekeeping training, addressing research question (iii).

I have further employed post-structural and postcolonial frameworks to examine how racism, sexism, imperialism, exploitation, and colonialism intersect within gender mainstreaming (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Hansen, 2010; Razack, 2002, 2004; Shepherd, 2008, 2014a, 2014b; Steans, 2006, 2013; Whitworth, 2003). Specifically, feminist postcolonial scholars have shown how differences in race, sex, culture, and colonial or imperial contexts challenge mainstream gender approaches. These intersecting factors sustain ongoing inequalities, reinforcing structural violence and discrimination. My approach is rooted in human rights and the principle of gender equality in peace processes, focusing on understanding women's unique strengths and their aspirations for agency in peace operations (Hudson et al., 2009; Mazurana et al., 2005; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010).

My Standpoint

In line with feminist reflexivity, my positionality is significant given my background as a former diplomat at the UN, where I advocated for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. As a female foreign service officer from a developing country, I worked to advance the commitment to its implementation in UN peace operations. My PhD research in feminist and gender studies, driven by my 'feminist curiosity', has been shaped by my lived experiences navigating gender discrimination in a male-dominated workplace. Additionally, as a mother of three boys, I constantly struggle to balance professional and academic goals with parenting. This places me in

a similar position to the female peacekeepers I interviewed, at least insofar as I experience the tension between demanding professional and personal responsibilities. These life realities have positioned me alongside my interviewees (Harding, 1987). I feel solidarity with them as I encounter similar challenges in pursuing my professional life.

I have used self-reflection to verify my empirical findings and to consider my positionality. This approach involves examining my experiences and biases, which have helped me understand how they shape my interpretation of barriers and their reinforcement. Drawing on my professional background at the UN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangladesh, as well as my training as a civilian peacekeeper in South Africa, I employ self-reflection (Appendix I). I have applied my knowledge and experience to further validate empirical data following my participation in the UN Department of Operational Support's Senior Women Talent Pipeline. For over a decade, I have engaged with many uniformed and civilian peacekeepers, primarily women, on this platform through virtual meetings and online training (Appendix H).

Although my professional experience at the UN and personal encounters with female peacekeepers inspired this study, I did not treat my emotions and perspectives as primary data. I presented my personal stories as supplementary, not formal, data to provide context grounded in my lived experiences. These individual stories remain part of this dissertation's background. At the same time, I highlight the experiences of female peacekeepers and create space to explore their emotions, frustrations, and resilience, voices that are often marginalized in traditional peacekeeping research. I emphasize my own precarity as a foreign service officer in the Prologue and examine the precarity of female peacekeepers throughout this thesis. By raising this oppositional awareness, I challenge the dominant power structures that uphold sexism and misogyny in peacekeeping. Although I have incorporated some aspects of autoethnography in this

thesis (Ellis, 2004; Ettore, 2017), I cannot claim to have fully employed this methodology in my systematic analysis.

While attending conferences at the UN, I became acutely aware of reports documenting human rights abuses around the world, especially those targeting women, children, minorities, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples. I also observed that human rights mechanisms at the UN were often politicized, particularly within the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. I attended sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Commission for Social Development, and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Serving as a key representative for a UN General Assembly resolution on the ‘Culture of Peace’ further strengthened my commitment to international peace and security. Working alongside my counterpart from the United Kingdom, I co-chaired negotiations to draft a resolution titled ‘Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all national policies and programs.’ The resolution was adopted at the 49th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005. During these negotiations, I gained insights into postcolonialism and neo-imperialism and observed stark divisions between the Global North and the Global South. I have used these experiences to shape the methodology of this thesis, which is grounded in a feminist standpoint and self-reflection.

The most valuable insights I gained came from discussions with fellow delegates and NGO representatives focused on women, peace, and security. They shared their stories and wisdom, deepening my understanding. I was regularly enlightened in the meeting rooms, corridors, and cafeteria of UN Headquarters in New York through both formal and informal discussions and social interactions, which became a significant part of my lived experience.

Methods

Methodology and methods are distinct yet connected concepts in research. Methodology concerns the theory and analysis of how research should be conducted, whereas methods are the techniques and procedures used to understand the problem, gather relevant data, and analyse evidence (Harding, 1987; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Tickner in Ackerly, Stern and True, 2006). Many techniques fall under the methodology umbrella, including ethnography, discourse analysis, content analysis, focus groups, surveys, interviews, and others (Ibid).

I have adopted a multi-method approach that includes interviews, policy reviews, and content analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2014). My primary method was interviewing relevant stakeholders, one of the most important techniques for studying the problems of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. I conducted twenty-three interviews to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues. As Kronsell (2006) notes, interviews “provide an in-depth detailed account of how gendered practices are carried out within institutions as well as how gendered identities are constructed and contested” (p.122). However, relying solely on interviews can be limiting and, at times, problematic. Kronsell (2006) further highlights this problem in her study of the Swedish armed forces, stating, “Since a woman challenges the hegemonic masculinity of the institutions by her mere appearance, the interview setting can accentuate that challenge further. So, we had to look for narratives elsewhere” (Ibid.). My secondary sources included numerous publicly accessible online sources, documents, and reports. The details of my research process are presented in the next section.

Research Process

Through qualitative research, I examined policies, programs, and trends in gender mainstreaming within UN peacekeeping operations, as well as the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UN missions. Below, I outline the steps taken in this research.

1. Studied the adoption and significance of UNSCR 1325, subsequent resolutions (1325+), UN reports, and UN peacekeeping mandates.
2. Reviewed literature, policies, and content to identify limitations, opportunities, and challenges in implementing UNSCR 1325.
3. Examined the socio-political and cultural contexts of post-conflict societies.
4. Conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews.
5. Analyzed interview data.
6. Employed qualitative research methods.
7. Conducted thematic analysis.
8. Applied Feminist Methodology.

The steps above were not always sequential and occasionally overlapped. The specifics of these steps are explained in the following sections.

My research journey began with a comprehensive literature review, a crucial step that deepened my understanding of the challenges of gender mainstreaming. This review, which involved analyzing existing research, reports, and case studies from various sources, including academic journals and books, UN policy documents, resolutions, and reports, as well as NGO and independent reports, was essential for identifying the interconnected and mutually reinforcing barriers that hinder the integration of gender equality into UN peace operations.¹²⁶ This thorough

¹²⁶ Key works that offered valuable insights into these barriers include those by Basini (2013, 2017), Braunmühl (2013), Ellerby in Gentry et al. (2019), Karim & Beardsley (2013, 2016, 2017), Olsson & Gizelis (2013), Parpart

literature review made me well-informed about the research landscape surrounding gender mainstreaming in peace operations.

I examined the origins of UNSCR 1325 and its significance for UN peace operations. My research drew on the UN Secretary-General's recent reports, documents from independent and expert panels, organizational guidelines, the *Capstone Doctrine* on UN peacekeeping, relevant peacekeeping mandates, strategies from DPO, DFS, and UN Women, and other related UN resolutions and NGO documents. This enabled a comprehensive content analysis of the resolution's framework and its implications. I also focused on the theoretical basis of the WPS agenda to explore opportunities for gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, the gendered aspects of UN peacekeeping, the challenges of implementing UNSCR 1325, and the broader impacts on achieving sustainable peace and gender equality in conflict-affected societies.

As part of my research, I conducted an extensive policy review, beginning with UNSCR 1325 and then examining subsequent resolutions within the WPS agenda, collectively known as 1325+. I reviewed relevant UN policy documents and initiatives, including the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, the A4P and A4P+ initiatives, and the Ministerial Conferences on the WPS agenda. This foundational work was complemented by a detailed analysis of annual reports, speeches by the UN Secretary-General, and UN press releases. For example, I examined key reports such as the *Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325* and the *High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO)* Report of 2015. These reports provide a thorough review of the implementation of UNSCR 1325, highlighting successes and challenges in gender mainstreaming.

(2014, 2017), Porter (2003), Puechguirbal (2003, 2010a, 2010b), Shekhawat (2015, 2018), Shepherd (2008, 2014a), Tiessen (2007, 2015), True & Parisi (2013), Turenne-Sjolander (2005), Valenius (2007), and Willet (2010), among others.

I examined the socio-political and cultural contexts of peace operations in Haiti, Sudan, South Sudan, Afghanistan, the DRC, and the CAR. This involved analyzing the backgrounds of these operations and identifying specific challenges faced by UN peacekeepers, such as embedded gender inequalities, patriarchal structures, rape culture, and the subjugation of women. After a comprehensive review, I identified gaps in the existing literature. To address these gaps, I formulated research question (i) on the challenges peacekeepers encounter when integrating gender equality into peace and security, and research question (ii) on sociocultural issues related to patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. I also questioned, through research question (iii), whether the training provided to peacekeepers is sufficient for implementing the WPS agenda in the field.

This practical approach enabled me to explore the realities of peace operations and identify gaps and pitfalls in implementing UNSCR 1325. Drawing on interview data, I identified new themes in relevant contexts, including hegemonic masculinity and militarization, Kalashnikov culture, gender injustice, sexual exploitation and abuse, and gender essentialism in training, recruitment, and deployment. I highlighted the participation of female peacekeepers in the all-female FPU in Haiti. Furthermore, I analyzed the limitations of implementing UNSCR 1325, highlighting areas where the resolution's impact has been limited, including local ownership and transitional justice.

I conducted a policy review and content analysis of secondary data sources, including UN reports, independent inquiry reports, and media coverage (see Table 2), using qualitative research methods. To conduct a systematic analysis, I began with the UN Charter, which established the United Nations and its principles of equality and non-discrimination. The Charter includes provisions for UN peacekeeping in Chapter 6, covering the Pacific Settlement of Disputes, and in

Chapter 7, which addresses Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression. I also reviewed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the most comprehensive blueprint for women's rights, peace, and security. Additionally, I considered the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, as a key global normative framework for promoting gender equality.

UNSCR 1325 is the foundation of this thesis. I also examined the ten subsequent resolutions known as 1325+, which together form the normative framework of the Gender, Peace, and Security Agenda. I further explored the definition of gender mainstreaming in the 1997 Agreed Conclusions of ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) and in the UN Women policy document on gender mainstreaming. Additionally, I reviewed the *Capstone Doctrine*, which outlines the principles and guidelines for UN peacekeeping. My reading also included documents such as the UN's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017), the policy on Gender-Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2024), and the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028), which together create a framework for achieving gender equality within UN systems, including peace operations.

I consulted the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13) to understand the UN's guidance on offences such as SEA. I reviewed the UN Secretary-General's WPS reports, which provide annual updates on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and highlight challenges in gender mainstreaming. I also examined independent audits and evaluation reports by external agencies, such as the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). Furthermore, I referred to Mission Mandates in relevant Security Council resolutions that establish or renew peacekeeping missions, often including provisions on gender mainstreaming.

I dedicated time to analyzing UN peacekeeping training materials. I reviewed DPO training resources that instruct peacekeepers on gender mainstreaming and the WPS agenda. I examined the Pre-Deployment Training Modules and Materials that prepare peacekeepers for gender issues before deployment. Additionally, I studied BIPSOT (Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training) materials, especially those related to gender, UNSCR 1325, and gender mainstreaming. I also reviewed several independent reports on women's participation in peace processes, assessing their involvement in peace negotiations, decision-making, and leadership. Furthermore, I evaluated reports on barriers to women's participation, including studies that identify obstacles to women's full engagement in peace operations, such as the Baseline Report and the UN Secretary-General's reports, which highlight challenges such as gender-based misconduct in peacekeeping operations and SEA. I also reviewed independent assessments of the UN's efforts to address SEA in peacekeeping missions, such as OIOS reports. This analysis helped identify recurring themes and systemic issues related to gender mainstreaming. For example, the UN Secretary-General's reports on Women, Peace, and Security often highlight specific barriers and provide context for understanding their effects. The following table lists documents to illustrate the breadth of my research; however, this list is not exhaustive and may not include all sources used in this thesis.

Table 2

Policy Review and Content Analysis

Type	Policy/subject matter	Example documents/contents
UN policy documents	UN Policy Frameworks on Equality, Peacekeeping, UNSCR 1325 and Gender Mainstreaming	UN Charter (1945) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

		UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) Subsequent WPS Resolutions known as 1325+: UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), 2493 (2019) and 2538 (2020) ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions on Gender Mainstreaming, 1997 United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: <i>Principles and Guidelines (Capstone Doctrine)</i>, 2008
UN policy documents	UN System-Wide Gender Mainstreaming Policies	UN System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017) UN Policy on Gender-Responsive Peacekeeping (2018) DPO/DFS Gender Parity Strategy (2018) UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13) UN Women's policy document on gender mainstreaming
UN reports	Reports on Challenges and Gaps	UN Secretary-General's Reports on WPS Independent Reviews and Audits: Reports by external bodies, such as the Office of Internal Overseas Services (OIOS). Global Study on UNSCR 1325 (2015) HIPPO Report 2015
UN websites	Mission-Specific Documents	Mission Mandates Gender Strategies and Action Plans Mission websites
Other sources	Training and Capacity-Building Resources	DPO Training Materials and Resources Pre-Deployment Training Modules and Materials BIPSOT (Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training) Training Materials

Independent reports	Reports on Women's Participation	Reports on Women's Participation in Peace Processes Barriers to Women's Participation, such as the Baseline Report
UN documents	Reports on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)	UN Secretary-General's Reports OIOS Reports on SEA
UN programmes	Reports on Gender and DDR, SSR, etc.	Gender and DDR Frameworks: Documents outlining how gender perspectives are integrated into DDR processes Case Studies on Gender Mainstreaming
Other studies	Academic and Civil Society Reports	Research Studies: Academic and think-tank analyses of gender mainstreaming in peace operations NGO Reports: Assessments by civil society organizations, such as Peace Women or Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the NGO Working Group on WPS Armed Forces Division (AFD) of Bangladesh's annual journals are published on the International Peacekeeping Day
UN websites	Gender Statistics	UN Peacekeeping Personnel Statistics Data on the representation of women and men in peacekeeping missions, including military, police, and civilian personnel

I used thematic analysis to categorize and interpret patterns in interview data and secondary sources. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data... and interpreting various aspects of the research topic” (p. 6). This approach helped me identify how specific barriers to gender equality are reinforced over time. For example, when multiple interviewees reported similar challenges related to institutional policies, this pattern indicated systemic reinforcement of those barriers. I evaluated how specific barriers persist or change by comparing data across peacekeeping missions and

periods. Additionally, I highlighted that transforming training and awareness initiatives could help overcome these barriers and lessen their adverse impact on female peacekeepers and local women. I briefly examined gender training programs for Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

To further validate the information gathered from my interviews, I conducted a content analysis of various UN websites, particularly those managed by the DPO and relevant field missions. This comprehensive validation process ensured the reliability of the research findings. Additionally, I found policy briefs from UN Women and NGOs such as Peace Women/WILPF especially insightful. The annual journals of the Armed Forces Division (AFD) of Bangladesh for 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2024 provided further insight into Bangladesh's peacekeeping policies, strategies, and realities. These extensive, systematic readings complemented the scholarly articles and books I examined during my doctoral research, offering a thorough framework for my study.

I systematically categorized documents by relevance to my research themes using software such as NVivo and Zotero. I used NVivo to analyze my interview data and a selection of UN documents, including resolutions and reports. I used Zotero to store all my documents and references with notes and to create a bibliography for each item in APA style.¹²⁷ Each document was carefully examined to extract key information, themes, and trends that aligned with my research objectives. I used a thematic analysis approach, identifying recurring patterns and linking them to the broader context of the WPS agenda and UN peace operations. This thematic analysis was vital for contextualizing my interview data, which will be discussed later in this chapter. By comparing the content of official documents, reports, and speeches with the insights from my interviewees, I identified consistencies, discrepancies, and gaps. This comparative analysis enriched my understanding of the subject, allowing me to situate the interview data within a well-

¹²⁷ American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition citation style.

established policy and operational framework. Consequently, the document analysis served as both a validation tool and a means to enhance the depth and reliability of the interview findings.

By categorizing and analyzing these themes, I could draw meaningful and realistic conclusions about the challenges of implementing UNSCR 1325 and the broader implications for gender mainstreaming in peace operations. Following this rigorous process, this research concludes that UN peacekeepers face multifaceted challenges in addressing gender inequality, which restrict effective peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. It also concludes that the lack of gender integration in peacekeeping units limits the successful implementation of UNSCR 1325. The study further demonstrates that gender training is adopted as a ‘problem-solving tool’ rather than an ‘analytical tool’. It also illuminates that patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization impede the transformational goal of achieving gender equality and social justice.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews for my empirical study, adopting a qualitative approach grounded in in-depth conversations. I selected a sample of twenty-two participants, which I considered sufficient to gather the necessary information. I stopped expanding my sample once I reached data saturation, as I was no longer gaining new insights or themes and the data became repetitive. I focused on depth rather than breadth, consistent with qualitative research methodology, to obtain rich, detailed insights into participants’ experiences and perspectives. This resulted in 23 interviews with 22 participants. The sample included ten officers from the Armed Forces of Bangladesh: eight from the Bangladesh Army and two from the Navy. I interviewed two UN staff members deployed in separate peacekeeping missions: one was a former Air Force officer working as an expert, and the other was a civilian staff member. Additionally, I interviewed six police peacekeepers to gather their field experiences.

I spoke with two policy practitioners associated with the Bangladesh government and former members of the UN Committee on the CEDAW. One was a former Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, deeply involved in Bangladesh's peacekeeping policy. Additionally, I interviewed two external experts: one with extensive knowledge of gender mainstreaming in Bangladesh's peacekeeping and the National Action Plan on the WPS agenda, and another specializing in post-conflict reconstruction who served as the World Bank's representative in Afghanistan. Of the twenty-two participants, ten were women and twelve were men. Eighteen had served in various conflict zones, including Afghanistan, the DRC, Darfur (Sudan), South Sudan, the CAR, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Mali, Kosovo, Georgia and Abkhazia, Haiti, Timor-Leste, and Lebanon (Appendix A). As a result, my interview transcripts are rich with stories and experiences, making my dissertation well-informed and full of insights into gender mainstreaming across geographically diverse peace operations. A brief profile of my interview participants is provided in Appendix A.

When interviewing professionals across categories such as soldiers, police officers, policymakers, and policy practitioners, I did not aim to capture typical perspectives. This is because mainstreaming gender, especially within the context of the WPS agenda in UN peacekeeping, is a top-down approach that requires collective effort across professional roles to achieve its objectives. Furthermore, it did not matter which peacekeeping mission my respondents participated in, as the missions generally share similar setups and standardized mandates. Therefore, the level of comparability across respondents' experiences and roles was more significant than the differences. This reasoning justifies my sample size, as the focus was on uncovering shared insights and collaborative dynamics. Nonetheless, hearing stories about

different experiences, including unique or mission-specific perspectives and challenges, was especially valuable during the interviews.

Following the successful defence of my thesis proposal, I submitted my application to the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board (REB) in the summer of 2019. After receiving REB approval (attached as Appendix G), I prepared detailed questionnaires and an invitation letter to recruit interview participants. First, I emailed the invitation letter (Appendix B). Once I obtained consent, I sent the open-ended questionnaire, which served as the 'Interview Guide' (Appendix C), to Bangladesh's Armed Forces Division (AFD), the focal point for the country's peacekeeping efforts.

After months of waiting and numerous follow-up emails, I finally received an acknowledgement letter authorizing me to contact the sender directly to request the AFD's cooperation with my research. Although the AFD representative promised assistance, no concrete action was taken. Fortunately, one of my civilian/expert interviewees helped break the deadlock by forwarding my 'Invitation' and 'Interview Guide' to the Bangladesh Army Headquarters with a reference. The Bangladesh Army responded promptly, sending me a memorandum that included the names and contact details of a selected group of mid-career officers at the Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, and Major levels, along with approval for their participation in my research. I then informed the AFD of the Army Headquarters memo and successfully persuaded them to secure their approval, which is included in Appendix F.

AFD later directed the Bangladesh Army, Navy, and Air Force to select officials with peacekeeping experience as interview candidates. Each branch then identified about five officers for interviews. I contacted each selected officer, received some responses, and obtained their consent. However, not all responded or agreed, and I respected their decisions. AFD's approval

also included instructions for the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training (BIPSOT) to nominate an officer for an interview and to share the required unclassified training documents with me. I recruited seven peacekeepers through official channels of the AFD, the Bangladesh Army, and the Navy for the interviews. The Air Force officers did not reply to my email requests. Without formal approval from the AFD, the Army, or Navy headquarters, securing a sufficient number of interviewees from the Bangladesh Armed Forces would have been difficult, and I would not have been able to carry out this project as planned.

The possibility that my interviewees were “vetted” by the military was a legitimate concern, and I considered it throughout my research. Given the hierarchical and structured nature of military organizations, the selection process was likely influenced by who might be deemed “suitable” for participation. I recognize that this vetting may have introduced bias, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives among the interviewees. However, I took several steps to mitigate this risk. I sought to capture a range of experiences and viewpoints by recruiting additional officers from my professional networks. I assured all participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, which may have encouraged them to speak more freely, regardless of any prior vetting. To counterbalance any potential bias, I also included interviews with policy practitioners and independent experts outside the military, which provided broader insights. While the potential for bias cannot be entirely ruled out, these measures helped ensure that the collected data were as comprehensive and representative as possible. Nonetheless, the possibility of vetting is a limitation of my study, and I have acknowledged it in my analysis and discussion of the findings.

I also contacted the Bangladesh Police Headquarters regarding their selection of officers and received support from former peacekeepers through professional networks. Although I was

unable to obtain formal permission from the authorities, the officers had the authority to decide independently whether to participate in my research. Not all contacts I reached out to through informal channels agreed to be interviewed. A few highly qualified peacekeepers hesitated and did not respond to my repeated email requests. However, those who took part in my project did so with enthusiasm and spontaneity. One of my civilian interviewees introduced me to a female police officer who shared valuable experiences from her time stationed at a remote peacekeeping location.

After accepting my interview invitation, I sent each participant a consent form (Appendix E). The form outlined the interview process and the conditions under which the interviews would take place, as required by the REB. Participants could remain anonymous, and in such cases, I assigned pseudonyms in my dissertation with their mutual agreement. Some pseudonyms were inspired by ancient mythologies, representing gods and goddesses of peace, war, and related themes. The consent forms were emailed to the interviewees in accordance with the University of Ottawa's REB guidelines. However, not all participants could provide signed written consent due to limited resources at their peacekeeping stations. In these cases, I obtained verbal consent for the interview and for their preferences regarding the use of real names or pseudonyms. I recorded these verbal consents for documentation. For participants who agreed to use their real names, I double-checked that I had their confirmed consent before proceeding.

Most of my 23 interviews lasted at least an hour and a half. As mentioned, I developed a set of open-ended questions that served as an 'Interview Guide' for my respondents (Appendix C). This guide provided my interviewees with an overview of the themes I was exploring in my thesis. My interview approach was not a straightforward question-and-answer session. Instead, I began with icebreakers and a brief introduction to each interviewee, including a summary of their career

in the armed forces, government, or at the UN. While the Interview Guide helped me ask relevant questions, I did not limit myself to it. I allowed the conversation to flow naturally, asking additional questions as they arose.

Although face-to-face meetings and interviews are often preferred, I conducted most interviews via WhatsApp or phone calls due to limited resources for this study. I had to rely on online meetings because of the challenges posed by the dengue epidemic in Bangladesh in 2019, followed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, some of my interviewees were stationed in post-conflict, high-risk areas as part of UN peace operations, making travel to these locations impossible. I interviewed both male and female peacekeepers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in UN operations. I also aimed to explore the gender dynamics and hierarchies in their training, deployments, and assignments within their respective UN missions.

I aimed to foster a supportive atmosphere that encouraged interviewees to speak openly, without hesitation or inhibition. I clarified that participation was voluntary and that they could pause or leave the interview at any time. None chose to do so. A few declined to answer specific questions, particularly those about racism or sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). One participant provided off-the-record information, which I did not include in this thesis for ethical reasons.

As a civil servant and researcher, I have the advantage of prior knowledge of Bangladesh's policy towards UN peacekeeping. However, I have carefully balanced my dual identity as both an insider and an outsider, maintaining neutrality and ethical responsibility throughout this study. For example, while my insider knowledge provided insights into peacekeeping policy at the organizational level, I actively encouraged my interviewees to share their outsider perspectives from the field. I also consciously addressed any unconscious bias towards Bangladeshi

peacekeepers, especially female personnel. Although I admire their courage, dedication, and sacrifice, qualities that reflect my career aspirations, I have maintained neutrality as a researcher.

To ensure an impartial assessment of my interview data, I have presented all findings honestly and have not excluded data that contradicts my perspectives. I kept my approach broad and transparent, remained systematic, and avoided cherry-picking. For instance, a male peacekeeper justified limiting female participation in missions by citing challenges in ensuring their safety and the difficulty of evacuating many female peacekeepers in an emergency. While this perspective conflicts with my belief, which aligns with UNSCR 1325, I included this interview data to ensure a fair and balanced analysis. To mitigate potential bias in my questioning, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions designed to elicit a range of perspectives without leading responses. Additionally, I engaged in ongoing self-reflection and consulted with my supervisor to critically examine my interview techniques and follow-up questions for potential bias, ensuring a more neutral data collection process.

The interview techniques I used encouraged participants to share their stories of success and challenge, hope and despair, trust and frustration. Some interviews were deeply emotional, and I was attentive to the national pride and sentiments associated with representing Bangladesh in UN peace operations. Peacekeepers strive to perform better than those from other nations. This competitive spirit, shaped by their national identity, influences their interactions with fellow peacekeepers and their perceived effectiveness in the field (Higate & Henry, 2009). These dynamics, including trainers' preferences for peacekeepers from certain nations and host communities' perceptions, were noted in the discussion chapter.

One of my interviewees shared a troubling personal experience of sexual harassment at her workplace during a UN peacekeeping mission. It was the first time she had disclosed this story.

During our conversation, she became very emotional as she recalled the harassment and ostracization she faced from her male colleagues. I listened patiently and empathetically. She expressed relief at finally sharing the incident with someone, describing it as a heavy burden she had been carrying. I assured her of complete anonymity and followed up several times after the interview to check on her well-being. Her story shocked me and made me reflect on how helpless a woman can feel in a male-dominated environment, despite being highly qualified and empowered. I later validated her account through an independent report and a survey on workplace harassment and sexual abuse among UN personnel, which reassured me of the prevalence of incidents like the one she experienced.

I carefully transcribed the interview data because most of my 22 respondents communicated in our native language, Bangla, or a mix of Bangla and English. Only five respondents wrote in English. Of the remaining 18 interviews, 15 were conducted in Bangla or a combination of Bangla and English, while three were in English. I translated them in real time while listening to the recordings. I used 'o Transcribe,' a web-based application, for this process. My advanced proficiency in both Bangla and English enabled accurate translation. As I typed the transcriptions, I became deeply familiar with every detail of the interviews, which proved invaluable during the data analysis phase. This close engagement not only ensured the accurate representation of my interviewees' responses but also reflected my commitment to capturing their perspectives with care. Although time-consuming, this meticulous transcription process ultimately enhanced the reliability of my qualitative analysis and research findings.

Thematic Analysis

In critiquing gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, I relied on assumptions and evidence to guide my literature review. These were developed before collecting empirical data,

such as interviews, and proved very helpful in shaping my questionnaire and interview guide, ensuring my research was rigorous and grounded in theory. My assumptions, based on FSS, masculinity theory, postcolonial feminism, and FI, are listed below.

1. In many contexts, 'gender' is equated with 'women' or treated as synonymous with biological sex (Butler, 1999; True & Parisi, 2013).
2. In many societies, security is viewed as a masculine domain in which women are excluded (Basini, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Steans, 1998, 2006, 2013).
3. Men are seen as protectors or warriors, whereas women are viewed as needing protection, reinforcing binary essentialism (Braunmühl, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010).
4. It is believed that men and women cannot perform equally in dangerous situations; therefore, women should not be deployed in perilous peace missions or combat operations (Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020).
5. Men are seen as stronger, while women are viewed as weaker - physically, mentally, and emotionally. At the same time, women are recognized for their (limited) skills, especially in intelligence gathering, to improve early warning systems that are helpful and tailored to the context, to assist rape victims in conflicts, and to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse (Dharmapuri, 2011, 2013). However, decision-making is generally regarded as a man's domain.

Furthermore, I used 'gender' as a lens to explore the dimensions of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, focusing on Bangladeshi peacekeepers as a case study. By examining UN reports and resolutions on peacekeepers' involvement, reviewing relevant policies and practices, and incorporating insights from interviews, I situated gender considerations within peace

operations. Based on the comprehensive literature review and the aforementioned assumptions, I selected the following broad themes for my questionnaire.

1. Gender and gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations: I primarily inquired about the definition of ‘gender,’ the types of programs implemented to mainstream gender, and the level of political commitment to incorporating gender into DDR, SSR, and other activities within UN peace operations. I also sought to understand what motivates my interviewees to participate in UN peacekeeping, how gender mainstreaming is integrated into their missions, and their experiences with gender policies, local populations, and the organizations’ commitments to gender inclusion.

2. UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security: I asked about their understanding of UNSCR 1325 and how it is implemented in UN peace operations. I also inquired about how UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security is incorporated into their mission, including training, leadership briefings, collaboration with the Gender Unit, engagement with local women, and its overall significance to UN Peace Operations.

3. Gender, peace, and security nexus: I inquired about how gender, security, and vulnerability intersect within UN Peace Operations, and how effectively these missions integrate gender perspectives, address power dynamics, and protect civilians.

4. Gender inequality, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization: I inquired about how gender inequalities, patriarchy, militarism, and cultural biases affect peace processes in host and sending countries, as well as the challenges of integrating women and addressing power dynamics within UN peacekeeping missions.

To understand the limited implementation of UNSCR 1325, I based my analysis on the assumptions and broad themes derived from the literature review and the theoretical foundations

outlined above. The following broad themes align with my theoretical assumptions and are supported by evidence from the interview data, as listed below:

1. Cultural and context-specific challenges

a) Different political and socio-cultural contexts across missions require peacekeepers to be respectful and sensitive to differences in political systems, social norms, cultural traditions, gender identities, and more (Higate & Henry, 2009).

b) UNSCR 1325 and associated gender mainstreaming actions often fail to adequately account for cultural and contextual specificities. This approach overlooks the diverse, localized experiences of women and men, undermining the effectiveness of peacebuilding and gender equality initiatives (Charlesworth in Caglar et al., 2013).

c) Peacekeepers often find themselves caught between cultural norms that suppress women and a top-down approach to gender mainstreaming that can reinforce masculine dominance. This underscores the importance of context-sensitive strategies that respect local culture while advancing gender equality (Hudson, 2009).

2. Blurring of *gender* and *women*

The blurring of gender and women's issues leads policies to place a myopic emphasis on women's involvement without addressing inequality in gender relations. This gap limits the full potential of gender mainstreaming while increasing the numerical ratio of women without transforming the underlying structural imbalances that affect both women and men (Butler, 1999; Detraz, 2012; True & Parisi, 2013).

3. Binary essentialism in UNSCR 1325

Even if UNSCR 1325 is a watershed resolution, it reiterates women's protection and participation while perpetuating binary essentialism. Feminist scholars argue that the resolution characterizes

women primarily as victims in need of protection rather than as autonomous agents capable of influencing peace processes. Such framing reinforces the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy, disempowering women and failing to destabilize the patriarchal and militaristic institutions that reproduce gendered inequalities (Parpart, 2017; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010).

4. Top-down approach in gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming programs typically adopt a top-down approach that overlooks the unique priorities and needs of local communities. This strategy reinforces masculine hegemony in peace missions and produces policy goals that do not align with the lived realities of host communities (Basini, 2017).

5. Tokenistic participation of women

Focusing solely on increasing women’s numerical participation in peacekeeping missions often overlooks their meaningful engagement and empowerment. Superficial participation risks reinforcing gender stereotypes and essentialism rather than addressing the root barriers that prevent women from being fully involved in peace missions (Carreiras, 2010; Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020; Puechguirbal, 2010a; True & Parisi, 2013). For example, the deployment of all-female FPU.

6. Gender dynamics among peacekeepers

Previous studies have not sufficiently examined the gender-power dynamics faced by peacekeepers. The intersectionality of racial, cultural, and gendered hierarchies within peacekeeping missions remains under-researched, despite its significant influence on the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming and on the experiences of both female and male peacekeepers (Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004).

7. Challenges and opportunities

- a) Peacekeepers must address skill limitations to navigate the cultural specifics of various missions and achieve both horizontal and vertical interoperability¹²⁸ (Rubinstein, Keller & Scherger, 2008).
- b) Gender mainstreaming is used as a ‘problem-solving tool’ rather than a ‘conceptual tool’ when there is CRSV or SEA (Kent, 2007; Oswald, 2016). There are gaps in formal rules and informal practices within peacekeeping institutions (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Mackay et al., 2010).
- c) Due to systemic inequality, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization, women are excluded from peace dividends (Shekhawat, 2015).
- d) The lack of an accountability mechanism in UNSCR 1325 perpetuates tokenistic gender mainstreaming and marginalizes women’s agency in peace processes (Braunmühl, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2004).
- e) Training is crucial to preparing peacekeepers for effective peace operations (Pechguirbal, 2003, 2010a).

Following the interviews, I prepared the transcripts and then conducted a qualitative thematic analysis using the software program ‘Nvivo,’ which is designed to organize non-numerical, unstructured data. This stage of thematic analysis revealed several additional themes, including cultural expectations and perceptions of gender; gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity; gender subjugation and transitional justice; women’s under-representation in UN peacekeeping; masculinity and SEA; and rape culture.

‘NVivo’ was essential for coding the data. I identified relevant codes in the software, then matched and tagged sections of the transcripts accordingly. This coding process helped organize the data into thematic categories and clusters. Writing my discussion chapters using these codes

¹²⁸ Horizontal interoperability ensures that all sectors are aligned and mutually reinforcing in their efforts to address gender issues. Vertical interoperability ensures that gender policies at the strategic level are translated into actionable outcomes on the ground. Together, they create a cohesive framework to promote gender equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and engage women meaningfully in peacebuilding processes. (Rubinstein, Keller & Scherger, 2008)

allowed me to present the data clearly. The software significantly streamlined the analysis process, enabling me to efficiently locate specific information across hundreds of pages of transcribed interviews and saving time overall. Lastly, I used Grammarly to improve the clarity, grammar, and spelling of this thesis. The software helped identify and suggest corrections and revisions, ultimately enhancing the readability of the final manuscript.

Thematic analysis of the empirical data offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing UNSCR 1325 within UN peace missions. The emerging themes point to a transformational approach to gender mainstreaming that addresses structural inequalities, challenges patriarchal norms, and enhances women's agency in peace-building efforts. These themes will inform further empirical research and analysis in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Problems Faced

Despite being well-prepared for my empirical study, I faced several challenges during the research process. As mentioned earlier, I experienced delays in receiving responses from the peacekeeping authority, specifically the AFD in Bangladesh. It took several months to receive a positive reply, which came only after an intervention via a memo from the Bangladesh Army Headquarters. Additionally, not all selected peacekeepers participated in the interviews. Some experienced personnel, whose insights could have been valuable, did not attend. The reasons for their non-participation remain unclear, though one person later said the interview guide contained many challenging questions. This may have caused hesitation and led them to decide not to share their experiences.

During the interviews, some peacekeepers exercised caution and chose not to address sensitive or controversial issues, such as racial discrimination and sexual exploitation and abuse

within UN peace operations. Additionally, military and police peacekeepers were generally non-critical of their institutions and expressed a positive outlook on gender mainstreaming initiatives and training. The noticeable silence on topics like racism, with some interviewees declining to answer, highlighted the challenges of discussing these issues openly.

To address this silence and gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender mainstreaming issues, I turned to “narratives formulated in other contexts” (Kronsell, 2006, p. 109). This approach involved a detailed content analysis of various sources, including UN and NGO reports, independent inquiry reports, newspaper articles, and surveys. By examining these additional sources, I uncovered further information on the problems associated with gender mainstreaming and filled in the gaps left by the interviewees. This method deepened my thesis and provided a broader context for understanding the challenges faced in UN peace operations. The supplementary data from these diverse sources proved invaluable in validating and complementing the information gathered from the interviews.

One limitation of this dissertation is the absence of a systematic analysis of Bangladesh’s peacekeeping policies. My data on this subject was limited to publicly accessible sources, such as the Armed Forces Division (AFD) website and annual journals published each May to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.¹²⁹ Additionally, I reviewed unclassified training materials provided by BIPSOT and included a brief evaluation of these materials in my thesis. However, another limitation was that I only interviewed uniformed officers who commanded troops and was unable to reach the under-command members of the forces. Contacting these lower-ranking personnel through official channels proved challenging, as

¹²⁹ May 29 is designated as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. This day honours the dedication, professionalism, and sacrifice of UN peacekeepers who work tirelessly to maintain peace and security in conflict zones worldwide. Please see <https://www.un.org/en/observances/peacekeepers-day>

nominating them for interviews is not standard practice. As a result, their perspectives are not represented in my research.

Conducting a content analysis of peacekeeping data on Bangladesh's participation in UN missions poses significant challenges. The data is highly fragmented because the Bangladesh Armed Forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) and the Bangladesh Police each maintain separate websites and databases. This division complicates the process of gathering comprehensive data on peacekeeping contributions. For example, when attempting to determine the total number of female peacekeepers, as well as fatalities and injuries involving Bangladeshi peacekeepers, I had to collect and merge data from the separate websites of the Armed Forces and the Police. Despite these efforts, the combined data often remains incomplete and inconsistent with the figures reported by the UN. This discrepancy underscores a lack of integration and coordination in data management.

Similarly, I found it difficult to determine women's participation in Bangladesh's Armed Forces and Police in UN peace operations from these fragmented data sources. As a result, tracking the total number of female peacekeepers from Bangladesh was challenging. The absence of a unified database for monitoring Bangladesh's contributions to UN peacekeeping meant there was no consolidated record or policy on participation. This fragmentation is especially concerning given that Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions. Although this thesis does not focus on data, the accuracy of such information remains important for my analysis. Maintaining accurate data is essential because it supports gender mainstreaming efforts, such as assessing changes in the number of female peacekeepers from Bangladesh, reporting consistent increases or decreases, and planning future actions and identifying needs and priorities for peacekeepers.

Furthermore, the absence of a centralized database and a comprehensive policy framework hampers accurate reporting and analysis of Bangladesh's peacekeeping efforts.¹³⁰ Bangladesh lacks a centralized policy or comprehensive framework specifically addressing its participation in UN peace operations and gender mainstreaming within these missions. This absence of a unified policy hinders the development of a clear strategy for monitoring and improving gender inclusion and overall effectiveness in peacekeeping efforts. In summary, data fragmentation and the lack of a single database and policy framework limit the ability to conduct a thorough, accurate analysis of Bangladesh's peacekeeping contributions. Although this is not a major issue for my thesis, as mentioned, I note it as a concern for any future study using quantitative analysis.

Another limitation of this thesis is the lack of perspectives on non-binary persons in UN peacekeeping. UNSCR 1325 has been pivotal in advancing the WPS agenda, yet its framework has been critiqued for excluding non-binary persons and those with diverse sexual orientations. According to the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IESOGI), this oversight reflects a broader "blind spot" in international peace and security mechanisms, which fail to account for the distinct and often severe forms of violence faced by LGBT persons during armed conflicts. These include systematic threats, sexual violence, persecution, and other violations aimed at enforcing rigid gender norms and marginalizing those who do not conform to traditional expectations. The report concludes with the following recommendation: "United Nations peacekeeping and peace operations should also promote the recognition of gender diversity as an asset to enhance a culture of peace whenever their bodies are deployed" (UN General Assembly Report, A/77/235, 27 July 2022, p. 23). The IESOGI report underscores the

¹³⁰ Anecdotally, it is well known in Bangladesh that the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) and Police forces have highly competitive relationships. This results in weak collaboration in maintaining official data concerning participation in UN peace operations. I observed this lack of coordination while serving as Director (UN) in Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dhaka.

need for an intersectional approach that incorporates sexual orientation and gender identity within peace and security frameworks. This approach should align with international humanitarian and human rights law to promote inclusive and sustainable peace efforts.¹³¹ These issues are largely absent from the UN reports and the country's national policies in my case study. The limited perspectives on non-binary persons in UN peace processes are not central to this thesis, but may be important for future research examining the challenges faced by non-binary individuals in peacekeeping.

My dissertation includes detailed, firsthand narratives from UN peace operations shared by my respondents. They offered in-depth accounts of their experiences, highlighting the opportunities and challenges encountered during their missions. These interviews provided valuable insights into the conditions of local communities, including the status of women and men in post-conflict societies. My interviewees also discussed how patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization influence local populations. Unfortunately, I was unable to verify these accounts with local people or visit peacekeeping missions in person due to budget constraints and travel restrictions caused by the dengue and COVID-19 pandemic. To validate and complement these stories, I used secondary sources such as a comprehensive literature review, content analysis of relevant websites, UN reports, and media reports. This approach allowed me to cross-check and corroborate the information from my interviewees, strengthening the credibility and depth of my research.

¹³¹ Reference: The UNGA report A/77/235 dated 27 July 2022, submitted to the 77th session of the UN General Assembly by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, under Human Rights Council Resolution 45/10 and may be seen here: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/440/41/pdf/n2244041.pdf>

Conclusion

A feminist project on implementing UNSCR 1325 in UN peace operations faces several methodological challenges. First, interviewing peacekeepers can be difficult because of institutional resistance and individual hesitancy. Peacekeepers may be reluctant to discuss sensitive topics or critique their institutions, limiting the depth and openness of the interviews. Second, collecting comprehensive, accurate data on sensitive issues such as sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, and discrimination is challenging because of confidentiality concerns. Protecting this data while ensuring its reliability is a significant obstacle. Third, verifying and validating data in peace operations can be complex. Information gathered from interviews must be cross-checked with secondary sources, including UN reports and academic literature, to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness. Fourth, connecting theoretical perspectives with practical considerations can be difficult. Some secondary sources may be inaccessible or classified as confidential by institutions. To address these challenges, I employed self-reflexivity and prior knowledge to validate my empirical findings. This approach allowed me to reflect on my own experiences and positionality, offering additional context and insights into the research. This chapter has laid the groundwork for the upcoming discussion chapters, which will present the data and thematic analyses, focusing on the challenges faced by peacekeepers in UN peace operations.

Chapter 6: Gender Mainstreaming, UNSCR 1325 and Peacekeeping Realities

Inequality is a form of injustice that fails to respect human diversity (Porter, 2003, p. 110).

The operational environment for peacekeepers in UN missions is shaped by complex interactions among militarization, political and historical legacies, social and ethnic dynamics, patriarchal structures, and deeply rooted cultural norms (Puechguirbal, 2010a, 2010b; Willet, 2010). Peacekeepers often face significant risks, including physical harm or death, while upholding the mandates of the UN Security Council. As emphasized in Chapter 3 and supported by interviews with peacekeepers, integrating gender considerations is impeded by deeply ingrained cultural and gender norms, ethnic and religious identities, patriarchal power relations, gender stereotypes, militarization, rape culture, socio-economic inequalities, and the unequal treatment and harassment of women and marginalized groups (Braunmühl, 2013; Detraz, 2012; Enloe, 2005; Parpart, 2017; Whitworth, 2003, 2004).

Rooted in feminist critiques of international relations and peacekeeping, this chapter argues that the implementation of UNSCR 1325, while groundbreaking, operates within a framework that often reinforces rather than dismantles gendered power imbalances. The literature review in Chapter 3 shows that gender mainstreaming often stalls because policies reproduce gender binaries and institutional masculinities rather than challenging them (Basini, 2017; Parpart, 2017; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010). Building on the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3, this analysis demonstrates that the reinforcement of gender binaries is not merely a policy oversight but a lived institutional reality for Bangladeshi peacekeepers. Feminist post-structuralist and FSS scholarship have long critiqued the gendered nature of international security institutions, and this analysis employs key theoretical perspectives to examine the structural barriers to effective gender mainstreaming (Enloe, 2005; Whitworth, 2004). Connell (2002) and Enloe (2005) emphasize how

militarized institutions sustain hegemonic masculinity, privileging aggression, hierarchy, and control, traits that are incompatible with gender equality. True and Parisi (2013) critique gender essentialism, especially the framing of women as inherently peaceful or passive victims, which limits their agency in peace processes. Additionally, scholars such as von Billerbeck (2016) scrutinize the concept of “local ownership,” questioning whether it genuinely empowers women or merely legitimizes external interventions. These frameworks reveal tensions between the aspirational goals of UNSCR 1325 and their practical application, particularly in contexts where gender inequality is deeply embedded and peacekeeping structures resist transformative change.

Feminist critiques argue that although UNSCR 1325 underscores women’s participation, it does so within a liberal feminist framework that tends to depoliticize gender, portraying women mainly as victims or peacebuilders rather than as political agents embedded in power relations (Cohn, 2008; Otto, 2006, 2018; Shepherd, 2011). Despite commitments to gender mainstreaming through various policies, peacekeeping missions often reinforce gender essentialism, marginalize women’s agency, and downplay systemic inequalities (Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Tiessen, 2015). This chapter explores the gap between policy and practice by addressing research question (i): What challenges do UN peacekeepers face in integrating gender equality into peace and security operations? It examines this issue through feminist theoretical perspectives, focusing on how peacekeepers understand, implement, and sometimes resist gender mainstreaming policies in practice. The analysis identifies key obstacles, including cultural and gender norms, patriarchal and militarized state structures, operational constraints, and institutional gender biases within peacekeeping units and host communities. It also presents findings on different scenarios, including the risks and challenges faced by peacekeepers, the role of All-Female FPU, and the

influence of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization on gender inequality, subjugation, and abuses of power.

This chapter critically analyzes the gendered aspects of peacekeeping using a multi-level analytical framework of feminist theories discussed in Chapter 3, with specific examples of how and why gender power imbalances are reinforced, particularly in relation to risks, subjugation, patriarchal norms in the form of paternalistic protectionism, and an emphasis on militarization over transformative social justice. First, FI explores how international institutions, such as the UN, embed gender norms and reveals institutional resistance and path dependency¹³² that hinder transformative gender agendas. Gender mainstreaming is often treated as a checklist, focusing on meeting quotas rather than challenging existing power structures (Mackay et al., 2010; Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

Postcolonial feminism highlights the racialized and hierarchical dimensions of international peacekeeping. Women in the Global South, whether as peacekeepers or members of the host community, are often portrayed as either victims in need of rescue or as representatives of exoticized cultural traditions, thereby reinforcing neocolonial dynamics under the guise of protection (Enloe, 2000; Mohanty, 1988; Tiessen, 2007, 2015; Whitworth, 2004). FSS, alongside masculinity studies, critically examine militarized masculinities in peace operations. Scholars in these fields challenge the notion that peacekeeping is inherently harmless, showing instead that it often perpetuates gender hierarchies and promotes militarized responses to insecurity (Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Cohn, 2013). Intersectional Feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Hudson et al., 2009) underscores the importance of understanding how gender intersects with other social identities, including race, class, ethnicity, and geopolitics. For example, peacekeepers from Bangladesh may

¹³² 'Path dependency' is a concept in social sciences, used by the FI scholars, to unpack the dynamics where past choices of policy determine the future policy that disproportionately affect women in gendered power relations.

face marginalization within the broader UN hierarchy while being perceived as enforcers in host communities. By employing these frameworks, this chapter presents the challenges of gender mainstreaming not as isolated implementation issues but as symptoms of broader institutional, ideological, and geopolitical constraints.

This chapter further examines the internal operational and personal challenges faced by peacekeeping units, including cultural differences, communication and coordination issues, training and preparedness, morale and motivation, and limited resources. It also investigates external operational and institutional challenges, such as hostile environments, local political dynamics, lack of cooperation from local authorities, personal safety risks, public perception, relations with the host nation, and widespread gender inequality. Additionally, it presents findings on issues such as local ownership of peace and security, gender inequality in repressive regimes, and transitional justice, which emerged as significant themes during the interviews. These operational and socio-cultural challenges address research questions (i) and (ii), respectively.

Mandate and Challenges for Peacekeepers

The UN's commitment to gender mainstreaming began prior to the adoption of UNSCR 1325, with early efforts formalized in documents such as the 2000 DPKO policy document, *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Operations*.¹³³ These initiatives marked institutional recognition that gender is a cross-cutting issue vital to the effectiveness of peace operations. The document recommended that mission leaders include explicit commitments to women's rights and CEDAW in peacekeeping mandates. However, my respondent, Ambassador

¹³³ In July 2000, DPKO's Lessons Learned Unit issued a policy document entitled *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Operations*. This document issued guidelines for mission leaders. It is recommended that "the mandate should include specific references to the affirmation of the equal rights of women and men, to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to the United Nations commitment to gender balance and gender mainstreaming" (p.19). Reference at https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/UN/dpko_mainstreaminggenderperspective_2000.pdf

Ismat Jahan, who served two terms on the CEDAW Committee, opined that although CEDAW's General Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention is a normative progress, it remains non-binding (personal communication, July 25, 2019).¹³⁴ Furthermore, the *Capstone Doctrine*¹³⁵ and UNSCR 1325 provide comprehensive guidelines for integrating gender into all aspects of peacekeeping. More recently, a 2024 UN policy on gender-responsive peacekeeping has highlighted the importance of challenging patriarchy, power relations, and gender norms at all levels, including strategic, operational, and tactical, representing a significant shift in UN policy.¹³⁶

Nonetheless, the above institutional mandates encounter significant operational obstacles. Feminist institutionalists (Basini, 2013, 2017; Mackay et al., 2010; Chappell & Waylen, 2013) argue that institutions often operate within “gendered logics of appropriateness”¹³⁷ that resist transformative change. Gender mainstreaming risks becoming merely procedural rather than political and is often confined to checklist approaches that leave existing masculinized structures

¹³⁴ CEDAW adopted General Recommendation (GR) 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations in 2013. It provides comprehensive guidance for states and relevant actors to ensure the protection, respect, and fulfilment of women's human rights and substantive gender equality before, during, and after conflict, emphasizing women's participation, the prevention of gender-based violence, access to justice, and the integration of gender perspectives across peace, security, and reconstruction processes. Reference at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/764506?v=pdf>

¹³⁵ Reference to “Capstone Doctrine” at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf

¹³⁶ As per this comprehensive gender-responsive policy, “Applying a gender-responsive approach in peacekeeping processes and functions means i) recognizing and analysing the gendered differences in status and power of women and men, girls and boys, and other gender identities; ii) ensuring mandate implementation at the strategic, operational and tactical level advance gender equality and reduce the harmful effects of patriarchy, gender norms and roles, and power relations.” (p. 3). Reference: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo-2024-01441_un_gender_responsive_peacekeeping_policy_2024.07_0.pdfhttps://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo-2024-01441_un_gender_responsive_peacekeeping_policy_2024.07_0.pdf

¹³⁷ ‘Gendered logics of appropriateness’ refer to the unwritten rules and norms that dictate what is considered “appropriate” for a person to do, as a man or a woman. The idea, rooted in institutional theory, explains that people's behaviour is less driven by a calculation of costs and benefits and more by a sense of what is normal, proper, and expected for someone in their social role or identity (Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

in place (Ibid.). Field-level implementation, as reported by peacekeepers interviewed for this study, highlights the gap between policy and practice.

Although over 95% of peacekeepers operate under mandates¹³⁸ that include civilian protection, mission personnel often lack the authority, tools, or institutional support to implement gender-sensitive provisions effectively, such as addressing conflict-related sexual violence.¹³⁹ Gender advisors, while central to policy rhetoric, are frequently under-resourced, marginalized within organizational hierarchies, or isolated from core decision-making processes (Puechguirbal, 2010a). Furthermore, UN deployments still favour a militarized approach to peace, despite UNSCR 1325's rhetorical focus on inclusive peacebuilding. The use of specialized gender units, such as FETs and all-female FPUs¹⁴⁰, aims to address the significant underrepresentation of women in peace operations. Moreover, building on the success of FETs, the UN has introduced Engagement Platoons, which consist of mixed teams with 50 percent women. These platoons manage community engagement and support gender-responsive local governance.¹⁴¹ However, feminist critics argue that such initiatives often reinforce gender essentialism, depicting women as inherently peaceful, nurturing, and more effective in community engagement, rather than challenging the masculine norms of peacekeeping itself (Otto, 2006, 2018; Pruitt, 2016; True, 2013).

¹³⁸ Reference at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protecting-civilians>

¹³⁹ Most peacekeepers are mandated to protect civilians (POC), but not all missions apply POC with the same intensity or methods. For example, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) is mandated to monitor the ceasefire and the borders only. It has no mandate for POC or authority to report on human rights violations in the region. It reports on alleged violations of the ceasefire agreement. Reference at <https://unmogip.unmissions.org/mission>

¹⁴⁰ Reference [UN police gender initiatives | United Nations Police](#)

¹⁴¹ Reference [Action for Peacekeeping: Engagement Platoons champion gender parity in peacekeeping and beyond | United Nations Peacekeeping](#)

In practice, peacekeepers, especially those from the Global South, operate in volatile, often hostile environments with limited infrastructure, entrenched militarization, and deep distrust of foreign interventions. Between 1948 and September 2025, 4,461 peacekeepers lost their lives, including 1,136 killed by malicious acts.¹⁴² These conditions make implementing gender-responsive mandates even more challenging.

Despite formal training, peacekeepers often report uncertainty about what gender mainstreaming entails in their daily duties, particularly in contexts where local authorities resist women's participation in public life or where gender relations are shaped by customary law or religious conservatism (Fellmeth, 2000; Hudson et al., 2009). These realities highlight the structural limits of the UN as a liberal international institution seeking transformative change through bureaucratic processes. As feminist theorists such as Sjoberg & Via (2010) and Whitworth (2004) argue, peacekeeping itself is a gendered practice rooted in militarized masculinity, often reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to dismantle. Although gender mainstreaming is an admirable goal, the institutional framework in which it operates is not ideologically neutral; it embeds assumptions about gender, race, and power that constrain peacekeepers' ability to generate meaningful change. I present the findings of my empirical studies below.

Gender, Insecurity and Militarized Masculinity in Darfur

I interviewed Atiqa Islam, a police officer holding the rank of Additional Deputy Inspector General of the Bangladesh Police. During our interview, I discussed her experiences in the three UN peace operations: Kosovo, Darfur, and Haiti.¹⁴³ I asked Atiqa about the challenges she faced

¹⁴² References: UN website at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities> and https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/stats_by_mission_incident_type_4_115_september_2025.pdf

¹⁴³ Atiqa served in three UN missions. Initially, she served in UNMIK, Kosovo, from November 2006 to March 2008 as a Civilian Police Officer, where she served as the Chief Investigation Officer at a central police station in Pristina. She also supervised the Kosovo Police Investigation Unit on behalf of CIVPOL (Civilian Police). Following this, she served in UNAMID, Darfur, Sudan, from June 2011 to December 2012 as the Deputy Commander and Deputy Gender

as a female peacekeeper, focusing on gender dynamics in host communities, sexual exploitation and abuse, and institutional barriers. She spoke candidly about her experiences, highlighting the distinct challenges she faced in each of the three missions. For example, movement was unrestricted in Kosovo, whereas Darfur had a nightly curfew from 7 PM to 7 AM, while Haiti offered some freedom (personal communication, August 16, 2019).

Atiqah also recounted abductions from her time in Darfur. She described a case in which a peacekeeper from a European country was abducted in Darfur and later taken to Chad. Through relentless efforts, including negotiations among the abductors, the peacekeeper's home country, and the UN, the peacekeeper was rescued after four months of captivity. The then Police Commissioner of the mission also played a crucial role in securing the peacekeeper's release. Atiqah stressed the dangers of abduction and captivity, including the risk of ransom demands and the embarrassment faced by the UN (personal communication, August 16, 2019). This incident highlights the paradox of protection in feminist security studies: peacekeepers, despite their role as protectors, can be highly vulnerable in militarized environments (Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Enloe, 2000).

Atiqah recounted a serious incident during her time with the UNAMID mission in Darfur. While driving alone after a workshop, she was stopped by a young man who forced his way into her vehicle and compelled her to drive to an undisclosed location. Atiqah's quick thinking helped her avoid a potential abduction. She calmly exited the UN vehicle and handed over the car and keys to the young man. This composure protected her from harm, and she was later rescued unharmed by her colleagues. During orientation training upon their arrival in Darfur, Atiqah and

Officer within the Reform and Rehabilitation Wing. Lastly, Atiqah served in MINUSTAH, Haiti, as Commander of Bangladesh's All-Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) from June 2015 to July 2016.

her fellow peacekeepers were told by trainers that, if confronted by locals demanding a vehicle, they should comply to avoid potential harm. This advice was based on past incidents in which local armed groups seized UN vehicles, modified them, and used them for rebellious activities (personal communication, August 16, 2019). While Atiqa's ability to navigate the near-abduction demonstrated her resilience, it also highlighted the unpredictability and inherent risks of peacekeeping missions.

Atiqa further acknowledged the challenges peacekeepers face in fostering peace in post-conflict societies. She noted that peacekeepers' responsibilities are defined and organized within specific job roles and mandates. For example, Atiqa described her role in Darfur's Reform and Rehabilitation (R&R) Wing, which comprised eight units. One of these was the Gender Unit, where she served as the Deputy Gender Officer. This structure highlights the specialized nature of peacekeeping duties, with individuals assigned specific roles to support broader peace and security efforts (Personal communication, August 16, 2019). Feminist institutionalist critiques (Mackay et al., 2010) argue that, despite gender-sensitive training and formal mandates, the operational structure remains influenced by masculine norms of risk, combat-readiness, and strategic silence around systemic sexual violence. Often, Gender Units are underfunded and marginalized (Puechguirbal, 2010a).

Understanding the historical context helps explain the challenges peacekeepers faced in Darfur, Sudan. The country, which gained independence from Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule in 1956, endured decades of civil war between its Arab-Muslim north and its Christian-Animist south. The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) operated from 2005 to 2011, supporting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). After South Sudan's independence in 2011, following a

long struggle, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was established. UNMISS continues to fulfill its mandate to protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian aid, support peace efforts, and monitor human rights violations, thereby contributing to the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and Peace Process.¹⁴⁴

Darfur, in northwestern Sudan, experienced a prolonged conflict from 2003 to 2020, marked by the ethnic cleansing of non-Arabs. The civil war between the Sudanese government-backed Janjaweed militia and other armed groups resulted in an estimated 300,000 deaths, widespread atrocities, the displacement of two million people, and hundreds of rapes.¹⁴⁵

In response, the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement was signed, leading to the creation of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) under UNSCR 1769 (2007). Acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and reaffirming UNSCR 1325, UNAMID's mandate included protecting civilians, safeguarding its personnel and humanitarian workers, and supporting the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement.¹⁴⁶ UNAMID concluded its mandate on 31 December 2020 and was replaced by the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), which concluded its mandate in February 2024.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Please see <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/mandate>.

¹⁴⁵ Darfur is located in northwestern Sudan, where conflicts have been protracted. There was ethnic cleansing of non-Arabs during the War in Darfur (2003-2020). According to the UN's estimate, 300,000 people were killed in this civil war that broke out in 2003 between the Government of Sudan and local militia forces, the Janjaweed, who were armed by the government and other armed groups. This resulted in wide-ranging atrocities, including the killings of tens of thousands of ethnic Darfuris, the displacement of two million people and the rape of hundreds of civilians. The Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in 2006 in response to this crisis.

¹⁴⁶ The mandate of the UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur) was established by the UN Security Council Resolution 1769 (31 July 2007), acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Resolution 1769 reaffirmed UNSCR 1325, and the mandate included all necessary measures to:

- i) protect civilians, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Sudan.
- ii) protect its personnel and facilities and ensure the freedom of movement of its own personnel and humanitarian workers.
- iii) support the early and effective implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement. (Lanz in Koops et al, 2015, p.780).

The 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement¹⁴⁸ between the Government of Sudan (GoS), the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) laid the framework for women's equal and meaningful participation across all levels of the peace process in Darfur. Article 1, paragraph 15 of the agreement acknowledged the under-representation of women in government institutions and decision-making bodies. It emphasized the need for extraordinary measures to ensure their equal and effective involvement in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the agreement prioritized the protection of women and children from gender-based violence and harassment. However, the Darfur Peace Agreement did not explicitly guarantee equal rights for men and women. While it underscores women's participation in decision-making, it does not advocate for gender equality in all spheres of life. This distinction is significant, as equal participation in decision-making does not necessarily mean that this society has accepted equality between men and women. Given that the Government of Sudan primarily adheres to the traditions of *Islamic Sharia Law*, the country may not endorse gender equality. This stance was, therefore, reflected in the terms of the Darfur Peace Agreement,¹⁴⁹ highlighting how negotiated settlements often instrumentalize women's inclusion without transforming gendered power structures (True, 2010, 2011, 2014; True & Parisi, 2013).

¹⁴⁷ References at <https://unamid.unmissions.org> and <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en>. Meanwhile, the United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA) has been active since 2011. UNISFA is tasked with safeguarding civilians and humanitarian workers amidst escalating violence, tensions, and population displacement. Additionally, UNISFA's mandate includes monitoring ceasefires, facilitating humanitarian aid, overseeing demilitarization efforts, securing oil infrastructure, and providing border protection between North and South Sudan. Reference at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unmis/background.shtml>

¹⁴⁸ Darfur Peace Agreement; Reference at <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/darfur20peace20agreement.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ In 2021, Sudan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), but with reservations. The male-dominated Sudanese Council declined to recognize women's equal rights with men at all political and social levels, as well as their equal rights in marriage, divorce, and parenting. Reference https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_sudan-ratifies-womens-rights-convention-exceptions/6205220.html

Peacekeepers I interviewed observed significant gender inequality in their regions of operation, yet they primarily navigated these disparities rather than directly challenging them.¹⁵⁰ They assisted marginalized groups, especially women, within the limits of their mandates, which often do not explicitly promote gender equality because of local socio-political and religious norms. Despite these constraints, peacekeepers are vital for stabilizing conflict-affected countries, maintaining ceasefires, overseeing elections, and restoring peace (Puechguirbal, 2010a). However, their limited capacity to incorporate gender perspectives can unintentionally exclude marginalized communities. As poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and historical factors fuel conflict and push individuals into armed groups (Higate & Henry, 2009), peacekeepers of all genders often struggle to engage effectively with communities in need. The following sections will outline the risks peacekeepers face.

Variable Gender Inequality and Political Insecurity

Atiqah compared the experiences of women in Kosovo and Darfur, noting that Kosovar women enjoy greater freedom and better access to education than women in Darfur, where opportunities are more limited. Despite these challenges, she admired the hardworking nature of Sudanese women, who travel long distances for water and actively contribute to their communities. In Darfur, she observed that the UN provided workshops in cooking, confectionery, and sewing to equip refugee women with skills that promote self-sufficiency. However, Atiqah noted a lack of initiatives to integrate refugee and internally displaced women and to create employment opportunities for them (personal communication, August 16, 2019). Women's rights and

¹⁵⁰ My interviewees, namely Nesar (personal communication, July 26, 2019), Reaz (personal communication, July 26, 2019), Eirene (personal communication, October 4, 2019), Oliver (personal communication, September 6, 2019), Lily (personal communication, November 18, 2019), Sophia (personal communication, August 2, 2019), Selene (personal communication, December 23, 2019), Mahmood (personal communication, July 31, 2019) and Maimuna (personal communication, November 24, 2019).

experiences vary significantly across cultures and regions, leading to disparities in access to opportunities (Steans, 2008). The different circumstances faced by women in Kosovo and Darfur highlight that gender mainstreaming, as outlined in UNSCR 1325, requires tailored approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all policy to address each unique context effectively.¹⁵¹

Women living in IDP camps face heightened risks of rape and torture at the hands of local armed groups and security forces (Leatherman, 2011; Mazurana et al., 2005). To address these vulnerabilities, Dharmapuri (2011) recommends establishing women-staffed police desks in IDP and refugee camps, deploying female interpreters and peacekeepers for patrols, and assigning personnel to document incidents. However, vulnerability varies widely across camps and depends on how effectively camp authorities, including peacekeepers and local security actors, implement gender mainstreaming. Kreft (2017) highlights this complexity, noting that “[g]iven the uniqueness of each context, there is hardly a universal blueprint” for implementing UNSCR 1325 (p. 152). Furthermore, in many societies, such as Darfur, women and marginalized men are not regarded as equal partners in conflict prevention or peacebuilding, which further limits their protection and participation.

In Darfur, promoting gender equality is a complex challenge due to the region’s diverse social fabric and traditional norms. In multi-ethnic societies of Arab and African descent, women’s

¹⁵¹ By one-size-fits-all policy, I mean a homogeneous policy that seeks to consistently apply the provisions outlined in UNSCR 1325 across various regions without considering each location's nuanced realities and contexts. By *homogeneous policy*, I refer to a policy that includes the following, as stipulated in UNSCR 1325: “Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace-building, and stressing the importance of equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.” (Excerpts from the preambular paragraph of UNSCR 1325).

The policy directive issued by the UN Security Council emphasizes the need for equal participation and greater involvement of women in decision-making processes regarding peace, security, conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. Peacekeepers and policy practitioners must commit to this goal by integrating gender perspectives into their work, executing effective plans, and developing relevant programs. Ideally speaking, advocating for gender equality should be a fundamental aspect of their work.

socio-economic status and rights vary widely. This situation calls for a transformative agenda to ensure women's full and equal participation in these communities. Peacekeepers mandated to protect civilians, facilitate aid, and support political processes must mainstream gender across these activities. However, they are not expected to transform deeply rooted norms and attitudes. Therefore, expecting them to integrate gender equality into their operations often poses a significant, unrealistic challenge.

Atiqa observed that Darfur had roughly 20 to 25 small political groups. These groups often made it clear they did not want the UN there, leaving her feeling unwelcome. She also felt insecure because local guards were responsible for protecting UN buildings. Although peacekeepers worked with communities to foster peace, disagreements among these groups left Atiqa feeling unsafe. Not all groups supported the peace treaty, so they did not cooperate with the UN's efforts. The political divide increased the risk, as violence could erupt at any moment, putting both peacekeepers and local residents in danger (personal communication, August 16, 2019). Feminist postcolonial scholars warn that peacekeeping missions risk replicating colonial dynamics within a neocolonial framework. In this framework, host societies are often assumed to lack gender equality, and peacekeepers, even those from the Global South, become both agents and subjects of a global governance regime (Mohanty, 1988; Whitworth, 2004). Atiqa's experience highlights this tension: sent to empower local women and oversee gender issues, she faced an environment often suspicious of female authority and hostile to foreign presence.

Male political leaders often destabilize societies by prioritizing their own agendas over the public's well-being. Raised in patriarchal and militarized environments, these leaders frequently exhibit nepotism and corruption, which can drive oppressed populations towards violence

(Maimuna, personal communication, November 24, 2019).¹⁵² This widespread political uncertainty, common in such settings, challenges everyone, including residents, refugees, IDPs, and peacekeepers alike, and severely hampers peace and security efforts, creating significant operational obstacles for UN missions.

Creation of an All-female FPU

The UN integrates gender considerations into peacekeeping by deploying all-female FPUs, a strategy intended to increase the low representation of women in mixed-gender units and to achieve the 20% female peacekeeper target (Pruitt, 2016). India sent the first all-female FPU to Liberia in 2007 (Ibid.). While some view these units as a means to promote gender equality, others argue that they risk marginalizing women by confining them to “special units,” reminiscent of the “women’s programs” of the 1980s (White in Jabri & O’Gorman, 1999, p. 118). This approach can reinforce essentialist ideas about women’s peacekeeping abilities, potentially perpetuating gender discrimination within UN peace operations (True & Parisi, 2013, p. 43).

All-female FPUs were created to increase female participation in UN peace operations and to address issues related to female representation. Pruitt (2016) notes that the UN’s institutional history does not fully capture its development. As she explains, its origins lie in bilateral talks between DPKO officials and the Indian government, rather than in a broad gender transformation initiative.¹⁵³ Therefore, it represents a problem-solving approach within institutions rather than a model driven by a transformative feminist agenda (Mackay et al., 2010; True & Parisi, 2013).

¹⁵² Maimuna is a pseudonym for a female police officer from Bangladesh who served in an All-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) in the DRC. As recounted by Maimuna, leaders like Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) maintained power through militarization, suppressing dissent with armed forces and leaving no room for opposition (personal communication, November 24, 2019).

¹⁵³ Pruitt’s interviews reveal that the idea originated in discussions between Mark Kroeker, then Director of the DPKO Police Division (2005-2007), and the Indian Police Adviser, who shared India’s experience with all-women police units used for crowd control and women’s safety. This led to India deploying the first all-female FPU to Liberia in

Both mixed-gender (mainly male) and all-female (70% female, 30% male technicians) Formed Police Units (FPUs) are armed and perform the same essential UN tasks: safeguarding UN personnel and property, assisting in civilian protection, and supporting police operations that require a specialized formed response (Policy, Formed Police Unit, DPKO, 2016, p. 4).¹⁵⁴ These duties align with the broader UN peacekeeping mandate of safeguarding civilians while fulfilling specific policing roles. Bangladesh deployed two all-female FPUs to Haiti and the DRC by 2013, with a Peruvian all-female FPU also deploying to Haiti in January 2013 (Dharmapuri, 2013).

The all-female FPU is not formally recognized as a distinct entity under the UN's FPUs policy. It is seen as a "minor exception to current practice" and therefore remains on the margins of the UN's peace operations framework (Pruitt, 2016, p. 27). Notably, the term "all-female FPU" is absent from the UN's official policy documents, including the 2016 policy document, and is not mentioned on the UN's website or in UN resolutions. However, it does appear in UN news reports.¹⁵⁵ This exceptionalism reinforces Whitworth's (2004) critique that women's inclusion is tolerated only when it is circumscribed and depoliticized, segregated rather than integrated, celebrated but not empowered.

The deployment of all-female FPUs aims to enhance women's participation in peacekeeping, a crucial objective of UNSCR 1325. However, from a feminist critical standpoint, there is a risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes and essentialism if their mandate is limited to gender-related issues. When all-female FPUs are integrated into peacekeeping units with broader responsibilities and assigned routine peacekeeping duties, they can contribute more effectively to

2007. However, unlike the Indian model, UNMIL's FPUs do not assign gender-specific roles (Pruitt, 2016, pp. 27-49).

¹⁵⁴ Reference document is the Policy of the Formed Police Unit found at [fpu_policy_2016.pdf \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/en/dharmapuri/fpu_policy_2016.pdf)

¹⁵⁵ In this connection, please see: [In first for UN peacekeeping, all-female police unit arrives in Liberia | UN News](#)

overall peacekeeping goals and promote gender mainstreaming (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Pruitt, 2016; Shepherd, 2011; Simić, 2013).

Bangladesh's All-Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) in Haiti

The establishment of all-female FPUs by the UN aimed to address gender imbalances within peacekeeping operations. However, the experiences of Bangladeshi troops in this unit highlight the challenges female peacekeepers face. Leading the unit was difficult, as troops struggled with depression stemming from separation from their families (Atiqa Islam, personal communication, August 16, 2019). They also faced scrutiny of their training and performance compared with their male counterparts, influenced by sexism and gender bias (Pruitt, 2016). Nonetheless, the troops had to overcome these challenges and fulfil their duties in line with the UN mandate.

The deployment of Bangladesh's all-female FPU in Haiti symbolizes the UN's commitment to gender equality and UNSCR 1325. Despite efforts to stabilize Haiti through elections, the country remained unstable during the transition period.¹⁵⁶ In response to the ongoing

¹⁵⁶ The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established in April 2004 as the only peacekeeping mission in North America. Haiti's history is tumultuous, marked by colonial upheaval and the successful uprising against slavery known as the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). The country gained independence from France in 1804. After independence, Haiti faced socioeconomic challenges, political crises, and racial discrimination, conditions that worsened during the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934, which aimed to curb German influence. Nonetheless, during this occupation, racial divisions and hierarchies between Black and light-skinned populations intensified (Higate & Henry, 2009). Following the U.S. withdrawal, Haiti underwent two Duvalier dictatorships, popular movements, and political instability, including the election and exile of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a subsequent military coup, and outbursts of violence (Ibid). In 1993, the UN Security Council imposed embargoes on oil and arms through Resolution 841 to restore constitutional governance. From 1994 to 2004, Haiti experienced violence alongside the deployment of multiple UN peacekeeping missions, such as:

- i) United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) from September 1993 to June 1996;
- ii) United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH) from June 1996 to July 1997;
- iii) United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (MIPONUH) from November 1997 to March 2000;
- iv) United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from June 2004 to October 2017;
- v) United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) from October 2017 to October 2019.

For reference on past peacekeeping missions, please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/past-peacekeeping-operations>

political crisis, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established in 2004 by the UN Security Council, through Resolution 1542.¹⁵⁷ Initially, MINUSTAH faced criticism for its disproportionate focus on security issues. However, its mandate was revised over time to address the evolving situation in Haiti more effectively and adapt to the “changing circumstances on the ground” (Lemay-Hébert in Koops, Tardy, MacQueen & Williams, 2015, p. 722).

The devastating January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which killed 220,000 people, including 96 peacekeepers, and a subsequent cholera outbreak significantly hampered stabilization efforts (Ibid). In response, the UN Security Council tasked MINUSTAH with supporting Haiti’s urgent recovery and reconstruction. Following the 2011 elections, MINUSTAH continued its core mission to establish a secure environment, promote political processes, strengthen institutions, and uphold human rights.¹⁵⁸ The mission concluded on October 15, 2017, and was replaced by a smaller transition mission (UNSCR 2350).¹⁵⁹

The UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti faced significant local opposition, as many Haitians viewed it as a foreign occupation, fueling tension. Reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers from countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Uruguay further intensified protests demanding the mission’s withdrawal (Lemay-Hébert in Koops et al., 2015). The post-2010 earthquake cholera outbreaks also exacerbated the difficulties, with peacekeepers once again accused of involvement (Ibid). Lemay-Hébert (in Koops et al., 2015) asserted that “... a proper recognition of the social and political aspects of peace consolidation in Haiti must prevail over

¹⁵⁷ For reference on MINUSTAH, please see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minustah>

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Please see: https://minujusth.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sc_2350e.pdf

technocratic approaches” (p. 727). My respondents, who served during MINUSTAH’s post-earthquake period, reflected on navigating Haiti’s complex social and political landscape.

After serving in Kosovo and Darfur, Atiqah led the Bangladeshi all-female FPU in Haiti following the earthquake, commanding 110 female troops and 30 male technical staff. Her most challenging role was supporting her troops’ mental health and morale, as many were first-time peacekeepers grappling with family separation. Atiqah effectively managed these internal challenges, highlighting a key aspect of gender mainstreaming. During their leisure time, Atiqah and her troops volunteered weekly at a local orphanage, providing food and medical aid to 40 children orphaned by the earthquake. This charitable initiative, which Atiqah encouraged her successors to continue, both reflected and challenged gender stereotypes about female peacekeepers’ dedication to family and volunteer work, demonstrating their commitment to peacekeeping and charity (personal communication, August 16, 2019).

Feminist scholars (Detraz, 2012; Dharmapuri, 2011, 2013) highlight a complex dynamic in peacekeeping: while displaying kindness and understanding, as seen in the actions of peacekeepers from Bangladesh, can greatly help build trust with local communities, an essential aspect of UNSCR 1325, such friendly gestures are sometimes perceived as signs of weakness or a lack of military strength (Higate & Henry, 2009). Such misunderstandings can hinder genuine efforts to incorporate gender considerations into peacekeeping operations. From a critical feminist perspective (Shepherd, 2011; Pruitt, 2016; Simić, 2013), even the goal of increasing women’s involvement in protecting people (as outlined in UNSCR 1325) can unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. Female peacekeepers are often recognized primarily for perceived “nurturing” traits, such as empathy and trustworthiness toward local women, rather than for their full range of professional skills across all peacekeeping roles (Ibid.).

This framing is evident in public endorsements from UN officials. Then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon praised the members of the Bangladeshi FPU for their empathy and effectiveness in camps for displaced persons.¹⁶⁰ While commendable, such praise tends to emphasize femininity and care over tactical skill or leadership, reinforcing the notion that women peacekeepers are primarily valued for their contributions in “soft” skills, such as victim support or community relations. Feminist scholars argue that this narrows women’s roles in peacekeeping and marginalizes them from strategic or combat-oriented responsibilities (Otto, 2006, 2018; True & Parisi, 2013). These humanitarian acts are valuable, but they also risk reinforcing the narrative that women’s contributions to peace are grounded in care, rather than authority or strategic thinking. This resonates with Enloe’s (2000) warning that institutions often co-opt women’s labour while sidelining their power. All the while, this co-option reifies masculinist power and hypermasculine expectations of authority, violence, and threat. To “feminize” military or peacekeeping activities is often to diminish their perceived value. Thus, a double-edged sword emerges: it reinforces the gendered division of labour (by transferring women’s traditionally domestic/reproductive labour into public spaces with limited value) while simultaneously

¹⁶⁰ Then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, praised the Bangladeshi all-female FPU and said, “Last year, a terrible earthquake struck Haiti. Hundreds of thousands of people died. One million lost their homes. More than 1,000 camps were set up for the displaced. We knew that women and children were especially vulnerable. And we also knew that, in circumstances such as these, women peacekeepers have a special role. Women in the camps tended to trust them more. They would confide in them, especially in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. To boost security in the camps, we issued an urgent call to our troop contributors. Bangladesh responded immediately. You deployed an all-female formed police unit to Haiti. They have helped fight crime and prevent rapes and assaults. They distributed water, food and medicines. They protected humanitarian convoys. They delivered hope” (United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT), in Rajendrapur, Bangladesh, 14 November 2011). Reference: <https://press.un.org/en/2011/sgsm13944.doc.htm>

Sultana and Salahuddin (2020) have recognized the achievements outlined above in their study on female peacekeepers from Bangladesh. They emphasize, “..Bangladesh’s deployment of two full contingents of All-Female Formed Police Units in Congo and Haiti is appreciated globally. With integrity, commitment and visionary ideas, these units have played an enormous role in ensuring peace and stability” (p.38).

reinforcing negative views of what women peacekeepers can contribute, because their skills do not fit predetermined, masculine notions of what it means to be a peacekeeper.

In sum, the Bangladeshi all-female FPU in Haiti encapsulates the varied feminist gains in peacekeeping. It shows both the possibilities for women's leadership and the persistence of institutional structures that limit their full integration. While UNSCR 1325 provides a rhetorical and normative framework for women's inclusion, its operationalization often defaults to liberal feminist tropes, that is, celebrating difference without dismantling hierarchy. This operationalization further reinforces a particular image of peacekeeping as a men's club.

Gender Inequalities among Host Communities: Feminist Insights from Post-conflict Spaces

The integration of gender perspectives into peacekeeping cannot succeed in isolation from the sociocultural dynamics of host communities.¹⁶¹ Not all host communities respond uniformly to peacekeepers, and attitudes towards them can vary widely. These dynamics depend on whether peacekeeping is perceived as a neo-colonial endeavour (Whitworth, 2004) and on the extent to which local ownership of the peace process is complicated in post-conflict societies (von Billerbeck, 2016). Understanding these dynamics requires examining them through the lens of gender identity. Insights into gender inequalities within these communities, as reported by my respondents, offer valuable perspectives on implementing UNSCR 1325 in post-conflict settings. These accounts shed light on the conditions and challenges faced by both host communities and peacekeepers.

Peacekeepers often operate in environments where gender inequality is not only pervasive but also normalized. When I examined gender inequalities in host communities, one of my

¹⁶¹ Here, *host communities* are those that allow UN peacekeeping forces to monitor ceasefire agreements and oversee peace processes.

respondents, Major Eirene,¹⁶² a Bangladeshi peacekeeper deployed to South Sudan, highlighted the prevailing belief in male superiority and observed: “Beating is a common phenomenon... Any deviation from local norms on gender hierarchy results in severe punishment - even death” (personal communication, October 9, 2019). Her account points to the systemic nature of patriarchy, in which both women and subordinate men are subject to violent enforcement of male dominance. These testimonies confirm what postcolonial and intersectional feminists have emphasized: that gender hierarchies are deeply embedded in local political economies and cultural ideologies (Mohanty, 1988; Crenshaw, 1991). Porter (2003) argues that entrenched cultural stereotypes significantly hinder gender equality and women’s participation in decision-making. These hierarchies are not simply attitudinal but structural, enforced through customary laws, economic practices, and institutional biases.

Gender subjugation and discrimination take many forms, including the forced labour of women (Enloe, 2000; Sullivan in Shepherd, 2010). As Hudson et al. (2012) argue, women in some communities are effectively commodified, traded for dowries or labour, likened to cattle or land, and denied agency in political and economic life. My respondent, Selene¹⁶³, a peacekeeper stationed in Pibor, South Sudan, echoed this, reporting that in the Murle community, women were “bought” with cattle and expected to perform all household and subsistence labour. Despite being the primary breadwinners in many cases, these women were excluded from decision-making and subjected to violence, polygamy, and child marriage. Selene further noted that “most businessmen or women in the market were either Ethiopian or Murle women,” underscoring the paradox of

¹⁶² Eirene is a pseudonym for my respondent, who was a female peacekeeper from the Bangladesh Army.

¹⁶³ Selene is a pseudonym for my respondent who was serving as a female police peacekeeper from Bangladesh at the time of interview.

women's economic productivity and social disempowerment (personal communication, January 1, 2020).

The example above illustrates how men hold authority in gender power relationships, leading to the subjugation of women, at least within this community. Although this subjugation may vary with specific cultural practices among the Murle community, the underlying social idea of women as inferior transcends cultural boundaries and is relevant to most, if not all, societies. Such practices cannot be understood without considering the historical and political context in which they are embedded. Post-structuralist feminist theorists, such as Whitworth (2004), argue that histories of colonial control and external interference often shape local resistance to peacekeeping.

Changing deeply ingrained cultural mindsets and traditional authority structures that perpetuate the subjugation of women is challenging. Equally daunting is introducing international norms on women's rights into these societies, as they may be viewed as foreign impositions and dismissed as so-called Western values (Charlesworth, 2013; Puechguirbal, 2010a, 2010b; von Billerbeck, 2016; Zwingle, 2013). This tension places peacekeepers in an awkward position, as they may be viewed with suspicion as agents of neo-colonialism, and their gender equality agenda might be dismissed as a Western imposition. Communities may not readily embrace the notion of gender equality without certain conditions in place. It is vital to cultivate social environments that foster economic relations, cultural norms, and social practices that enable men and women to recognize the advantages of equal rights for their families, communities, and society. However, in reality, this task can be a tall order in many societies.

Hegemonic and Militarized Masculinity in Kalashnikov Culture

Hegemonic and militarized masculinities significantly shape conflict dynamics and obstruct gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping. Drawing on feminist security studies and critical masculinity theory,¹⁶⁴ this section demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity and militarization reinforce each other in post-conflict societies such as South Sudan,¹⁶⁵ intensifying structural violence and making it nearly impossible to achieve the transformative goals of UNSCR 1325.

Connell (2002) and Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity as the culturally celebrated form of masculinity that sustains male dominance and subjugates women

¹⁶⁴ Hegemonic masculinity, as explored in Chapter 3, glorifies masculine norms and male dominance, often leading to militarization in societies where it is upheld. The patriarchal gender order, reinforced by hegemonic masculinity, perpetuates unequal power dynamics and hinders equality for women and subaltern men. Consequently, women and marginalized men disproportionately endure structural violence. This includes gender-based violence, political exclusion, poverty, socio-economic injustice, human rights violations, and developmental challenges. Building on the theoretical frameworks of Caprioli (2000), Chinkin & Charlesworth (2006), Cockburn (2010, 2012), Connell (2002), Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), Enloe (2005), Hudson (2009), and Olsson and Gizelis (2013) discussed in Chapter 1 on hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and violence, I contend that these phenomena, together with gender inequality, pose significant obstacles to UN peacekeepers striving to promote peace and security in post-conflict reconstruction, as outlined in UNSCR 1325.

¹⁶⁵ Militarization in South Sudan has deep historical roots, stemming from “cultural, racial, and economic antagonisms” between the North and South Sudanese that date back to pre-colonial times (Idris, 2018, p. 2). The conflicts in South Sudan trace back to various historical periods, including the Turko-Egyptian rule (1821-1885), the Mahdist state (1885-1898), and the Anglo-Egyptian rule (1898-1956). Racial and religious identities also played significant roles in the tensions between the North and South Sudanese after independence in 1957. Under Sudanese rule, the people of South Sudan lacked self-determination. The split between the Islamic, Arabic-speaking North and the non-Arabic, Christian, and adherents of traditional African religions in the South has been marked by two devastating civil wars: one from 1955 to 1972 and another from 1983 to 2005. These conflicts resulted in millions of deaths and displacements. Even after South Sudan gained independence in 2011, political instability persisted, leading to another civil war from 2013 to 2020. Tensions between the Dinka and Nuer tribes further exacerbated the situation. Since December 2013, violent conflicts in South Sudan have forced four million people from their homes, with half seeking refuge in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda, while the rest remain internally displaced. For more details, please see South Sudan Emergency at <https://www.unhcr.org/south-sudan-emergency>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the existing humanitarian crisis, particularly affecting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who often live in overcrowded camps with limited access to essential services like healthcare, nutrition, and sanitation. In response to ongoing conflicts and humanitarian challenges, the United Nations Security Council imposed an arms embargo on South Sudan in May 2020, including restrictions on travel and financial transactions. UN Security Council Resolution 2521 (2020) of 29 May 2020 was adopted with twelve votes in favour and three abstentions, notably from China, Russia, and South Africa. Please see: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14199.doc.htm>. Despite various peace initiatives, South Sudan has plunged into another civil war since 2023, further worsening the plight of its people.

and marginalized men. In militarized settings, this form of masculinity is not merely cultural but is weaponized. Here, violence is used as a means of exerting power, and masculinity is closely linked to militarization, tribal identity, and socio-economic exclusion. This mindset reinforces a “Kalashnikov culture,” in which my interviewee peacekeepers believe that status and survival depend primarily on access to weaponry.

Colonel Nesar of the Bangladesh Army, who served in South Sudan in 2007, shared his experiences of gender inequality, hegemonic masculinity, and militarization across various tribes, especially the Dinka and Nuer. When asked about the challenges of maintaining security and protecting civilians, Colonel Nesar recalled that these tribes were not only armed but also operating in a context where highly developed cattle raiding necessitated constant vigilance and armament: “Individuals...were often shepherding cattle carrying Kalashnikov rifles! Any minor problem could turn into a serious fight with these guns around” (personal communication, July 26, 2019). This situation reflects a new, dangerous reality for cattle herders, in which violence and armament have become necessary for protection and defence against raiding, rather than an innate, deeply rooted cultural trait. His account was supported by Major Eirene in 2019, highlighting the ongoing presence of hyper-masculinized insecurity over the years (personal communication, October 9, 2019). Weapons like the Kalashnikov are more than just tools; they serve as symbols of masculine power, reinforced through armed groups, state forces, and even peacekeeping missions (Naidu, 1985; Enloe, 2005).

This blending of masculinity and militarization also shapes state institutions. Masud Karim, a police peacekeeper in Juba, explained that local police hesitate to intervene in conflicts due to fear and limited resources. “Kalashnikovs among tribe members are meant to ensure security,” he noted, “but often worsen insecurity” (personal communication, September 29, 2019). In this logic

of militarized protection, peacekeeping efforts become integral to the very systems they aim to reform. The line between peacekeeper and combatant blurs in a context where power is maintained through armed dominance. This militarized masculinity is embedded not only in local militias and governments but also in peacekeeping structures themselves. Most peacekeepers come from national militaries and are trained in masculine defence doctrines (Kronsell, 2006; Whitworth, 2004). Even with gender-sensitive mandates, peacekeeping units may unintentionally reproduce patriarchal logics, reinforcing the very hierarchies UNSCR 1325 aims to dismantle.

As Jane Kani Edward (2018) illustrates, the valorization of masculinity in South Sudan dates back to the liberation struggle, when military heroism became a cultural ideal. Defence Minister Kuol Manyang once warned recruits that refusing to serve would be seen as feminine: “If you refuse to join the army... we will buy you a skirt” (Sudan Tribune, 2014). This rhetoric equates manhood with militarization and femininity with weakness, reinforcing violent gender binaries and undermining peacebuilding.

Customary laws in South Sudan often fail to guarantee women’s equal rights, with a multitude of unwritten regulations that vary among tribes. While some customary laws have been formally documented, primarily by tribes such as the Dinka, Nuer, Lou, Shilluk, Kakwa, Kuku, and Pajulu, among others, disparities persist in the recognition and protection of women’s rights across these communities (Edward, 2018, pp. 63-64).¹⁶⁶ Women are esteemed as ‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of culture and traditions,’ yet they are frequently sidelined in political arenas and decision-making processes (Ibid). Furthermore, a 2018 article in *The Economist* explores how

¹⁶⁶ These laws are typically interpreted by tribal chiefs and community elders who are predominantly men. The male-biased interpretation of law perpetuates male dominance and negatively affects women’s lives. For instance, customary laws in South Sudan often lack specific regulations regarding the minimum age for marriage, which leads to the endorsement of early and arranged marriages. Edward (2018) further asserts, “... wife beating, polygamy, and widow inheritance are sanctioned by customary law and consequently, violate women’s rights to choose.” (p. 64).

polygamy fosters civil unrest in South Sudan, a connection that few recognize.¹⁶⁷ The article also notes that destitute bachelors are susceptible to recruitment by rebel armies, a process that literalizes the connection between gender inequality and militarized conflict (Caprioli, 2000; Hudson et al., 2009).

Feminist critiques argue that gender inequality is not merely an incidental cultural barrier; it is fundamentally linked to ongoing conflict and the failure of liberal peace. This argument is evident in Cockburn (2010), who examines hegemonic masculinity's role in fostering conflict; Connell (2002), who analyzes masculinity's multifaceted impact on conflict dynamics; and Enloe (2005) and Steans (1998), who highlight patriarchy as a foundational cause of violence. Furthermore, Caprioli (2000), Hudson (2009), and Olsson & Gizelis (2013) underscore the correlation between gender inequality and violence. Militarization relies on rigid gender hierarchies, racialized ideologies, and political exclusion, all of which hinder peacekeeping's transformative potential. In South Sudan, despite multiple peace agreements, including the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018, intercommunal violence and elite power struggles persist. Therefore, the core ideologies of militarized masculinity remain unchallenged.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ The article underscores that corruption, weak institutions, and tribalism, along with marital customs, play a significant role in the onset of civil conflicts in South Sudan. It notes that almost 40 percent of marriages are polygamous, with the wealthiest 10 percent of men having at least four wives, leaving about 30 percent of men at the bottom without spouses. Securing a wife requires paying a "bride price" ranging from 30 to 300 cattle, which many impoverished men cannot afford. Consequently, some resort to violence, engaging in "cattle raids" that spark bloody disputes among tribes. Reference: <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/03/19/why-polygamy-breeds-civil-war>.

¹⁶⁸ This persistent discord, rooted in gender and tribal identities is further exacerbated by the political ambitions of select local figures vying for power, including the ongoing power struggle between factions aligned with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and those supporting Vice-President Riek Machar. (Coning & Costa in Koops et al, 2015). In September 2018, a Revitalized Peace Agreement was brokered between President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar to end the civil war. Reference: <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/revitalised-agreement-resolution-conflict-republic-south-sudan-r-arcss>. The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) outlines provisions for power-sharing and security arrangements. Despite the

The voices of peacekeepers in this study show that UNSCR 1325's implementation faces not only logistical and cultural hurdles but also ideological resistance rooted in gendered violence. Major Eirene identified patriarchy and masculinity as the primary forces of exclusion. Selene linked gender disparity to domestic violence and child marriage. Colonel Nesar highlighted tribal militarization, while Masud noted distrust and economic marginalization. These testimonies confirm what Cockburn (2010) and Enloe (2005) have long argued: militarization is both a cause and an effect of patriarchy, and gender inequality is not merely a by-product of conflict; it is a driving force.

Reflections on Gender Injustice, Security and Limits of Peacekeeping

Despite the rhetorical promises of UNSCR 1325 and related WPS frameworks, this study shows that gender injustice remains deeply rooted in post-conflict societies. Empirical accounts from peacekeepers, deployed across South Sudan, Darfur, the DRC, and Haiti, highlight how patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and militarization systematically undermine women's rights, autonomy, and security. These challenges persist not merely as "social issues," but as fundamental threats to peace and justice, which critical feminist theorists, such as Tickner (1992), call the "unjust social relations" that must be dismantled for any meaningful security to emerge.¹⁶⁹

formation of a transitional government in February 2020, challenges persist, including ongoing intercommunal violence. Reference: [Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 31 of Security Council resolution 2677 \(2023\)](#).

¹⁶⁹ Tickner (1992) argues, "... the achievement of peace, economic justice, and ecological sustainability is inseparable from overcoming social relations of domination and subordination; genuine security requires not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations, including unequal gender relations" (p. 128). Tickner (1992) further argues, "...gender hierarchies themselves are a source of domination and thus an obstacle to a truly comprehensive definition of security" (p. 53). In societies dominated by hegemonic masculinity, women's empowerment may be perceived as a threat to the existing social order. Many women and girls are denied equal access to basic needs, education, healthcare, employment, and empowerment. This phenomenon leads to a 'silent genocide' that robs them of their lives and aspirations. This cycle of injustice continues unabated across the world.

Gender inequality, intensified by conflict and socio-cultural norms and “diffuse within religion, ideology, language and art among other aspects of culture” (Hudson et al., 2009, p. 21), persists globally. Respondents Eirene and Selene highlighted pervasive violence against women and a lack of agency. Maimuna observed that patriarchy undermines women and subordinates men in the DRC, where “women work hard, but they have no authority over their families. They are merely seen as the money machine” (personal communication, November 24, 2019). Atiqah detailed high casualties among women and children in Darfur, where Sudanese authorities used rape and sexual violence as war tactics (personal communication, August 16, 2019), leading communities to internalize “rape as an assault on their collective consciousness” (Reid-Cunningham, 2008, p. 279). This sexual violence hinders reintegration (Leatherman, 2011) and perpetuates cycles of violence (Baaz & Stern, 2013, pp. 62-63), obstructing peace processes (Kaufman & Williams, 2013).¹⁷⁰

Although UNSCR 1325 acknowledges the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, peacekeeping institutions often depoliticize gender issues, treating them as marginal rather than central to security concerns. This limits the resolution’s transformative potential, as Tickner (1992) and Shepherd (2011) argue that security must address structural inequalities to dismantle systems of domination. While peacekeepers like Selene recognized the influence of patriarchy, institutional responses were often technocratic or protectionist, marginalizing female peacekeepers. For instance, female peacekeepers were frequently confined to central offices

¹⁷⁰ In Darfur, the Sudanese authorities committed atrocities against women and children, including rape and sexual violence, as tactics of war starting in 2003. This atrocity left affected communities to internalize “rape as an assault on their collective consciousness.” (Reid-Cunningham, 2008, p. 279). In the realm of post-conflict reconciliation, the impact of sexual violence is particularly profound. Studies have shown that the prevalence of sexual violence can hinder the reintegration of survivors into their communities and, therefore, perpetuate cycles of violence (Leatherman, 2011). Moreover, the stigmatization and marginalization of survivors can create barriers to social cohesion and trust (Reid-Cunningham, 2008), both essential elements for sustainable peace. Baaz and Stern (2013) describe sexual violence as a global security issue, emphasizing the necessity of further research into the specific contexts in which conflict-related rape occurs (pp. 62-63).

because of assumptions about their vulnerability, a policy that unintentionally reinforces their marginalization rather than empowering them (personal communication, January 1, 2020; Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020).

Achieving the WPS agenda requires not only more women but also a fundamental shift in gendered logics rooted in patriarchy, militarism, racism, and neocolonialism across peacekeeping and host societies. Crucially, this transformation cannot be imposed solely from above. As Ferguson (2010) reminds us, women are not a monolithic group, nor are their political goals uniform. Effective peacebuilding requires recognizing women's diverse experiences, political identities, and claims to agency. It also entails challenging the gender essentialism embedded in protection doctrines that cast women as passive victims or natural peacemakers. The question, then, is not only how to address gender injustice but also who is responsible for it. Can UN peacekeepers, recruited from institutions shaped by hegemonic masculinity, challenge the very hierarchies they are part of? Can local leaders, working within patriarchal systems, be recruited as allies for gender justice? The answer lies in moving beyond symbolic inclusion towards meaningful transformation of peacekeeping institutions, local communities, and global norms alike.

Local Ownership and Politics of Gender Equality in Peacekeeping

Local ownership is a core principle of UN peacekeeping mandates. This principle was highlighted by UNSCR 1645 (2005), which established the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The principle underscores the importance of the host country's leadership in political, electoral, judicial, and economic reforms, community engagement, civil society involvement, and the capacity building of local institutions, including security and rule-of-law bodies. Resolution 2086, adopted by the UN Security Council in 2013, further emphasized the multidimensional roles of

peacekeeping missions and reaffirmed the importance of local ownership. Local ownership is a complex concept. In the peacekeeping context, it is defined as “entailing the broad and open inclusion of national actors in peacekeeping and a relatively high degree of deference to their aspirations and wishes” (von Billerbeck, 2016, p. 3).

Local ownership serves as a legitimizing element for peace operations. However, it faces two competing ideas: the normative duty of self-determination and the practical need to maintain peace and security. In *Whose Peace? Local Ownership and United Nations Peacekeeping*, Sarah von Billerbeck (2016) argues that the UN’s discussion of local ownership, expressed through the *Capstone Doctrine* on peacekeeping and the Peacebuilding Commission, is controversial. She explains, “...the UN adjusts and limits local ownership both conceptually and in practice, relying on it primarily as a discursive tool for legitimation but not an operational principle for effective peacekeeping” (von Billerbeck, 2016, p. 4). Thus, the UN restricts and frames local ownership in theory and practice, using it as a tool for validation rather than a guiding principle for effective peacekeeping.

In practice, local ownership often conflicts with peacekeepers’ mandates to promote gender equality, especially in patriarchal societies where “local leaders” may be the very actors maintaining gender hierarchies. Peacekeepers’ testimonies highlight this contradiction. In South Sudan, Selene described how political elites, who could have championed women’s rights, used their influence to reinforce polygamy and child marriage, thereby denying women access to education and agency. Educated community members often migrated, leaving a leadership vacuum filled by male-dominated traditional authorities (personal communication, January 2, 2020). Similarly, Maimuna described how political elites in the DRC maintained their authority through militarization and patriarchal patronage, positioning themselves as the voice of local ownership

while excluding women from leadership (personal communication, November 24, 2019). These accounts illustrate a core dilemma: Who constitutes the “local” in local ownership, and whose interests do they represent?

Conversely, there are instances in which gender equality is promoted. One example involved women participating in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)’s negotiations and planning for DDR (Samuel, personal communication, August 7, 2019). Women received micro-credit loans from World Bank projects to start small businesses in Afghanistan, with their husbands assisting them in selling products in local markets (Reaz Islam, personal communication, July 28, 2019). One respondent reported seeing no discrimination between men and women in daily activities within local communities in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Archer, personal communication, January 21, 2020). Community leaders can either mitigate or worsen gender inequality through their actions. While they can implement affirmative measures to promote gender equality, they often reinforce patriarchal structures, masculine norms, and, in some cases, militarization.

Local ownership is too often framed by male-dominated institutions that resist systemic change. As von Billerbeck (2016) argues, local ownership is seldom implemented as a feminist principle of shared governance. Instead, it becomes a fallback justification that shields the UN from accountability when its interventions fail to achieve gender justice.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ The theoretical concept of local ownership becomes complicated when peacekeepers are on the ground, particularly as their ‘operational effectiveness’ is challenged by patriarchal and militarized structures. Furthermore, the UN’s role in the transformative agenda, such as advancing gender equality through gender mainstreaming and local ownership, often appears more rhetorical than genuinely principled. The issue of local ownership presents two main problems. First, the UN paradoxically restricts ‘local ownership’ and does not fully adopt it as a fundamental operational principle in its peace operations (von Billerbeck, 2016). Second, there is clear ambivalence about ‘local ownership,’ especially regarding who the legitimate owners or local representatives are.

Furthermore, in Africa, “national actors ignore the discrimination against women in patriarchal systems” (Oré Aguilar & Gómez Isa, 2011, p. 8). This situation poses challenges beyond the purview of peacekeepers on the ground. The UN’s primary objective often centres on stabilizing post-conflict countries and facilitating their transitions to

Feminist institutionalists warn of the danger of gender-washing, in which institutions adopt the language of inclusion without altering underlying patriarchal structures (Mackay et al., 2010). In this view, gender mainstreaming through local ownership becomes not a mechanism of transformation but a performance of legitimacy. Moreover, identifying “legitimate” local actors is itself a contested, political process, often shaped by power, militarization, and international diplomacy rather than by grassroots accountability. A feminist approach to local ownership would highlight women’s lived experiences, foster equal partnerships with civil society, and tackle gender inequality not only in program design but also within governance processes, including SSR, DDR, and POC.¹⁷² As this study illustrates, these processes are often not carried out with a gender perspective in mind.

Repressive Regimes and International Politics of Gender Inequality

The limits of gender mainstreaming become clearer in contexts controlled by repressive regimes, where patriarchy is maintained through religion, law, and coercion. Drawing on feminist postcolonial critiques, Hudson et al. (2009, 2012) and Ferguson (2010) contend that both repressive governments and foreign interventions have politicized gender equality, either using it to justify authoritarian rule or to legitimize foreign occupation. The situation in Afghanistan shows that gender equality, when implemented without cultural change, remains superficial. Under both the Taliban and the Soviet government, gender was used as a tool of control: strict dress codes, child marriage, limited mobility, and exclusion from public life were justified by “tradition” or

democratic governance within a liberal peace framework (Ibid). Consequently, ‘local ownership’ may serve as a fallback position for the UN if its interventions fall short, acting as a safeguard against potential failure. For peacekeepers, ambivalent and insincere local ownership constitutes an external challenge to mainstreaming gender.

¹⁷² SSR stands for Security Sector Reform, DDR is Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and POC stands for Protection of Civilians. For details, please see:

i) <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/security-sector-reform>;

ii) <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>;

iii) <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protecting-civilians>

“order” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 18). After 9/11, the US-led coalition promoted women’s liberation as a reason for occupation (Hudson & Leidl, 2015, pp. 35-38) but failed to build lasting systems to protect women after its withdrawal. As my respondent, Reaz Islam, a former World Bank official in Kabul, noted, economic empowerment projects for women often mask more profound inequalities. While some women participated in micro-finance and production, male relatives retained control over income and public transactions (personal communication, July 28, 2019). Reaz emphasized that without institutional “implementation arrangements” to combat gender-based violence and defend women’s rights, even the most well-intentioned policies will fall short (Ibid.).

The UN’s policies, such as the 2024 Gender-Responsive Peacekeeping Operations Policy, call for thorough coordination with governments and civil society; however, in highly patriarchal societies, willingness to engage in such collaboration is limited. The international community’s failure to protect Afghan women during peace talks with the Taliban or to respond effectively to the 2022 bombing of a girls’ school highlights the shortcomings of liberal peace frameworks. Feminist scholars such as Shepherd (2011) and Cohn (2013) have long criticized the use of gender as a *post hoc* justification for military interventions that do not prioritize women’s agency in peacebuilding. As Reaz concluded, gender justice requires not only legal and institutional change but also social transformation and political will, factors critically absent in Afghanistan (personal communication, July 28, 2019).

Although mandated to promote women’s rights, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) faces significant obstacles. According to UNSCR 2679 (2023)¹⁷³, the UN now

¹⁷³ The mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established by Security Council resolution 1401 in March 2002, following the 2001 Bonn Agreement. Initially, the mandate focused on

recognizes that addressing gender injustice requires an integrated, multisectoral approach. Nevertheless, Afghan women still lack access to education, mobility, and safety. This reality shows that without transitional justice mechanisms and meaningful accountability, gender mainstreaming cannot succeed.

Transitional Justice and Gender: Rhetoric and Reality in Post-conflict Reconstruction

Transitional justice is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of post-conflict peacebuilding. It seeks to restore the rule of law, address harm, and create conditions for enduring peace. However, from a feminist perspective, transitional justice is a highly debated area. While it aims to deliver justice and reconciliation, it often overlooks gender justice in favour of political convenience. As Westendorf (2015) notes, transitional justice is one of the three main areas of international peacebuilding, alongside the ending of armed violence and governance reform. Nonetheless, it remains the least responsive to gender issues among the three.

Feminist scholars argue that transitional justice mechanisms have often excluded or marginalized women's experiences, particularly those related to SGBV (Anderlini, 2007; Porter, 2007). Although tribunals such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) recognized rape as a war

providing humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to the country's interim administration, without any specific mention of women's rights. Reference: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1401>.

Given the changed circumstances following the resurgence of the Taliban, the latest mandate of UNAMA, as outlined in UNSCR 2679 adopted in March 2023, emphasized the need for an independent assessment. This assessment was tasked with the following: forward-looking recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, humanitarian and development actors, within and outside the United Nations system, to address the current challenges faced by Afghanistan, including but not limited to humanitarian, human rights, and especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities... (Operative paragraph 2, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023)). Please see:

https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023-03-15_-_res_2679_independent_assessment.pdf.

crime, survivors still face legal, institutional, and cultural barriers to seeking justice.¹⁷⁴ In patriarchal societies, survivors who speak out risk stigma, retaliation, and ostracism. As Anderlini (2007) notes, the very act of “truth-telling” can retraumatize victims and expose them to further harm (pp. 153-190).

The main issue is not only the neglect of gendered harms but also the lack of gender awareness within transitional justice frameworks. As UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820 emphasize, impunity for SGBV must end, and women should be actively involved at all stages of justice and reconstruction. However, because peace negotiations often focus on ceasefires rather than accountability, a practical ‘peace first, justice later’ approach tends to emerge, one that is fundamentally gender-blind. This pattern has been observed in peace processes in Uganda, Bosnia, Liberia, and South Sudan (Anderlini, 2007; Porter, 2007). Even when women are included, their influence remains limited, with little real power or input into legal reforms and reparations programs.

Ambassador Ismat Jahan’s testimony from Sri Lanka highlights the gendered corruption that emerges when justice systems collapse. Her description of “sexual bribery”, in which women are coerced into transactional sex for documents or jobs, shows how exploitation becomes normalized in post-conflict bureaucracies. This abuse mirrors a cycle of violence rooted in unequal power relations, in which women’s access to justice is shaped by male authority and often treated as a commodity (personal communication, July 25, 2019).

The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the erosion of international commitments to women’s rights underscore the fragility of progress in transitional justice. Despite UNSCR 2679

¹⁷⁴ Though there has been some progress in advancing transitional justice through the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC), these institutions alone cannot end impunity (Anderlini, 2007, p. 186).

(2023) calling for “full, equal, and meaningful participation” of women, Afghan women remain systematically barred from public life, education, and employment. My respondent, Reaz, noted that even when women engage in home-based economic activities, male relatives control the finances (personal communication, July 28, 2019), reinforcing the ‘protector–protected’ dynamic described by Peterson (1992) and Enloe (2016) that limits women’s autonomy and self-determination.

Critically, UNSCR 1325 does not explicitly mandate reparations, highlighting a significant gap in the transitional justice framework. While former combatants receive DDR packages, survivors of rape and other war crimes often receive no support. As Ambassador Ismat Jahan noted, both women and men have been victims of rape, yet reparative justice remains largely absent from post-conflict funding priorities. Even when apologies or truth commissions are established, the lack of tangible redress leaves survivors without the means to rebuild their lives (personal communication, July 25, 2019).

Feminist scholars such as Porter (2007) and Davies & True (2015) argue that justice cannot be delayed or sacrificed for peace. The false dichotomy between retributive and restorative justice must be challenged. Restorative mechanisms, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), can be effective, but only if they centre victims’ experiences and are part of broader social justice reforms. Otherwise, they risk offering symbolic healing without structural change. As Davies and True (2015) contend, effective transitional justice must be grounded in an intersectional understanding of gender. This involves addressing not only individual crimes but also the systemic legal, cultural, economic, and institutional inequalities that produce vulnerability. Ignoring these systemic forces weakens efforts to end SGBV and achieve lasting peace.

Transitional justice should be reimagined not just as a legal afterthought to ceasefire agreements but as a vital part of feminist peacebuilding. Gender equality is fundamental to justice; it is not optional. Achieving this requires political will, survivor-centred mechanisms, legal reforms, and economic reparations. Peace operations must move beyond short-term stability mandates and focus on long-term accountability and social change. UNSCR 1325, along with resolutions such as 1820 and 2679, provides a normative framework for this transformation. However, without authentic implementation, political commitment, and adequate funding, it will remain a plan lacking real support. As this research shows, women and marginalized communities continue to be excluded from the promises of post-conflict peace. Feminist theories of justice further remind us that peace cannot exist without justice, and justice cannot be achieved without gender equality (Porter, 2007).

Review of the Challenges and Main Argument

This chapter provides an empirically grounded, theoretically informed analysis of the challenges of implementing UNSCR 1325 in UN peacekeeping operations. Drawing on interviews with Bangladeshi peacekeepers serving in missions in South Sudan, Darfur, Haiti, the DRC, and Afghanistan, this study examines how gender mainstreaming is shaped and often constrained by operational, cultural, institutional, and ideological barriers. This chapter answers research question (i) on the challenges peacekeepers face in integrating equality into peace and security and illuminates the realities of peacekeeping. A key contribution of this study is to show how peacekeepers, both as individuals and as groups, are positioned in gendered ways within their institutional roles and assigned value accordingly, thereby reinforcing gender divisions at the institutional level that perpetuate expectations of masculine and feminine roles. IPOs may pursue individual, role-based initiatives, while FPU tend to act more collectively; however, even within

this structure, individual leadership can affect outreach, as demonstrated by humanitarian efforts led by the All-female FPU Commander in Haiti. Military contingents also function as collective units, but individual misconduct, especially regarding SEA, can affect the entire group, sometimes resulting in repatriation.

Several recurring challenges have emerged in the field. First, peacekeepers, especially women, operate in high-risk environments marked by insecurity, threats of abduction, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder their mobility and effectiveness. Second, gender essentialism continues to shape operational doctrine: women are mainly assigned to SGBV cases, reinforcing their confinement to “soft” skills and excluding them from broader mission mandates. Third, treating UNSCR 1325 as a problem-solving tool rather than a transformative political framework has limited its scope, often restricting its implementation to addressing female peacekeepers’ underrepresentation or to tackling SEA/CRSV/SGBV, rather than advancing proactive gender equality efforts (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a).

Fourth, the diverse forms of gender inequality across host societies require deep understanding and sensitivity to local political and cultural norms. Yet peace operations often lack the mechanisms to address these complexities effectively. Fifth, gendered social dynamics, such as patriarchal leadership, bride-price economies, and the militarization of masculinity, regularly limit women’s participation in peace processes and further exclude both local women and female peacekeepers. Sixth, discriminatory institutional practices within peacekeeping missions, including logistical marginalization, restricted roles, and confined spaces, reflect broader organizational gender hierarchies (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Mackay et al., 2010; Newby & Sebag, 2020).

The case of the all-female FPU in Haiti illustrates both the potential and the challenges of gendered deployments. While their engagement with local communities showcased the benefits of women-led outreach, their mission faced obstacles stemming from essentialist beliefs and a lack of doctrinal support for integrating women as a standard practice. Their success was often described in terms of stereotypical traits, such as empathy, nurturing, and care, rather than in terms of professional skills and strategic value.

Finally, this chapter argues that gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping cannot be effective without addressing the underlying structural inequalities in both host societies and the peacekeeping system itself. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 remains hindered by a lack of accountability mechanisms, fragile local ownership in patriarchal contexts, and the marginalization of transitional justice processes. Testimonies from policy practitioners reveal ongoing challenges and gender injustices, including emerging forms of exploitation such as “sexual bribery” during post-conflict reconstruction. The stories in this study show how female peacekeepers and women in host communities are caught in a web of hegemonic masculinity, militarization, and institutional sexism. Patriarchal norms, ranging from wife-beating and child marriage to the exchange of women for cattle, are widespread in many conflict-affected societies. “Kalashnikov culture” and gender-based violence, especially in South Sudan, Darfur, and elsewhere, strengthen militarized hierarchies that are deeply resistant to transformational change.

Conclusion

Promoting gender equality in post-conflict societies is essential to lasting peace. Yet implementing UNSCR 1325 still faces cultural, political, and institutional resistance. As this chapter shows, local communities may not always support gender equality efforts, often viewing them as foreign impositions that threaten social harmony. Feminist critiques warn against ‘gender

imperialism', the forced imposition of Western norms without respect for local values and social practices (Charlesworth, 2013; Zwingle, 2013). Therefore, peacekeeping missions must carefully balance engagement with local cultural contexts while safeguarding human rights and gender justice. This requires moving beyond procedural gender mainstreaming to a transformative feminist approach that questions power dynamics, amplifies marginalized voices, and redefines peace as a feminist goal. As peacekeepers work to fulfil their mandates in environments marked by insecurity, political complexity, and institutional uncertainty, their experiences highlight an important truth: gender mainstreaming cannot succeed without systemic change within host societies, UN institutions, and global peacebuilding efforts. Recognizing the gendered aspects of post-conflict environments is just the beginning. Addressing this challenge requires a fundamental shift in peacekeeping, from a technical task to a political and ethical commitment to equality and justice. The following Chapter 7 will explore the barriers to achieving gender mainstreaming goals and suggest ways to overcome these obstacles.

Chapter 7: Gender Mainstreaming, UNSCR 1325 and Socio-cultural Challenges

Gender should be mainstreamed in peacemaking as a matter of right, neither as a privilege nor as a charity (Shekhawat, 2018, p. 18).

The primary goal of UNSCR 1325 is to ensure women's equal participation in peace processes. My research underscores the need to translate this mandate into concrete actions within peacekeeping missions. In the previous chapter, I examined the risks and challenges peacekeepers face and argued that these complexities undermine both effective peacekeeping and gender mainstreaming. This chapter builds on that analysis by examining the socio-cultural challenges to implementing UNSCR 1325. The second key research question is: What socio-cultural factors influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across different societies, particularly patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization? This question arises from critiques that the resolution overlooks unequal gender relations, ingrained hierarchies, and the impact of militarized and patriarchal structures in post-conflict settings.

I argue that limited gender integration within peacekeeping units reflects not only operational shortcomings but also a deeper systemic failure of the liberal peace paradigm, which perpetuates patriarchal and masculine power structures (Basini, 2017; Connell, 2002; Willet, 2010). Existing gender relations and hierarchies impede the implementation of UNSCR 1325, while the interplay of patriarchy, militarized masculinity, and institutional norms creates structural obstacles that restrict women's access to peace dividends. This chapter critically examines how the implementation of UNSCR 1325 is shaped by socio-cultural, racialized, and hierarchical factors within both host and host communities, emphasizing their national identity, which creates rivalries that hinder cooperation. Host communities, such as those in Kosovo, criticize their failure to prioritize perspectives, which poses a significant barrier to the effective implementation of

UNSCR 1325. SEA, SGBV, and CRSV are not isolated incidents but signs of a deeper systemic problem rooted in a masculinist security culture. As we will see, while local women face threats from such violence, female peacekeepers often experience sexism, racism, and harassment within the peacekeeping environment. The tendency to view female peacekeepers as a ‘problem-solving’ tool for SEA (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Simić, 2010) further obstructs genuine gender mainstreaming. Drawing on the work of scholars in FSS, feminist poststructuralism, and FI, this chapter argues that internal reform within peacekeeping missions is essential to achieving the broader, transformative goals of UNSCR 1325.

Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming in a Multinational Set-up

Building on the multi-level theoretical framework in Chapter 3, this chapter draws on FSS to examine the gendered aspects of peacekeeping. The literature review in Chapter 3 argues that patriarchy, hegemonic and militarized masculinities, and neo-colonial logics influence both host societies and peace operations, producing diverse and often adverse gender outcomes (Connell, 2002; Enloe, 2000; Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004). Whitworth (2004) critiques peacekeeping as a masculine institution that sustains cultures of command and discipline while confining women to symbolic or specialized roles. Enloe (2000) describes militarization not only as the presence of weapons but as an ideological process that promotes masculinity and marginalizes femininity. This ideological notion shapes mandates and roles in peacekeeping, as the hyper-masculine UN Security Council fails to challenge the underlying power structures (Shekhawat, 2018; Puechguirbal, 2010a).

FI further explains the gap between formal gender equality policies and the persistence of masculine norms within institutions such as the UN (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Homles, 2020). As Puechguirbal (2010b) warns, UNSCR 1325 is often co-opted to maintain existing gender

relations rather than change them, with resistance embedded in recruitment practices, implementation gaps, and entrenched hierarchies. Research by Ellerby (2016), Olsson & Gizelis (2013), Karim & Beardsley (2013, 2017), and Newby & Sebag (2020) highlights the tokenistic presence of women in peacekeeping, often confined to narrowly defined or ‘specialized’ areas and excluded from high-risk missions. Intersectional factors, including race, nationality, and culture (Crenshaw, 1989; Higate & Henry, 2009; Razack, 2002), as well as personal circumstances such as caregiving responsibilities (Jenne & Ulloa Bisshopp, 2021), also influence deployment choices and perceptions of women’s capacities.

Beyond socio-political and economic conditions, cultural identity is an important factor. Rubinstein (2016) argues that culture is crucial to the success of peacekeeping missions and must be recognized as a key element at all operational levels. Scholars such as Agathangelou and Ling (2009), Kent (2007), Razack (2002, 2004), and Whitworth (2003, 2004), referenced in Chapter 3, highlight that racism, sexism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism pose significant challenges for peacekeepers and local communities alike.

Higate and Henry (2009) examine how peacekeepers often emphasize their national identity, creating rivalries that hinder cooperation, while host communities, such as those in Kosovo, criticize their failure to prioritize local security (p. 121). These interactions reinforce identity politics, shaping gendered hierarchies and power struggles within missions (Ibid). Research also shows that marginalizing female peacekeepers (Carreiras, 2010; Newby & Sebag, 2020; Olsson & Gizelis, 2013) impedes efforts towards gender equality, highlighting the need for consistent policies that leverage diversity to move beyond tokenistic gender mainstreaming.

Only a few peacekeepers I interviewed¹⁷⁵ spoke openly about the racism and discrimination they faced due to their race, colour, religion, and ethnicity during their deployment, while remaining anonymous. One individual revealed that peacekeepers from developed countries often receive different treatment, being assigned higher positions and better tasks. Another mentioned that in cases of SEA, peacekeepers from first-world countries accused of misconduct are often exonerated by mission leadership. Meanwhile, those from developing nations face harsher penalties. Another respondent described experiencing ‘African racism’ or ‘reverse racism’ from colleagues from African countries. Additionally, a trainer from a European country (anonymized) was reported to favour peacekeepers from a specific nation while discriminating against others based on ethnicity or race. These stories highlight the various challenges faced by peacekeepers from different nations during their missions.

My respondent, Atiqa Islam, shared her experiences in Kosovo and Darfur, highlighting notable differences in the backgrounds of peacekeepers from various nations. In Kosovo, her colleagues came from the US, the UK, Türkiye, other European countries, India, and Pakistan. However, at UNAMID, a hybrid operation in Darfur jointly run by the United Nations and the African Union, 70% of the peacekeepers were from African nations, with fewer from South Asian countries (personal communication, August 16, 2019). This diversity offers both opportunities and challenges. Collaborating with colleagues of different nationalities and cultures provides opportunities for learning, innovation, and cooperation, but also presents challenges that must be effectively managed. These challenges can include issues with cohesion, communication, and coordination (Rietjens & Ruffa, 2019).

¹⁷⁵ I interviewed 22 participants, of whom 18 were UN peacekeepers, and four were experts and policy practitioners.

Higate and Henry (2009) further illustrate how Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UNMIK Kosovo, who are mainly Muslim, are stereotyped as less professional than their Swedish counterparts, who are seen as “quintessentially impartial,” revealing the underlying “hegemony of whiteness” (p. 130). Their “humanitarian professionalism” in UNMIL Liberia, demonstrated through reconstruction, food distribution, and well-digging, earned local appreciation but was sometimes dismissed as lacking military legitimacy, with South Asian troops perceived as “peace flag wavers” compared to the feared Nigerian forces (Ibid., pp. 129–130). While such qualities can build trust and support UNSCR 1325’s vision of inclusive peace, they also risk reinforcing gendered and racialized expectations, especially regarding female peacekeepers as naturally compassionate and helpful, rather than fully integrating women into all operational roles (Dharmapuri, 2011, 2013; Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Newby & Sebag, 2020; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Simić, 2010, 2013). Higate and Henry (2009) warn that such stereotyping creates unrealistic expectations, discrimination, and favouritism that can weaken cohesion, a pattern echoed in the framing of Bangladesh’s all-female FPU in Haiti discussed in Chapter 6.

My respondent, Maimuna, who served in the DRC, attended an MTT¹⁷⁶ Training and recalled that trainers from the Global North openly favoured the Egyptian contingent over the Bangladeshi one, praising the former’s capabilities while labelling the latter as less diligent and “lazy” (personal communication, November 24, 2019). She noted that such bias often draws on

¹⁷⁶ MTT (Mobile Training Team) is defined as an on-site technical assistance team, comprised of UN and non-UN peacekeeping training experts, led by ITS/DPKO-DFS and deployed under specific terms of reference (ToR) for a limited period to address specific pre-deployment training and capability development needs. The Team Leader shall be an ITS staff member/trainer or an ITS-designated trainer responsible for delivering outputs and services specified in the ToR, as well as team supervision, performance evaluation, follow-up, and reporting. Details may be seen at the source at the following link:

https://resourcehub01.blob.core.windows.net/training-files/Training%20Materials/002%20Policies/002-008%20ITS%20SOP%20on%20Mobile%20Training%20Teams_Sep%202015%20final.pdf

militarized ideals that equate physical stature with professionalism, framing certain nationalities as ‘stronger’ and others as ‘weaker’. These perceptions intersect with race, nationality, and gender, reinforcing hierarchies that marginalize women from the Global South. Despite acknowledging facing subtle racism, she commended the professionalism of peacekeepers from Egypt, Ghana, and Uruguay and described interactions between Bangladeshi peacekeepers and their counterparts, particularly with African peacekeepers, as friendly (Ibid.). As Rietjens and Ruffa (2019) and Ruffa and Rietjens (2023) argue, cohesion across strategic, cultural, and operational levels, grounded in equity and inclusion, is critical to the effective implementation of the WPS agenda in multinational peacekeeping environments. When peacekeepers embrace diversity and build strong interpersonal relationships within their ranks, they are better equipped to coordinate and achieve shared goals, such as gender mainstreaming, within peacekeeping units and among host communities.

Regarding multinationalism, my interviewee, Haider Ali Khan, a peacekeeper from the Bangladesh Police, noted that the UN values diversity and that Bangladeshi peacekeepers are eager to participate on the international stage (personal communication, September 19, 2019). My respondent, Masud Karim, another peacekeeper from the Bangladesh Police, stated that although he had not personally encountered racism, he observed that peacekeepers from First World countries, such as the US or European countries, were often assigned to higher-ranking or supervisory roles in peace missions, including Sector Commanders. Conversely, African and South Asian peacekeepers, despite their experience and higher ranks, were more likely to serve under the command of their counterparts from the Global North (personal communication, September 29, 2019).

UN peacekeeping missions involve personnel from 121 TCCs/PCCs, making them highly diverse. These different identities, intersecting race, religion, class, citizenship, and culture, can

pose challenges to peacekeeping work. My respondents' stories reveal both evident and subtle racial discrimination, with peacekeepers from various nations not always treated equally. Hidden racism based on national identity worsens gender inequality, especially for women from countries like Bangladesh, where gender and nationality intersect in oppression. Military culture's praise of strong, tough-looking male soldiers further sidelines those who do not fit this stereotype, making it harder for women from the Global South to hold important roles or be taken seriously. This overlap of racism and militarization upholds hierarchical power systems that restrict women's influence in peace operations.

Discriminatory attitudes within missions weaken efforts to mainstream gender. Maimuna observed blatant favouritism towards certain nationalities, while Masud noted that lower-ranking personnel from the First World sometimes held higher positions, highlighting racialized and national hierarchies (Higate & Henry, 2009; Whitworth, 2003, 2004). Although discrimination in one form can intensify another, the connection is not automatic (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, white women, despite experiencing gendered marginalization, can still participate in and benefit from racial hierarchies, showing that gender identity alone does not ensure solidarity across racial or national lines (Razack, 2002, 2004). Upholding UNSCR 1325's core goals of equality and cohesion can better enable peacekeeping units to address post-conflict needs. Without such cohesion, the mandate, peace and security, and human rights efforts all risk being undermined.

Dealing with SEA and CRSV: Women as Crisis Managers

SEA and CRSV are distinct human rights issues that can hinder peace operations and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. These issues leave women in vulnerable situations, with instances of rape, torture, and displacement often forcing women to assume new identities as

refugees, IDPs, or sole providers for their families (Mazurana et al., 2005). Commander Lily¹⁷⁷ is among the pioneering female officers in Bangladesh's armed forces, joining the first cohort when the country began recruiting women in 2000. In our interview, I asked her about the challenges she faced as one of the first female officers in the Bangladesh armed forces and about her experiences serving in UN peace operations. Lily began her peacekeeping assignment in the CAR during heightened volatility. Joining as a Staff Officer during the mission's start, she faced the challenges of working in a "mission start-up" environment. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has been mandated by the UN Security Council since April 10, 2014, in response to escalating security, humanitarian situations, human rights conditions, and political crises in the CAR.¹⁷⁸

Lily stressed that more women in peace operations could: (i) improve access for local women to report SEA, (ii) deter such incidents by increasing discipline and vigilance among male colleagues, and (iii) foster respect and gender equality through shared authority (personal communication, November 18, 2019). The insights shared by Lily underscore the reality that women often find themselves working within the confines of militarized masculinity. Her observations reflect the pervasive influence of hegemonic masculinity within military structures. In the context of South Asian countries, which contribute significantly to UN peace operations, Chenoy (2017) contends, "[w]omen's induction into the militaries has not altered the character,

¹⁷⁷ Lily is a pseudonym for a female peacekeeper from the Bangladesh Navy.

¹⁷⁸ CAR gained independence from France in 1958. Since then, the country has faced persistent challenges, including political divisions, sectarian violence, armed conflicts, civil unrest, and underdevelopment. Since 2021, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence have risen, further complicating efforts to stabilize the region. The mandate of MINUSCA includes protecting civilians, assisting in the transition process, facilitating humanitarian aid, promoting and safeguarding human rights, supporting justice and the rule of law, and aiding the DDR process. As of October 2025, Bangladesh contributes about 1,400 troops out of approximately 14,000 military personnel, making it the third-largest troop-contributing country and demonstrating its commitment to the mission's aims and the region's stability. Reference at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusca>

attitude, or values of the military or militarization” (p. 117). Despite these countries’ pride in their female troops and contingents, their security institutions and armed forces stay male-dominated, perpetuating the values of masculinity and militarization (Ibid). Furthermore, women become necessary as peacekeepers when missions extend into areas that cannot be effectively addressed through militarized masculinity alone. This creates a gendered division of roles between male and female peacekeepers and does not lead to transformative change.

During her service with the UN mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), Lily described intervening in an SEA case involving foreign peacekeepers and a vulnerable local girl. At the request of the Force Provost Marshal, she counselled the accused officers, persuading them to stop the misconduct. She recalled a situation in which a vulnerable civilian girl received assistance from peacekeepers. However, a concerning report revealed that they had made an indecent proposal to her. A board of inquiry was convened, and the Force Provost Marshal asked Lily to speak with the officers, believing her intervention might resolve the issue internally and prevent it from escalating to UN headquarters. Lily provided counselling to the officers, which successfully de-escalated the situation. She noted that negotiating such sensitive issues can be particularly challenging for men and that her actions, while not part of her official duties, were effective in preventing a significant incident (personal communication, November 18, 2019).

This case exemplifies the deep-rooted issue of SEA in peace operations, often associated with dominant masculinity and militarization. However, there is a culture of downplaying these incidents by attributing them to a few individuals, a perspective sometimes referred to as ‘a few bad apples’ (Whitworth, 2004). The above story also depicts efforts to ‘manage’ SEA incidents in peace operations. Significantly, Lily was explicitly approached because of her gender,

underscoring the expectation that women, not the masculinized institution, should resolve problems when militarized norms prove inadequate.

Despite stringent measures, including zero-tolerance policies and the immediate repatriation of accused troops (Karim & Beardsley, 2016; Oswald, 2016; Westendorf & Searle, 2017), the UN has failed to prevent incidents of SEA. The UN Secretary General (UNSG), in his report to the General Assembly in February 2021, expressed deep concern that “... such egregious allegations continue to implicate United Nations personnel...”.¹⁷⁹

The UNSG called for constant vigilance and the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions to curb SEA cases. He also stated that the UN “...must expand the work to embed a culture that rewards those who call out sexual exploitation and abuse, sanction perpetrators, and sharpen focus on risk factors” (UNSG’s report A/75/754, p. 18).¹⁸⁰ The UN has disclosed SEA data in the supplement to the UNSG’s report.¹⁸¹

Scholars have examined recent cases and identified troubling issues in institutional responses to SEA. Oswald (2016) cites the 2015 special panel report on allegations of SEA in the CAR, which strongly criticized the UN for its “institutional failure” to address incidents of sexual violence (p. 144). Westendorf and Searle (2017) examined the UN’s policy frameworks for

¹⁷⁹ UN Secretary General’s report A/75/754 entitled *Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy*, dated 15 February 2021, p. 2, and may be seen at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/042/69/pdf/n2104269.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁸⁰ UN Secretary General’s report A/75/754, p. 18, may be seen as a reference at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/042/69/pdf/n2104269.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁸¹ In the supplement to the UN Secretary-General’s report, it was disclosed that out of 162 reported incidents, 68 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation were made against UN peacekeepers in 2020. These allegations included 8 cases of rape, 18 cases of transactional sex, 26 cases of exploitative relationships, and 13 cases of child rape. In 2020, out of 157 reported cases, only 10 incidents were substantiated, with 90 ongoing cases. The remaining cases were either found to be unsubstantiated, closed, or still at the preliminary assessment stage. The number of allegations in 2020 in the supplementary information may also be seen at: https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/a_75_754_suppl_info_to_sgs_report_on_psea.pdf

preventing and responding to SEA. They found that multiple factors compromised the effectiveness of these policies, including the gap between policy development and implementation in the missions, bureaucratic imperatives, member-state interests, and structural and political conditions (p. 366).

Lily's case illustrates how a female peacekeeper's intervention averted a potential SEA scandal that mission leadership, representing entrenched masculine power, sought to minimize. Her role underscores both the potential and the limitations of gender diversity in peacekeeping: women are sometimes included to resolve crises that militarized masculinity cannot, but such interventions often protect the institution's image rather than address structural abuse. According to FI (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a), using women as problem-solvers for sexual abuse is manipulative and reinforces gender stereotypes. As poststructuralist feminist scholars argue, this tokenization reaffirms women as 'natural caregivers' rather than autonomous 'peace agents' and conceals institutional failure to prevent abuse (Whitworth, 2004). This exemplifies a form of gender mainstreaming narrowly defined as increasing women's numbers, while leaving intact the masculinist norms that place institutional 'fitness' above women's safety. Without challenging these norms, gender mainstreaming risks remaining merely symbolic and ineffective.

Lily argued that the presence of female officers can pressure male colleagues to uphold discipline. However, as Puechguirbal (2010a) and Kreft (2017) note, this can undermine the broader goal of equality if problem-solving is not grounded in a vision of gender justice. Many male peacekeepers I interviewed, including Archer, Oliver, and Samuel,¹⁸² view UNSCR 1325 as limited to roles involving women, children, and sexual violence, rather than as a mandate for full gender equality. This narrow interpretation constrains its transformative potential, reinforcing my

¹⁸² These are the pseudonyms for the three male peacekeepers who preferred to remain anonymous throughout the study.

argument that peacekeeping missions must first integrate gender equality internally before promoting it externally. Karim and Beardsley's (2016) study supports this view, showing that both the representation of women and the gender equality norms in troop-contributing countries influence SEA rates. While female participation can help, lasting change requires fostering a culture of gender equality within peacekeeping units and confronting the patriarchy, militarism, and masculinized structures that perpetuate abuse.

Three Menaces and UNSCR 1325

As noted in Chapter 2, the *Capstone Doctrine* aligns with UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1612 on children and armed conflict (2005), and with UNSCR 1674 on the protection of civilians (2006), within the thematic tasks of UN peace operations (*Capstone Doctrine*, p. 13).¹⁸³ These mandates create both organizational and operational imperatives for gender mainstreaming and require the UNSG to report annually to the Security Council on progress and the welfare of women and girls in host communities (OP 17, UNSCR 1325).¹⁸⁴

My identification of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization as the primary constraints on UNSCR 1325 aligns with feminist security scholarship. As discussed in Chapter 3, Enloe (2000) describes militarization as a gradual, ideological process rooted in violent patriarchy and privileging masculinity, “a complex process, frequently a contested one” (p. 11). Many of my interviewees equated militarization solely with weaponization and viewed gender mainstreaming as the inclusion of a few female peacekeepers in specialized roles. While some recognized elements of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization in local contexts, few identified these

¹⁸³ For the full text of the publication of “Capstone Doctrine”, please see https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf

¹⁸⁴ United Nations Security Council. (S/RES/1325 (2000), 31 October 2000) at <https://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1325>

dynamics within their own units. This limited awareness hinders gender mainstreaming within missions and undermines external gender equality efforts. Inequalities also intersect with race, ethnicity, and nationality among peacekeepers.

Patriarchy manifests through masculinity, and masculinity drives militarization. Chenoy (2017) underscores that “the interwoven triad of militarization, masculinity, and patriarchy profoundly influence state-society relations” and that this influence is “heightened with the political economy of war, force, security and control” (p. 99). Militarization extends beyond formal military institutions to include the arming of non-state actors, as Lily witnessed in the CAR. She recalled armed rebels besieging UN compounds, ambushing convoys, and killing or injuring peacekeepers in violation of ceasefires and peace agreements. In one incident, her convoy (Lily was riding in an Armoured Personnel Carrier) was attacked repeatedly over a three-kilometre journey, leaving two Pakistani soldiers fatally wounded. A Bangladesh Air Force helicopter evacuated the injured, but the experience underscored the immediacy and danger of such environments (personal communication, November 18, 2019). Lieutenant Colonel Albert, a peacekeeper from the Bangladesh Army, recalled similar instances of heavy fighting in South Sudan when conflicts erupted between government-backed and opposition parties (personal communication, October 8, 2019). Colonel Mahmood reported that his camp in Mozambique was attacked by local rebels, and he had to neutralize the attackers through negotiation and food support (personal communication, July 31, 2019).

In contexts of gunfire and rebellion, discussions of equality and justice are often sidelined as militarized masculinity frames security in strictly tactical and combat terms. This prioritization of military objectives over gender concerns reflects the dominance of masculinist security logic. Yet, as the WPS agenda and Galtung’s (1969) notion of “positive peace” emphasize, true security

must encompass justice, inclusion, and recognition of diverse experiences, not merely the absence of violence.¹⁸⁵

Despite DDR programs designed to disarm combatants and support rehabilitation, the ideological foundations of militarization often persist among local populations and former fighters. Although scholars note that militarization is more than weapons and that disarmament alone cannot dismantle it, this understanding is not universal among peacekeepers. Militarization's security-first focus constrains gender mainstreaming (Tickner, 1992, 2001) and can fuel gender-based violence, with 'sexual violence' deployed as a 'weapon of war' (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Furthermore, Olsson and Gizelis (2013) observe, "Female peacekeepers are not sent to dangerous missions where there is gender-based violence, gender inequality and gender insecurity" (p. 429). Consequently, their roles remain limited.

Colonel Nesar of the Bangladesh Army, who served in Georgia (UNOMIG) in 1994 and in South Sudan (UNMISS) in 2007, linked militarized masculinity to liberation struggles in which armed men hold power.¹⁸⁶ After the conflict ends, DDR shifts authority to politicians, who can either consolidate peace or reignite conflict. He observed that the presence of militarized men could obstruct peace processes; however, their influence diminished as development progressed. Nesar emphasized the importance of political reforms to support post-conflict recovery (personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Nesar emphasized that DDR and demilitarization are critical in conflict zones for sustaining peace and reducing violence against women, a view echoed by Chenoy (2017). Yet

¹⁸⁵ Peace researcher Johan Galtung coined the concept of 'structural violence' in 1969. In Galtung's view, security is not merely the absence of violence (negative peace) but the presence of social justice, equitable structures, and conditions that ensure human dignity and well-being for all (positive peace).

¹⁸⁶ By 'militarized masculinity', Nesar here meant 'the rule of military men or armed persons' (personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Chenoy warns that “militarization of the state is manifest where political parties have armed wings; militarized cadre and governments not only allow militias to exist but covertly use informal militias in disturbed areas” (p. 115). Militarization is not confined to wartime; it persists into periods of peace, and weaponization is only one aspect of the phenomenon (Enloe, 2000; Naidu, 1985). Its persistence undermines peace processes and complicates gender mainstreaming. While promoting gender equality can help dismantle militarism by challenging its ties to aggressive masculinity, women themselves may sometimes uphold militarized values. Consequently, both male and female peacekeepers must consciously resist patriarchy and militarization (Chenoy, 2017).

The possession of arms, especially illicit ones by rebels or combatants, remains a visible marker of militarization and a means of sustaining inequality. Selene, a Bangladeshi police officer serving in the UNMISS, described widespread killings and robberies by local combatants armed with illegal weapons. Although joint police operations recovered some arms, many remained hidden in remote areas. She recalled midnight raids by unidentified “bush combatants” seeking weapons and valuables, which posed grave dangers to unarmed civilians (personal communication, January 1, 2020). Her account equates militarized masculinity solely with weapons, reflecting a narrower view than the broader feminist definitions advanced by Enloe and Naidu. Such limited understandings among peacekeepers risk undermining both demilitarization efforts and gender equality initiatives.

It is noteworthy that many of the peacekeepers I interviewed equate militarization with weapons rather than ideology, revealing a shallow understanding that feminist theory helps illuminate. This misconception among peacekeepers highlights a limited grasp of militarization, which can hinder demilitarization and efforts to achieve gender equality. However, this is

understandable for those who have not engaged with militarization through a feminist lens. The militarization of society can significantly affect gender mainstreaming by undermining peace and security, as Selene described above. FSS scholars, such as Chenoy (2017), Enloe (2000), and Wibben (2011, 2014), frame militarization as the cumulative effect of patriarchy and masculinity; these are not isolated but interlocking systems. Militarism is therefore gendered and ideological, not merely material (Ibid.). In the following sections, I delve deeper into how militarization intensifies the negative impacts of masculinity and patriarchy within post-conflict societies.

Gender Inequality, Militarization and Inclusion of Women

UNSCR 1325 mandates increased women's participation by: (i) involving more women in decision-making within conflict resolution and peace processes (OP 2); (ii) appointing more women as special representatives and envoys (OP 3); and (iii) expanding women's roles in UN field operations, including military observers, police, human rights, and humanitarian personnel (OP 4). The resolution stresses the need to engage local women in peace processes and to ensure their equal opportunities within peace operations. In light of this mandate, I examine the status of local women and community dynamics through my interviewees' perspectives to assess the environment for implementing UNSCR 1325.

Interviews with several peacekeepers, including Colonel Nesar and Major Eirene, underscore the need to increase the number of women on peacekeeping missions to foster a more inclusive environment. Nesar said that a greater female presence demonstrates to local men that women are partners in development (personal communication, July 26, 2019). Eirene, a UN Military Observer in South Sudan, emphasized that gender mainstreaming is an ongoing effort that requires support from all involved. She noted that in South Sudan, where cultural norms restrict

interactions between men and women, female peacekeepers are essential for engaging with half the population (personal communication, October 8, 2019).

Both Eirene and Nesar, who also served in South Sudan, observed that local patriarchal structures and a culture of militarization complicate peacekeeping efforts. Eirene noted that in South Sudan, the widespread presence of weapons, a key aspect of militarization that includes both physical and psychological dimensions (Naidu, 1985, pp. 2-3), is a constant threat to unarmed civilians. She explained that arms symbolize power and are linked to societal instability, cattle raids, and inter-tribal conflicts (personal communication, October 10, 2019). Nesar shared an incident that illustrates this, in which the UN sought to relocate members of local tribes to a safer location using trucks provided by the UN and UNHCR. However, the South Sudanese administration indiscriminately loaded passengers onto the trucks, overlooking the special needs of women, children, and the elderly. Nesar also observed the lack of separate prison cells and washrooms for men and women. These examples, he said, showed a failure to recognize the distinct needs of women and children, reflecting a broader societal issue in which women are often seen as inferior (personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Selene agreed that having more women in peacekeeping roles improves communication with local women on sensitive topics such as domestic violence and sexual assault (personal communication, December 23, 2019). She cited an example of a woman with mental challenges who interacted only with female officers, suggesting that women are better at community engagement and counselling (personal communication, January 1, 2020). Lieutenant Colonel Albert held that including more women would better ensure peace and security and would particularly enhance civil-military coordination. He further noted that the UN should create a conducive environment before inclusion (personal communication, October 8, 2019).

However, Major Archer, who served in the CAR, held a more utilitarian view. While he agreed that women peacekeepers could improve coordination with local women, he expressed concerns about their physical security in dangerous environments. His perspective reflects a narrow interpretation of UNSCR 1325, in which women are seen as useful for specific tasks but not as fully integrated, equal partners. This view positions gender-related work as a secondary concern, separate from the primary military mission (personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Views on including women in peacekeeping differ. Masud Karim, a Police peacekeeper, cited logistical challenges, such as shared accommodations and open washrooms, as barriers to deploying more women, especially those from conservative societies. He also noted that women are often not posted to the most remote areas (personal communication, September 29, 2019). In contrast, Selene shared her positive experience volunteering for a remote posting, escaping a toxic central office environment and finding fulfilment in helping neglected communities (personal communication, January 2, 2020). These perspectives underscore the need to understand the diverse needs of female peacekeepers. While the UN's gender mainstreaming policy aims to address the distinct needs of both men and women, male peacekeepers often resist a greater female presence. They frequently express concerns about protecting female peacekeepers in emergencies, reflecting a perception of non-interchangeable gender roles rather than viewing women's participation as a step towards equality.

Samuel, a long-serving male peacekeeper, opposed increasing the number of women in UN peace operations. He claimed that women compromise mission efficiency, citing instances in which female personnel allegedly left their duty stations or were relocated due to challenging conditions (personal communication, August 7, 2019). This perspective reflects a gendered

assumption that overlooks the fact that female peacekeepers receive the same training and equipment as their male counterparts. This stereotype, which portrays women as less capable protectors, is often rooted in the ingrained patriarchal belief that women are not suited for certain roles (Shekhawat, 2018, p. 10). The assumption that women need to be protected hinders the implementation of UNSCR 1325, which calls for women's "equal participation and full involvement" in peace and security (UNSCR 1325, preambular paragraph). These views often serve a hidden agenda to preserve male institutional dominance in peacekeeping, as observed by FI (Homles, 2020). While UNSCR 1325 aims to promote women's participation, it can unintentionally reinforce gender divisions by assigning them to "feminized" tasks, which fails to challenge and transform militarized norms. Ultimately, the mission's units must mainstream gender internally, ensuring women's full and equal participation rather than excluding them under the guise of protection (Giannini & Vermeij, 2014; Newby & Sebag, 2020; Vermeij, 2020).

Masculinity, Militarization and Exclusion of Women

Hyper-masculine peacekeeping operations tend to view women as a group in need of protection, thereby denying them agency in the peace process (Puechguirbal, 2010a). This 'gendered protection norm' restricts women's participation in high-risk peacekeeping operations (Karim & Beardsley, 2017). Conversely, authorities in troop- and police-contributing countries base the deployment of female peacekeepers on perceived risks in post-conflict countries, often opting not to deploy them initially when uncertainty prevails (Tidblad-Lundholm, 2020, p. 678). When women peacekeepers are deployed, the mission is familiar with managing those risks (Ibid., p. 680). This approach perpetuates gender stereotypes and sidelines women in peace operations. It also overlooks the valuable contributions women can make to conflict resolution, peace negotiations, and stabilization.

My respondent, Lily, survived a hostile environment and a violent ambush in the CAR. She also shared a similar observation: the Bangladesh Army did not send its female soldiers at the beginning of the peacekeeping mission in the CAR because of the risks involved. It took the Bangladesh Army three years to deploy its female troops, and they were deployed only after a certain level of stability was achieved in the CAR (personal communication, November 18, 2019). Therefore, there is little likelihood that women peacekeepers will abandon the mission or face demanding situations, as Samuel suggested from an essentialist and protectionist perspective, except in cases of sudden personal or rare family reasons. Instead, the UN states that “...the presence of female peacekeepers broadens the repertoire of skills and styles available within the mission, often with the effect of reducing conflict and confrontation. Gender mainstreaming, then, is not just fair; it is beneficial.”¹⁸⁷

Major Oliver, who served two tours in the DRC, and other officers highlighted how patriarchy, “muscle power,” and militarized norms create hostile environments for women in peacekeeping. While Oliver noted an increase in female officers in MONUSCO, he criticized the UN’s lack of local sensitization. He emphasized that effective civilian protection requires both gender inclusion and appropriate role placement, particularly for engaging with women and children (personal communication, September 6, 2019). Some male officers interpret the WPS agenda through a ‘protector–protected’ binary, emphasizing women’s victimhood and overlooking their agency, whereas female peacekeepers challenge stereotypes and demonstrate capability despite systemic barriers.

¹⁸⁷ For reference, please see paragraph 6 of the UNDPKO’s document entitled *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective In Multidimensional Peace Operations* of 2000 at https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/UN/dpko_mainstreaminggenderperspective_2000.pdf

My respondent, Samuel, extended these concerns to DDR processes, questioning how gender mainstreaming could account for women's varied roles in conflict, from active combatants to coerced participants, and for their eligibility for post-conflict programs (personal communication, August 7, 2019). DDR criteria often require proof of being armed, excluding women whose weapons were confiscated or who served in non-combat roles (Carroll in Shekhawat, 2015, pp. 47–48). Consequently, women are frequently framed as auxiliaries or victims and are overlooked in programs in Rwanda, the DRC, Angola, and Sierra Leone (Mann in Shekhawat, 2015, p. 32). Stigma deters many from self-identifying as combatants, leaving them without benefits (Carroll in Shekhawat, 2015). Delivery systems for gender mainstreaming, social integration, and community relations remain inadequate (Basini, 2017, p. 138). Low female participation in DDR reflects entrenched perceptions of women as passive victims and the assumption that they can simply be added to existing programs without addressing their specific needs (Mackenzie, 2017, p. 156). These observations illustrate systemic discrimination in post-conflict reconstruction. When peacekeeping units are not gender-mainstreamed, they fail to grasp the socio-cultural and economic consequences faced by local women, limiting both the effectiveness of DDR programs and broader peacekeeping mandates.

Claims of inexperience or male dominance cannot justify women's underrepresentation in peace processes; women must be recognized as contributors and stakeholders in peace, and their equal participation must be regarded as their right (Shekhawat & Pathak in Shekhawat, 2015, p. 65). Efforts should aim to increase women's participation as decision-makers in negotiations and as beneficiaries of DDR programmes. Labelling their roles as “auxiliary” undermines both their contributions and post-conflict engagement, perpetuating patriarchy and hindering sustainable peace (Ibid). Exclusion from DDR due to militaristic assumptions about supportive roles, as well

as confinement within peacekeeping units to administrative or specialized tasks such as handling SEA or CRSV, further reinforces gendered hierarchies (Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020).

Evidence shows that a higher percentage of female peacekeepers and personnel from countries with greater gender equality is linked to fewer SEA allegations. However, broader cultural change is needed to address the root causes (Karim & Beardsley, 2016, p. 100). My respondents highlighted that many peacekeepers lack awareness of the mission's strategic and gendered dimensions, often confined to tactical tasks or engagement with women and children. Advancing the WPS agenda requires enabling women to participate as agents of change, integrating gender perspectives comprehensively, and ensuring leadership, training, and inclusive policies for all personnel in conflict zones.

Institutional Norms and Gender Mainstreaming

Through my interview with Sophia, a seasoned UN staff member, the transformative role of leadership in gender mainstreaming within peacekeeping missions became evident. She highlighted her male South African Police Commissioner in Darfur who promoted gender mainstreaming by prioritizing training and implementing initiatives such as 'firewood patrols' and 'firewood escorts' to protect internally displaced women from CRSV (personal communication, August 2, 2019). These measures, now considered best practices across African peace operations, demonstrate how leadership can translate policy into practical protection.¹⁸⁸ Sophia emphasized that female representation in missions is critical: women are more sensitive to addressing CRSV trauma, serve as empowering role models in post-conflict societies, and having female supervisors reduces the risks of sexual abuse for female staff (personal communication, August 2, 2019). She

¹⁸⁸ Reference: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/05/the-role-of-peacekeepers-in-protecting-civilians-from-sexual-and-gender-based-violence/>

also noted that senior officials in patriarchal institutions often resist acknowledging shortcomings in gender mainstreaming; policies and UN resolutions alone do not guarantee genuine implementation (personal communication, August 2, 2019).

Finally, Sophia described the UN as a “policy-perfect” yet patriarchal organization, where nepotism, a masculine work culture, and abuse of power create a toxic environment. Fear of reprisal prevents staff from speaking out, reinforcing structural inequalities that hinder effective gender mainstreaming (personal communication, August 2, 2019). Her observations align with findings by Puechguirbal (2010b) and Braunmühl (2013), supporting the argument that internal inequalities impede the mission’s ability to incorporate gender perspectives.

Sophia’s criticisms of the UN coincided with findings from other agencies, including the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the independent review body of the UN system that conducts evaluations, inspections, and investigations.¹⁸⁹ A JIU report on recruitment highlighted issues such as the concentration of power among executive leaders, opaque selection processes, limited vacancy notices, and predetermined appointments, which can lead to favouritism, nepotism, and political interference at the expense of professionalism and impartiality (JIU, para. 27, p. 9).¹⁹⁰ The findings align with Sophia’s experiences of corruption and misuse of power, showing that organizational procedures can undermine peacekeepers’ duties and the UN’s overall objectives.

¹⁸⁹ For reference, please see the website of the Joint Inspection Unit at: [About the Joint Inspection Unit | Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System \(unjiu.org\)](http://unjiu.org)

¹⁹⁰ The report entitled *Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework: Overview* prepared by Papa Louis Fall and Yishan Zhang in 2012 may be seen at [JIU/REP/2012/XX \(unjiu.org\)](http://unjiu.org). The inspectors documented the following findings: “The Inspectors do not, however, view favourably the concentration of a large amount of authority at the level of executive heads and the lack of proper recruitment guidelines and processes for the recruitment of senior managers. A lack of transparency in recruitment, restriction of the announcement of vacancies, and the announcement of vacancies merely to fulfil the requirements, without due process, and with or without a predetermined decision to offer the job to a particular person may lead to favouritism, nepotism and undue political influence. Failure to outline and enforce limits on political and personal influences and safeguard transparency may allow decisions to be taken according to such influences and weaken professionalism, performance and fairness” (paragraph 27, p. 9).

Although national governments recruit troops in line with UN standards, senior mission leadership, such as the Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Deputy SRSG, Police Commissioner, and other civilian experts, is directly recruited through UN competitions. UNSCR 1325 called for greater participation by women at decision-making levels and for more women to be appointed as special representatives and envoys (UNSCR 1325, OP 2–3). Even so, gender relations within such institutions remain difficult to quantify externally. Puechguirbal (2010b) noted that the UN continues to operate under entrenched masculinist norms that shape inclusion and exclusion in decision-making. She argued that although UNSCR 1325 was celebrated as a revolution, it has been used to co-opt in the interests of preserving the existing gender order, thereby leaving inequalities and power imbalances between women and men broadly intact (p. 184).

Sophia noted that, despite existing policies, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 often falls short. She emphasized the need to reform the recruitment of senior mission leaders and to hire qualified, committed personnel (personal communication, August 2, 2019). She also highlighted that male-dominated networks discourage reporting of abuse. While the UN addresses formal sexual harassment complaints, other forms of harassment that undermine a healthy work environment are often ignored. Women fear reporting SEA because it can lead to social isolation, stigma, and retaliation (personal communication, August 2, 2019). Sophia described a “mafia-like” culture within the UN, characterized by lawlessness, irregularity, and non-accountability, which creates hyper-masculine environments that marginalize women and restrict their roles (Ibid).

Such cultures, as described by Sophia, can impede gender integration in peacekeeping and the practical implementation of UNSCR 1325, fostering tokenism, superficial inclusion, and impunity for sexual and gender-based violence (Karim & Beardsley, 2013, 2017; Newby & Sebag,

2020; Olsson & Gizelis, 2015). Newby and Sebag (2020) note that SEA in UN missions remains largely unmeasured, partly due to militarized “warrior syndrome” and hyper-masculinity (p. 20). When internal structures marginalize women and enable SEA, peacekeepers are less likely to advocate for gender equality or to effectively include women in local governance and peacebuilding.

In a 2021 JIU report titled *Review of the ethics function in the United Nations System*, the importance of ethics in safeguarding against sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse is emphasized (paragraph 75). The report also highlights the need for a system-wide protection policy for whistle-blowers, noting that “Progress in creating operating procedures for retaliation case management is likewise disappointing” (paragraph 242).¹⁹¹ The JIU report defines “retaliation” as “...any direct or indirect detrimental action recommended, threatened or taken towards a whistle-blower (an individual who has previously reported misconduct or wrongdoing) or an individual engaged in an oversight activity (either investigation or audit)” (paragraph 231). My observation is that while the JIU holds advisory roles and can conduct studies within participating UN organizations, it lacks the authority to compel executive heads of these organizations to take action. JIU can, therefore, only issue recommendations.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ For details, please see the JIU report entitled *Review of the ethics function in the United Nations System*, prepared by Gönke Roscher, [JIU/REP/2021/5 \(unjiu.org\)](https://unjiu.org/jiu/REP/2021/5)

¹⁹² JIU’s mandate is as follows: “The JIU’s mandate is to look at cross-cutting issues and to act as an agent for change across the United Nations system. It works to secure management and administrative efficiency and to promote greater coordination both between UN agencies and with other internal and external oversight bodies. JIU provides support in the context of these agencies’ oversight function on human, financial and other resources. In its reports and notes, JIU names best practices, proposes benchmarks and facilitates information-sharing throughout all the organizations of the UN system that have adopted its Statute.” Please see the JIU website at [Mandate | Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System \(unjiu.org\)](https://unjiu.org/jiu/Mandate).

While abuse of power is not universal across the UN, it exists and affects men and women differently, sometimes benefiting some while harming others. My respondent described perpetrators as “mafias” or “corporate monsters.” Drawing on Seyla Benhabib’s feminist ethical theory (1992, cited in Hutchings in Jabri & O’Gorman, 1999, p. 23), “mafia culture” combines internal loyalty with injustice toward outsiders. Sophia recounted how a female peacekeeper fell victim to the ‘mafia’ culture within the UN system and was treated as an outsider or a non-member of the group. This individual faced injustice and contempt while serving in a peacekeeping mission. Despite impartial rules and regulations outlined in the organization’s manuals, mafia practices often overshadow institutions. As Puechguirbal (2010b) noted, the internal gender dynamics within the UN system are influenced by ‘relations of inequality’ and the ‘imbalance of power between women and men.’ This aligns with the concept of *male homosociality*, in which male-dominated cultures reproduce norms that favour men through formal and informal networks (Bjertén-Günther in Scheuermann & Zürn, 2020, p. 36).

Women are often sidelined in workplace dynamics and recruitment. While individual accounts require cautious interpretation, similar issues were documented in a 2019 UNICEF report on gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and abuse of authority. The report highlighted scenarios similar to those raised by my respondents, including an authoritative management culture, fiefdoms, a lack of checks and balances, favouritism in recruitment, micro-aggressions, a culture of silence, and a broken complaint system for addressing sexual harassment and abuse of authority.¹⁹³ Despite the UN management’s emphasis on addressing cases of sexual abuse, there is insufficient evidence that psychological abuse is recognized as a form of harassment. Mental or

¹⁹³ For details, please see the report entitled *Report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority* prepared for UNICEF in May 2019 at: https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Independent-Task-Force_report_EN.PDF

intellectual abuse is equally severe and can have devastating effects on the lives and careers of professionals. FI reveals how formal policies (such as UNSCR 1325) coexist with informal norms that resist change (Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

The UN must address these concerns as it implements gender mainstreaming policies. The WPS agenda should not be undermined by ‘mafia cultures and practices’, whether within host communities or within the UN’s peacekeeping structures, nor should workplace harassment of any kind be tolerated. Gender mainstreaming in peace operations must begin internally, because credibility matters. We cannot effectively promote equality externally while tolerating inequality within our own structures. This is not just about data; it is about consistency and legitimacy. If peacekeeping missions exclude women from leadership or fail to address sexual exploitation in their ranks, why would local populations trust their gender initiatives? At this point, it is worth reiterating that gender integration within peacekeeping units is essential to enabling peacekeepers to effectively implement the WPS agenda for local host communities. Without internal mainstreaming, achieving meaningful gender mainstreaming externally is challenging.

Rape Culture and the UN’s Inaction

During conflicts and post-conflict transitions, rape is frequently used as a weapon of war. Mackenzie (2010) argues that “wartime rape is more than just a brutal side-effect of war. It is an indicator of embedded patriarchy” (p. 217). Perpetrators use it to terrorize opposing populations, and without effective transitional justice, these crimes often go unpunished (see Chapter 6). Sophia described how peace processes in Darfur stall when rape, gender-based violence (GBV), and sexual harassment are not addressed. She reported that local military, government-aligned groups, and political factions target IDP women, who enjoy impunity and often face no condemnation from institutions (personal communication, August 2, 2019). Women collecting firewood face

particular dangers from militias, locals, or even uniformed personnel. Sophia emphasized that sexual violence is widespread in post-conflict peacekeeping missions and that addressing it is vital to mission effectiveness.

These patterns reflect a “rape culture,” in which dominant, often militarized men feel entitled to sexually assault those perceived as weaker, including women, girls, boys, marginalized men, and non-binary individuals. When victims come from opposing communities, such violence is framed as dominance through violent masculinity (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Leatherman, 2011). Leatherman (2011) documents similar risks in IDP and refugee camps in Sierra Leone, Darfur, and Uganda, where women and children face abuse from both local armed groups and UN peacekeepers. Willet (2010) notes that some UN-mediated peace agreements have empowered men implicated in SGBV and trafficking. She highlights that sexual violence excludes women from public life, enforces subordination, and has occurred “under the very noses of peacekeepers” in eastern DRC and Darfur (p. 154). Peacekeepers sometimes collude with warlords, reinforcing male privilege (p. 147), and may also engage in SEA. Participation in the sex trade sustains inequality, violates human rights, and is exacerbated by peacekeepers’ de facto immunity, despite UNSCR 1325’s call to end impunity (p. 153).

Whitworth (2004) offers a nuanced perspective, noting that although peacekeepers witness horrific violence, they sometimes cannot intervene because mandates are unclear, arms are insufficient, or the use of force is restricted. Nonetheless, civilian protection, including protection from SGBV, remains central to most peacekeeping mandates. Sophia observed that the UN’s presence, advocacy, and training have reduced rape by government forces in Darfur over the past decade, though this claim lacks verifiable data. UN records from July 2007 to December 2020

show fewer armed clashes but no reported decline in rape cases.¹⁹⁴ In fact, a 2020 AU–UN special report documented a 10.5% increase in reported conflict-related sexual violence compared with 2019, alongside escalating intercommunal violence (United Nations Security Council, S/2020/115*, 2020, para. 15, p. 5).¹⁹⁵

Sophia noted that achieving zero rape is unrealistic given institutional weaknesses, and that many women avoid reporting out of fear of retaliation (personal communication, August 2, 2019). Amnesty International points out that fear itself can pressure victims into silence, and that survivors often face shame, blame, or guilt, which discourages them from reporting (pp. 19, 36–37).¹⁹⁶ The UN similarly reports that stigma and fear prevent most survivors from coming forward, estimating that for each reported case, 10–20 go undocumented (United Nations: International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, 19 June). In fragile states, reporting rape can threaten women’s lives. For those in post-conflict societies, this creates a “double jeopardy”: surviving sexual violence and then risking further harm and ostracism by speaking out. As a result, many cases remain unreported.

The UN maintains a zero-tolerance policy for SEA, promulgated in 2003, that covers instances of violence against women and rape (Jennings, 2008). As noted earlier, the UNSG’s bulletin on SEA states that “sexual exploitation and abuse constitute acts of serious misconduct and are therefore grounds for disciplinary measures including summary dismissal” (UN Secretary

¹⁹⁴ For more details, please see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unamid>

¹⁹⁵ Please see page 5 of the special report of 2020 of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and UN Secretary General to the Security Council at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_1115.pdf

¹⁹⁶ Reference Amnesty Publication *Rape and sexual violence: Human rights law and standards in the International Criminal Court* at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ior530012011en.pdf>

General's Bulletin: special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, ST/SGB/2003/13, 9 Oct. 2003, p. 2).¹⁹⁷

This policy on misconduct applies not only to interactions with women in host communities but also to peacekeepers themselves. My respondent, Maimuna, recalled that UN trainers permitted consensual relations among colleagues but prohibited sexual contact with local women or UN staff without consent, and provided free condoms in UN offices (personal communication, November 24, 2019). However, in power-imbalanced settings, 'consent' can be coerced, reflecting gendered inequalities linked to masculinity and militarization. Westendorf (2023) criticizes this policy as paternalistic and colonial, as it homogenizes women and conflates diverse sexual interactions, including 'survival sex' and genuine relationships, into 'sexual harm,' thereby restricting women's agency.¹⁹⁸

Sophia compared the UN to "Animal Farm,"¹⁹⁹ where gender equality is claimed but masculine cultures prevail (personal communication, September 26, 2019; see also Puechguirbal, 2010a, 2010b; Braunmühl, 2013). Although most UN resolutions avoid addressing masculinity, patriarchy, or militarization, UNSC Resolution 2538 (2020) explicitly recognized sexual

¹⁹⁷ UN Secretary General's Bulletin: special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, ST/SGB/2003/13, 9 Oct. 2003 at [SE ST SGB 2003 13.pdf \(securitycouncilreport.org\)](https://www.un.org/securecouncilreport/pdf/ST%20SGB%202003%2013.pdf)

¹⁹⁸ Westendorf (2023) offers a nuanced understanding of the spectrum of consensual, exploitative, and transactional sex within the broader context of UN peace operations in her article titled "Sex on mission: care, control and coloniality in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations". Her analyses suggest that the UN Secretary General's bulletin on sexual exploitation and abuse reflects a paternalistic and colonial policy that homogenizes women as a category. The policy represents the institutionalization of feminist concerns around care and protection through enacting policies that either deny or control and limit women's agency within hybrid and fluid political environments. She further maintains that the policy collapses diverse sexual interactions into sexual harm in ways that obscure their complexities. For instance, cases involving 'survival sex' for desperate local women or authentic romantic relationships between local women and peacekeepers are not adequately nuanced.

¹⁹⁹ 'Animal Farm' is an anti-utopian political satire by George Orwell, published in 1945 and an allegorical representation of the Soviet Union under Communist rule after the Russian Revolution of 1917 by the Bolsheviks. The book's main message is that power corrupts even when idealism is at play in any human society.

harassment allegations (OP7) and called for gender-sensitive working environments and protection for female peacekeepers (OP6), signalling formal acknowledgment of gendered issues in UN peace operations.²⁰⁰ When discussing gender equality in UN peace operations, Sophia described being targeted by a senior UN official with a military background; after rejecting him, she was humiliated, socially isolated, and defamed, leading to marginalization and psychological distress (personal communication, September 26, 2019). She also reported harassment from another male superior, a known “womanizer” who exploited female colleagues by promising career benefits, whose misconduct was openly acknowledged yet protected by high-level UN officials. In another case, a female colleague’s harassment complaint was ignored, with the victim sidelined and the accused promoted through nepotism (Ibid.).

The UN has internal mechanisms for addressing harassment, including the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Ombudsman, and Conduct and Discipline Units in field missions since 2005.²⁰¹ However, investigations remain internal and confidential, lacking independent oversight, raising concerns about transparency and fairness.²⁰² The findings of the investigations are not made public, as details of such investigations are not documented for public access.²⁰³ Deloitte’s 2018 survey (30,364 respondents) found one-third of UN staff experienced sexual harassment in 2017–2018, most often in the workplace, with male perpetrators in two-thirds of cases. Only a third of victims reported incidents, which ranged from vulgar jokes to rape. These

²⁰⁰ For details on UNSC 2538 (2020), please see <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2538>

²⁰¹ For details, please see <https://oios.un.org/node/26355>

²⁰² For details, please see <https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/pko120.doc.htm#:~:text=The%20Conduct%20and%20Discipline%20Units%20will%20address%20issues%20such%20as,United%20Nations%20standards%20of%20conduct>

²⁰³ Publishing details would violate confidentiality for both the complainant and the accused. The UN would be violating jurisprudence in many areas if it did so.

findings align with the instances my respondent, Sophia, shared. The UNSG acknowledged mistrust, inaction, and lack of accountability, but did not strongly condemn offenders, many of whom remained employed.²⁰⁴ Shockingly, some offenders are rewarded with promotions or transferred to higher positions.²⁰⁵ At the same time, perpetrators enjoy impunity due to a ‘flawed grievance system’ and a lack of accountability.²⁰⁶

A culture of silence, retaliation against complainants, and impunity for perpetrators, who are often rewarded with promotions, undermines the UN’s stated principles of human rights and gender equality. As my respondent, Ferdous Ara Begum, a former member of the CEDAW Committee, noted, underreporting remains high despite the #MeToo movement, and transactional sex persists, with impoverished local women exploited for goods (personal communication, January 13, 2020). In such contexts, consent is compromised by gendered power imbalances, poverty, and marginalization, confirming the UN’s recognition that SEA is rooted in inequality (UN General Assembly: Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse Report of the Secretary-General; 17 February 2024, paragraph 1, p. 2).²⁰⁷

Commander Lily recounted similar cases of local girls being exploited through food incentives. Persistent issues include impunity, weak enforcement, policy inconsistency, and structural inequalities (Jennings, 2008). Despite mandatory training, a Code of Conduct, OIOS

²⁰⁴ For details, please see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/16/one-in-three-un-workers-say-they-have-been-sexually-harassed-in-past-two-years>. However, the results of the survey could not be found in any online database. It is not published on the Deloitte website.

²⁰⁵ For an instance, please see <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/may/08/un-sexual-misconduct-chief-was-promoted-while-facing-harassment-claims>

²⁰⁶ For more information on sexual harassment of UN staffers, please see <https://unwatch.org/un-needs-accountability-recent-sexual-abuse-cases/>

²⁰⁷ Reference at <https://docs.un.org/en/a/78/774>

investigations, and a Voluntary Compact²⁰⁸ with 105 member states, SEA and SGBV persist. Sophia emphasized that gender inequality among UN personnel impedes their ability to promote gender mainstreaming externally, underscoring the need to address internal disparities first. Jennings (2008) contrasts a “minimalist” UN approach, focused on rule compliance and damage control, with a “maximalist” approach advocating systemic reform, survivor-centred justice, and structural gender mainstreaming. Without internal reforms, peacekeepers risk losing legitimacy and undermining local trust. They must ensure operational coherence between internal conduct and external gender advocacy, which is essential to the WPS agenda. These realities are particularly troubling for an organization like the UN, which was established not only to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” but also to “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, and the equal rights of men and women.”²⁰⁹

Recap on the Findings

This chapter builds on the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 by linking peacekeepers' field accounts to FSS theories, postcolonial critiques, and FI. Despite the promises of UNSCR 1325, gender disparities persist within peacekeeping forces and among post-conflict societies, with women facing gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal power relations. Interviewees recounted shocking attitudes, such as the acceptance of rape against women from opposing tribes, and practices such as child marriage for dowries, illustrating how patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and militarization influence both local communities and mission environments (Puechguirbal, 2010a).

²⁰⁸ Reference: [Voluntary Compact | Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)

²⁰⁹ Reference from the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble>

These structural inequalities are mirrored in missions. Female peacekeepers are often relegated to administrative roles for security reasons or assigned ‘special’ gendered tasks, such as working with local women, addressing SGBV incidents, or working with children, based on presumed expertise in ‘soft skills.’ While some respondents recognized the deterrent effect of female peacekeepers on sexual violence and their role in promoting accountability, others dismissed their presence as unsuitable for ‘real’ security work. Such perceptions confirm institutional masculinist cultures (Braunmühl, 2013) that limit women’s agency, echoing postcolonial critiques of UN organizations that reproduce gendered hierarchies while projecting equality as a core value.

Internal barriers, such as sexual harassment, bureaucratic obstacles to reporting, and marginalization from decision-making, derail gender mainstreaming. Externally, missions are found to neglect addressing SEA, CRSV, and patriarchal violence in host societies. The division of responsibilities among the military, police, and civilian components, as well as cultural sensitivities, also obstructs the WPS agenda. Ticking boxes for women’s participation, whether as peacekeepers or local staff, without addressing structural hurdles risks symbolic inclusion without substantive change, a concern at the centre of FI (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Holmes, 2020).

The accounts demonstrate that peacekeeping remains influenced by patriarchal power, militarized masculinities, and colonial legacies that generalize women’s experiences. These dynamics undermine the transformative potential of UNSCR 1325. Until missions themselves embody gender equality by challenging masculine cultures, removing institutional barriers, and recognizing women’s diverse roles, external efforts to promote equality will stay limited. Deploying women with combat skills to address SGBV, without broader structural change, risks reinforcing the hierarchies that UNSCR 1325 aims to dismantle.

Conclusion

I conclude this chapter by highlighting that internal gender inequalities within UN peace operations significantly impede gender mainstreaming in both missions and host communities. The experiences shared by respondents reveal only the “tip of the iceberg” of obstacles to implementing UNSCR 1325. Without addressing hierarchical relations, gender imbalances, and deeply rooted norms within missions, meaningful gender equality remains difficult to achieve. Effective peace operations require integrating gender internally through policies, tools, and personnel committed to equality. While adopting a transformative agenda is challenging, it is possible. The next chapter will further examine how these goals can be achieved.

Chapter 8: The Cornerstone of Peacekeeping: Training and UNSCR 1325+

Soldiers are not born, they are made; and part of what goes into the making of a soldier is a celebration and reinforcement of some of the most aggressive, and most insecure, elements of masculinity (Whitworth, 2004, p. 3).

Although peacekeepers encounter numerous challenges, as discussed in the previous chapters, participating in multicultural and multi-ethnic UN peacekeeping offers a valuable opportunity. To meet the evolving challenges of these missions, the UN views peacekeeping training as a ‘strategic investment’ that enhances mandate implementation and serves as a practical tool.²¹⁰ Therefore, continuous investment in training is essential for success. This chapter examines the crucial role of training in UN peace operations and answers the research question (iii): What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground?

By exploring peacekeeping training, this chapter aims to demonstrate its potential to overcome existing barriers, enhance our understanding of civilian protection, and integrate gender perspectives into peace missions. Additionally, effective training can illuminate the complex dynamics of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization in these operational environments. While acknowledging the influence of gender essentialism in training, recruitment, and deployment, this study emphasizes the importance of training in addressing gender mainstreaming, biases and masculine attitudes, rather than solely assessing its primary aim of equipping personnel with diverse knowledge and skills. This chapter further illustrates how integrating gender equality in training contributes to the broader goal of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations.

²¹⁰ Reference: <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training> and <https://resourcehub01.blob.core.windows.net/training-files/Training%20Materials/002%20Policies/002-038%202012-2013%20Global%20TNA%20Report.pdf>

The UN has enforced mandatory training for peacekeepers, and a core component of that training reflects the UN's commitments to gender mainstreaming. As mentioned in Chapter 1, UNSCR 1325 emphasized the importance of specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel to protect the security, unique needs, and rights of women and children in conflict zones. (preambular paragraph 9). One of the subsequent UNSC resolutions (1325+), i.e., Resolution 1820 (2008), mandated training for troops on preventing and responding to sexual violence. Furthermore, UNSCR 2242 (2015) called for increased funding for gender-responsive training, analysis, and programs, while UNSCR 2538 (2020) emphasized the need to ensure appropriate training and facilities, as well as to support women's leadership opportunities.²¹¹ The *Global Study on 1325* also recognized that training is essential for advancing the WPS agenda, but identified the "systematic under-resourcing of gender-related requirements and expertise within peacekeeping budgets, and the uphill climb to tackle entrenched gender inequality in mission contexts" (UN Women, Fact Sheet: The Global Study on 1325: Key messages, findings, and recommendations, p. 5).²¹²

The multi-level theoretical framework in Chapter 3 claims that training and institutional reform are necessary but insufficient unless combined with accountability, contextual adaptation, and efforts to change masculinized organizational cultures (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Kronsell, 2006; Mackay et al., 2010). Feminist scholars in relevant fields, including critical feminism, structural feminism, and masculinity studies, as well as FI, have emphasized the need

²¹¹ See *Table 1* in Chapter 2.

²¹² Reference the fact sheet on 1325 at <https://wps.unwomen.org/resources/fact-sheets/Fact-Sheet-and-Key-messages-Global-Study-EN.pdf>, which recommends the following: Ensure that all UN peacekeepers are provided scenario based training on gender mainstreaming in peace operations, preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse by calling on Member States to invest in the capacity of national peacekeeping training centers from the largest troop contributing countries, so that they become permanent features in their pre-deployment training curriculum. (p.5).

for specialized training and identified inadequate training on gender mainstreaming as a significant issue in addressing gender inequalities, masculine domination, CRSV, and SEA (Basini, 2017; Jennings, 2008; Kreft, 2017; Oswald, 2016; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Simić, 2010; Strickland & Duvvury, 2003; True, 2010; Valenius, 2007). It is important to bear in mind that training alone is insufficient to overcome the organizational, operational, and individual obstacles, as well as socio-cultural barriers, in the peacekeeping agenda. The primary goal of the UN's gender mainstreaming is to transform society by integrating gender equality; in this effort, implementing UNSCR 1325 and 1325+ is a necessary first step.

In Chapter 7, my respondents, Sophia, Samuel, Oliver, and Maimuna, highlighted the significance of training in reaching peacekeeping objectives and bridging gaps. In this chapter, I further analyze the training provided to UN peacekeepers and discuss my interviewees' experiences with pre-deployment, functional, and in-mission (on-the-job) training. I briefly describe the specialized lectures UN peacekeepers receive on gender and UNSCR 1325, along with some deficiencies in that training. Additionally, the Bangladesh case study provides insights into the training delivered through BIPSOT and reveals traces of Eurocentrism in the training materials.

This study further employs FI to examine how peacekeeping institutions, including their training, are shaped by and sustain gender inequality. As Jacqui True (2010) observes, focusing on policy and training often overlooks deeper power dynamics that reinforce gender injustices. FI, as explained by Holmes (2020), critiques the inherently gendered nature of institutions, aiming to reveal and transform these structures towards genuine gender equality. Institutions are not neutral; they are influenced by histories of exclusion, despite their stated commitment to diversity and equality. Consequently, these institutions may implement gender policies while still maintaining

exclusionary power dynamics (Ahmed, 2012). FI can be regarded as a ‘political project’ not only for analyzing these exclusions but also for challenging and reforming institutions to achieve gender equality (Holmes, 2020).

In light of the critical analyses derived from the theoretical framework of FI, the research question I pose is: What are the challenges and opportunities in equipping UN peacekeepers with sufficient training and enhancing their competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground? This question addresses the problematic nature of gender mainstreaming under UNSCR 1325, often used as a ‘problem-solving tool’ primarily to address issues such as SEA and CRSV, as discussed from the theoretical perspectives (structural feminism) in the preceding chapters (Kreft, 2017; Puechguirbal, 2010a; Simić, 2010). Despite this limitation, Resolution 1325 remains an essential policy instrument for promoting gender equality in peace and security, providing opportunities for gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. I draw on theoretical perspectives from structural and postcolonial feminism in this chapter. My main argument is that if ‘gender training’ continues to be seen solely as a ‘problem-solving tool’ rather than an ‘analytical tool’ and is further politicized by the Global North as a hegemonic transnational practice, navigating gender training with the transformative goal of achieving gender equality and influencing changes in masculine behaviours among peacekeepers becomes increasingly difficult.

UNSCR 1325 mandates gender mainstreaming and training in all peacekeeping missions. Yet, my research, based on diverse cases and interviews, shows that these missions encounter unique challenges in post-conflict, patriarchal and masculine environments.²¹³ Understanding peacekeepers’ views on gender equality and mainstreaming is essential, as individual,

²¹³ The UN peacekeeping missions discussed in this study, through the lens of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers, are situated in Sudan, Darfur, South Sudan, Timor Leste, Haiti, the Central African Republic (CAR), Abkhazia in Georgia, and Kosovo. Two civilian respondents share their experiences in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Besides, the rest of my respondents shared their experiences in Lebanon, Mozambique and Sierra Leone.

organizational, and operational factors greatly influence their performance and the success of missions in achieving the objectives of UNSCR 1325. This chapter, therefore, draws on structural and critical feminist scholarship, as well as masculinities studies, to examine institutional and operational barriers to gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping training through the perspectives of FI.

The Imperative of Gender Training in Peacekeeping

The barriers discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 require targeted strategies and investments to achieve effective resolution. Training and awareness-building are critical for dismantling the barriers and integrating gender considerations into both peace processes and UN peace operations. These elements are particularly crucial as women in post-conflict societies often face significant deprivation of formal education and lack awareness due to the ravages of conflict.²¹⁴ Conversely, adequate training is indispensable within peacekeeping missions. Serving in a peacekeeping mission without proper training is challenging, especially since many contemporary peace operations are multi-dimensional.²¹⁵ Therefore, comprehensive training tailored to the complex nature of peace operations is essential.

²¹⁴ There is a distinction between training and education. While education is preferred, it is not without its flaws. Education can perpetuate biases and prejudices and may not necessarily lead to a more open-minded or enlightened attitude. On the other hand, training is focused and purposeful, with specific aims and objectives. Sometimes, training is employed to address misconceptions, misinformation, biases, and prejudices, thereby facilitating attitudinal and behavioural changes. However, certain conditions may need to be established for such changes.

²¹⁵ With the participation of military, police, and civilian components, peacekeeping operations encompass a range of political, humanitarian, development, human rights, and gender dimensions, in addition to their military and policing functions. Reference: Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping-handbook_un_dec2003_0.pdfhttps://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping-handbook_un_dec2003_0.pdf

Peacekeeping training²¹⁶ is provided to UN military, police, and civilian personnel during pre-deployment and in-mission training after deployment. Similar to the evolution of peacekeeping itself, from monitoring missions to multidimensional peace operations, training for peacekeepers is also evolving in response to new challenges and opportunities. Before the adoption of UNSCR 1325, Fetherston (1998) observed that there was almost no training on gender. Fetherston (1998) lamented that despite increased attention to peacekeeper training, they are poorly trained and “... little thought has been given to understanding the complexities of the warzone environment (psychological, social, cultural, political) within which peacekeepers work” (p. 158). Reviewing the content of training programs, Fetherston’s analysis revealed that UN peacekeeping training heavily prioritizes administrative and logistical skills, up to 95% of the course time, over crucial aspects such as intercultural relations, human rights, and gender sensitivity. This imbalance is particularly concerning, given the ongoing militarization of war zones, which underscores the importance of enhancing peacekeepers’ capacity to critically assess the human dimension of conflict.

Even after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, as observed by Mackay (2003) and Puechguirbal (2003), a significant lack of training on gender relations persists. More recently, scholars, namely Laplonge (2015) and Holvikivi (2021), have highlighted the problematic aspects of gender training. Mackay (2003) holds that while wars and conflicts destroy the lives of all civilians, men and women suffer differently: “Yet few members of peacekeeping missions have any training in

²¹⁶ “Peacekeeping training is defined as any training activity which aims to enhance mandate implementation by equipping UN military, police or civilian personnel, both individually and collectively, with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to: a) meet the evolving challenges of peacekeeping operations in accordance with principles, policies and guidelines, as well as lessons learnt from the field; b) perform their specialist functions in an effective, professional and integrated manner and; c) demonstrate the core values and competencies of the UN” (Source: <https://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/training>).

dealing with the civilian populations, much less the specific issues relating to gender relations” (p. 217). Mackay (2003) further notes that delivering training with gender-sensitive materials presents an emotional, political, and cultural challenge, rather than merely an intellectual one. The challenge with gender training materials lies in their emotional impact, as they address deeply held beliefs and values that can be particularly sensitive and emotionally charged. In military contexts, there is a risk that gender sensitization training is treated merely as a checklist item (Ibid.). Furthermore, there is a lack of enforceable standards for the conduct of military and police peacekeepers, and the UN cannot mandate training due to concerns about sovereignty (Ibid). Therefore, the effectiveness of training hinges on the trainers’ ability to navigate these complex challenges.

A core part of training is familiarity with key documents, MOUs, mission mandates, codes of conduct, and related materials. For example, the UN peacekeepers must abide by the UN’s *Code of Conduct* for peacekeepers and observers. However, this document is classified as strictly confidential. Since this document is not publicly available, I was unable to access it. There are a few public policy documents that outline the UN Standards of Conduct.²¹⁷ Most notable is the *Regulations Governing the Status, Basic Rights and Duties of Officials other than Secretariat Officials and Experts on Mission*.²¹⁸ This document outlines principles of probity, impartiality, and honesty across all aspects of the work. Officials and experts on mission must adhere to the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity, and refrain from seeking or accepting instructions from external sources outside the UN. All forms of discrimination or harassment, whether based on sex, gender, or other factors, as well as any instances of physical or verbal abuse,

²¹⁷ Reference: <https://conduct.unmissions.org/documents-standards>

²¹⁸ For more information, please see <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/keydoc2.pdf>

whether at the workplace or related to work, are prohibited. The UN's *Code of Conduct* is highly relevant to training because adherence to these high standards, especially regarding non-discrimination and anti-harassment, must be taught, reinforced, and evaluated during training to ensure peacekeepers understand their obligations and the prohibited behaviours, such as discrimination or abuse. Additionally, through training, the UN emphasizes its institutional commitment to the WPS agenda and helps translate policy into appropriate conduct on the ground, particularly addressing SEA.

Since 1998, uniformed peacekeeping personnel have received pocket cards detailing the *Ten Rules: Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets*.²¹⁹ This document outlines the rules for upholding dignity, respecting the law of the land, and protecting human rights. It prohibits, among other things, immoral acts of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse and exploitation of the local population and UN staff, particularly women and children. An additional document, titled “We Are United Nations Peacekeeping Personnel,” is included as an annex in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UN and each Troop and Police Contributing Country (TPCC).²²⁰ The Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13) is another critical document to add to the list.

Peacekeepers become familiar with these documents during their training provided by their sending states before deployment and subsequently by UN authorities after deployment. Puechguirbal (2003) emphasizes that while gender training for peacekeepers often includes discussions on a *Code of Conduct*, its effectiveness in shaping behaviour is limited without robust

²¹⁹ Reference: https://www.un.org/en/ethics/assets/pdfs/ten_rules.pdf

²²⁰ Reference: <https://conduct.unmissions.org/documents-standards>

monitoring and accountability mechanisms to report misconduct. Without these, training primarily serves as an awareness tool about local realities (Puechguirbal, 2003, p. 120).

More recent studies on training, such as those by Laplonge (2015), highlight the absence of discussion of masculinity in gender training. Holvikivi (2021) highlights the challenges associated with gender training for the troops, focusing on vulnerability to sexual violence and the lack of moral values. These studies underscore the complexity of peacekeeping training, particularly in efforts to raise awareness of gender issues within local communities, change the behaviours and attitudes of peacekeepers, and connect peacekeeping to broader codes of conduct. Such training must aim to address the root causes of misconduct, sexual exploitation, and abuse, or at least to reduce their occurrences.

For a comprehensive gender training, it is essential that training expand beyond women's issues to encompass a broad range of topics, including gender relations, power dynamics, the impact of gender relations on conflict and peace (Holvikivi, 2021; Laplonge, 2015; Puechguirbal, 2003) as well as the gendered nature of violence and masculinities (Connell, 2002, 2014). However, the UN faces certain limitations in diversifying gender training. For example, UN training for peacekeepers overlooks discussions about men, masculinities, and the internalization of certain negative masculine behaviours by peacekeepers, as noted by Mackay (2003), Laplonge (2015) and Holvikivi (2021). Mackay (2003) argues,

The contradictory views of those who professed they cannot interfere to stop violence against women because 'wife beating is a part of the local culture' but at the same time declared they 'wanted to help' and 'make a difference' seemed to be missed without being properly problematized (p. 221).

Upon reviewing UN gender training materials, Laplonge (2015) observes that there is “...a refusal or reluctance to allow cultural practices of masculinity to be investigated” (p. 97). The hesitance arises from the UN’s avoidance of these topics, as it does not want “...to risk being seen to interfere with the cultural norms of member nations even as attempts to unpack and deconstruct culturally embedded beliefs about masculinity” (Ibid.). Laplonge further questions whether current gender training adequately addresses masculinity, noting it often reinforces a ‘protector-protected’ dynamic where peacekeepers are expected to safeguard women in host communities. This limited and ambiguous focus, combined with operational failures such as SEA scandals and resistance to gender reforms, underscores the critical need to integrate a deeper understanding of cultural masculinities into training curricula to genuinely advance gender mainstreaming in peace operations.

Holvikivi (2021) further observes that peacekeeping training and national action plans (NAPs) from 75 countries often reduce gender to a technical problem of sexual violence, external to the peacekeeping enterprise itself, particularly in Global North countries, “where NAPs often describe gender equality as something they export to countries in the Global South” (p. 193). Holvikivi (2021) argues that this training constructs gender as an analytical problem rather than addressing actual gendered harm, while establishing a normative understanding that prioritizes vulnerability and technical skills over political or moral considerations. Similarly, Laplonge (2015) notes that militarily trained peacekeepers often practice patriarchy, emphasizing the need for awareness of how masculinity impacts behaviour to prevent gender-based crimes and biases in peacekeeping. Based on my study, I argue that if ‘gender training’ continues to be viewed solely as a ‘problem-solving’ tool rather than an ‘analytical tool’ and is further politicized by the Global North as a hegemonic transnational practice, it becomes challenging to navigate gender training

with the transformative goal of achieving gender equality and influencing changes in masculine behaviours among peacekeepers. I further validate this in the following sections with content analysis and empirical evidence.

Training for UN Peacekeepers

While UN General Assembly Resolution 49/37 (1994) assigns peacekeeper training primarily to Member States, it mandates that the UN establish guidelines, standards, and provide training materials, manuals, curriculum modules, programs of instruction, and rapidly deployable teams (UNGA Res. 49/37, paragraph 47). Over the past few decades, the UN has developed various training initiatives for peacekeepers. The Integrated Training Services (ITS), overseen by the Department of Peace Operations (formerly DPKO), has played a crucial role in delivering pre-deployment, functional, in-mission, and other training.²²¹ However, such standardized training alone is inadequate without a broader, transformative agenda that promotes gender equality and mutual respect. The various training categories are outlined in Table 3.²²²

Table 3

Training for Peacekeepers Participating in UN Peace Operations

1. Pre-deployment training: • Civilian • Military • Police 2. Functional training: • Specialized training • Reinforcement training • Leadership training: - Senior Leadership Programme (SLP) - Senior Mission Leaders (SML) course

²²¹ Reference: <https://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/about>

²²² For reference on the categories of UN's training for peacekeepers in the UN peace operations presented in Table 3, please see: <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training>

- Senior Mission Administration and Resources Programme (SMART)

3. In-mission training:

- Mission Specific Induction:
 - Integrated induction training
 - Specialized induction training
- Ongoing training:
 - Mandatory training
 - Other training

4. Policy and Guidance:

- Policy
- Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)
- Guidelines

In the above table, the first type of training peacekeepers receive is pre-deployment training, organized primarily by the relevant authorities of the TPCC, as per UNGA Resolution 49/37 of 9 February 1995. This type of training is organized for the civilian, military, and police components of peacekeeping, depending on the nature of the country's deployment. In Bangladesh, peacekeeping is often associated with military deployment, and the majority of Bangladeshi peacekeepers are drawn from the military.²²³ There is another category of training called 'Functional training,' which focuses on specialized areas where peacekeepers may need training to perform various tasks. Within this category, leadership training, such as the Senior Mission Leader (SML) Course,²²⁴ is designed for civilian, military, and police personnel preparing

²²³ Bangladesh has consistently ranked among the largest troop-contributing countries to United Nations Peace Operations, with about 6,000 troops deployed across various peacekeeping missions at any given time. Reference: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

²²⁴ In 2011, I was trained as a civilian peacekeeper at the Senior Mission Leader Course in Pretoria, South Africa, organized by the former United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). My motivation for this thesis stems in part from the insights gained during this training. Throughout the course, I recognized the importance of fostering greater collaboration among the civilian, military, and police components to better understand human rights and gender, areas that were partially absent.

for leadership roles. These roles include, in the civilian category, SRSG, Deputy SRSG, Head of the Human Rights Unit, and Head of the Gender Unit, among others; in the military category, Force Commander, Deputy Force Commander, and others; and in the police component, Police Commissioner and deputies.

Another essential type of training is ‘in-mission training’ or ‘induction training,’ which occurs after troops arrive at the mission site. This training provides orientation and mission-specific information, available in both integrated and specialized formats tailored to the civil, military, and police components. Additionally, training on policy, mandate, and guidance is provided continuously during deployment and can be accessed from the UN upon request.

My respondents discussed three types of peacekeeping training: pre-deployment, induction, and on-the-job training, with one respondent also mentioning online training. Masud Karim, Director of Training at the Police Staff College and a veteran of UN missions in Kosovo, Sudan, and Timor-Leste, noted that peacekeeping training has evolved, with peacekeepers receiving training in three phases: pre-deployment, post-deployment, and ongoing (personal communication, September 29, 2019). Lieutenant Colonel Nazmul Haque, who served in Sudan (UNMIS) and South Sudan (UNMISS), confirmed that the Bangladesh Army’s pre-deployment training includes gender equality, UNSCR 1325, gender-based marginalization, and CRSV as part of the Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials (CPTM).²²⁵ He stressed the importance of this training in preparing peacekeepers for diverse operational and social challenges (personal communication, October 13, 2019).

²²⁵ The training materials under Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials (CPTM) may be seen here <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/pre-deployment/cptm/intro>

Gaps and Discrepancies in Peacekeeping Training

When asked about the gap between pre-deployment training (PDT) and actual responsibilities, Major Eirene saw no discrepancy (personal communication, October 4, 2019). However, police officers Maimuna and Selene both identified significant gaps, with Maimuna emphasizing that inadequate training affects performance (personal communication, November 24, 2019). Selene specifically highlighted PDT's insufficient preparation for working with IDPs and POC, leading to inappropriate behaviour by peacekeepers (personal communication, January 1, 2020). This gap highlights the need for job-oriented training that incorporates UNSCR 1325 to equip peacekeepers with knowledge of gendered conflict aspects, focusing on IDP protection, agency, and inclusion in peace processes, particularly addressing the specific needs of women and girls during repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration (UNSCR 1325; 2000; preambular paragraphs 4, 5, 6 and operative paragraph 8).

Opinions on the effectiveness of PDT vary, likely due to the different roles of military and police peacekeepers who train at separate facilities: the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT) in Gazipur, Dhaka, for army, navy, and air force personnel, and the Police Training Centre in Mohera, Tangail, for police. Police personnel sometimes attend courses at BIPSOT, which provide peacekeepers with knowledge specific to their roles in mission settings (Asaduzzaman, personal communication, February 6, 2020).

Maimuna highlighted a significant gap between national and in-mission training, especially on gender issues. She observed that while national trainers had some understanding of gender, UN training provided a more comprehensive, though often SEA-focused, approach. Maimuna also believed that national gender training should involve more men, not just women. Additionally, she identified the spread of HIV and STDs as a significant challenge in the Congo mission, linked to

peacekeepers seeking companionship, and pointed out the UN's strict zero-tolerance policy for non-consensual sexual acts, which can result in the repatriation of the contingent (personal communication, November 24, 2019).

Beyond formal training, UN peacekeepers receive additional briefings on SEA following past incidents, emphasizing the UN's zero-tolerance policy and its consequences, including repatriation or prosecution.²²⁶ Maimuna specifically noted the UN's commitment to repatriating entire peacekeeping units involved in SEA, a measure supported by UNSCR 2272 (2016), which mandates investigation, accountability, and repatriation for widespread or systemic abuse. (United Nations Security Council: S/RES/2272 (2016), OP 8). Examples include the repatriation of Gabonese (2021), Tanzanian (2023), and South African (2023) contingents from the CAR and the DRC for SEA violations.²²⁷ Maimuna also indicated that the UN's focus on gender in the DRC mission, driven by high SEA incidents and STD concerns, prioritizes mitigating these crises through consent and precautionary measures rather than genuinely advancing gender equality or women's empowerment in post-conflict development.

²²⁶ Reference at https://conduct.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/report_of_the_secretary-general_on_special_measures_for_protection_from_sexual_exploitation_and_abuse_a77748.pdf

²²⁷ In September 2021, the UN repatriated a Gabonese contingent comprised of 450 military troops from the CAR due to SEA involvement. Reference at <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2022/05/02/beyond-repatriation-combating-peacekeeper-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation/>.

In June 2023, the UN repatriated 60 Tanzanian peacekeepers from MINUSCA after preliminary investigations revealed credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against 11 troops stationed at a temporary base in western CAR. In October 2023, the UN repatriated the South African contingent from the DRC after a statement revealed that nine South African peacekeepers deployed in eastern DRC were observed violating curfew by visiting off-limits bars, establishments known for transactional sex, in breach of UN conduct regulations. They allegedly assaulted UN staff who attempted to detain them while on patrol. Reference at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/11/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-meeting-under-any-other-business.php>.

Gender Training as a ‘problem-solving tool’

After Maimuna, similar observations were made by Themis, a Bangladeshi police officer who served in the DRC. She described her ‘entry training,’ in which the outgoing contingent briefed the incoming contingent. While she acknowledged the UN’s push for greater female participation and the value of women as IPOs, she noted that UNSCR 1325 was only referenced, not emphasized, during in-mission training. Instead, the training focused primarily on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). It repeatedly emphasized the importance of preventing SEA, citing past incidents in the DRC, including the appointment of an SEA focal point for their FPU and the conduct of weekly SEA awareness sessions (personal communication, August 1, 2019).

Missions often prioritize reducing SEA, which is not only a matter of discipline and misconduct but also a security concern (Dharmapuri, 2011) and a barrier to gender mainstreaming. As discussed in Chapter 7, SEA committed by peacekeepers undermines the legitimacy of missions. It can also foster local hostility and worsen insecurity by damaging community trust. This turns perpetrators into security liabilities and hampers operational effectiveness (Ibid.). Therefore, SEA turns individual misconduct into a broader strategic risk. Female peacekeepers are thus deployed in peace operations as ‘problem-solving forces’ when sexual violence rises (Kreft, 2017; Oswald, 2016; Simić, 2010), or to engage with local women (Puechguirbal, 2010a), or to perform pacifying roles alongside male peacekeepers to address SEA (Valenius, 2007).

In the absence of a Protection Doctrine or standard procedure, UN peace operations have relied on *ad hoc* responses to address barriers and incidents related to SGBV. These responses include setting up desks for women police officers at IDP and refugee camps, as well as deploying female interpreters and peacekeepers for patrols and incident documentation (Dharmapuri, 2011). My respondent, Sophia, mentioned similar measures undertaken to protect IDP women,

particularly ‘firewood patrols’²²⁸ in conjunction with regular patrols and providing training for community policing in the host communities (personal communication, August 2, 2019). These initiatives have since become best practices across African peace operations. However, this reactive, rather than proactive, approach indicates a superficial engagement with gender, treating symptoms rather than the disease and limiting systemic change.

A core analytical framework distinguishes between gender training as a ‘problem-solving tool’ that targets immediate issues such as SEA and CRSV, and an ‘analytical tool’ that focuses on understanding systemic gender dynamics (Puechguiorbal, 2010a, 2003; Shepherd, 2008). True gender mainstreaming demands a deeper comprehension of societal and militarized norms that shape behaviour, rather than merely addressing misconduct. This critical feminist perspective allows for the deconstruction of seemingly neutral initiatives, such as gender training or increased female representation, to reveal the underlying power dynamics. It also shifts the discourse from simply identifying training gaps to challenging the fundamental conceptualization of gender within peacekeeping training.

Considering the ongoing incidents of SEA by UN troops, a key question emerges: can true transformative gender mainstreaming be achieved? While greater awareness of SEA might indicate progress since UNSCR 1325, this resolution also calls for the active integration of women into all operational roles and emphasizes the importance of local women’s participation. Consequently, eliminating SEA remains a crucial and ongoing step toward fully embedding gender equality in the UN peacekeeping process. Nevertheless, lasting change will require sustained effort beyond this initial, limited application of 1325.

²²⁸ ‘Firewood patrols’ or ‘escorts’ are special security arrangements provided by the UN peacekeepers. When women venture out to collect firewood and animal fodder, peacekeepers escort them because women IDPs often fear sexual violence by rebel fighters or criminals when they leave their homes.

Training in the Bangladesh Context

BIPSOT, a globally recognized ISO-certified institution, trains personnel for UN peacekeeping missions. Established in 1999 as PKOTC (Peace Keeping Operation Training Centre) and renamed in 2002, BIPSOT operates under the technical authority of the Army Training and Doctrine Command (ARTDOC) and, within a decade, became a leading Asia-Pacific peacekeeping training centre (Asaduzzaman, personal communication, February 10, 2020). BIPSOT partners with the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the US State Department's Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) to provide appropriate training for potential peacekeepers. Its modules are certified by the Integrated Training Services (ITS) to conduct PDT for the peacekeeping contingent members. BIPSOT further partners with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UN Women, the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT), and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). Consequently, BIPSOT offers specialized training on mandates and the protection of civilians, as well as regular training on the WPS agenda and CRSV. The institute provides standalone courses on WPS and CRSV, as well as instruction on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) (Asaduzzaman, personal communication, February 10, 2020). BIPSOT is, therefore, fulfilling the obligations under UNSCR 1325 (2000) and UNSCR 2538 (2020), as well as the recommendations of the *Global Study* on 1325 (2015).

BIPSOT has also developed a 'Gender Advisor Course'. While commendable, these efforts need deeper analysis to understand their implications. However, there is an apparent absence of mechanisms to assess how well the training is applied in real peacekeeping situations. Additionally, there is limited research on training, especially regarding Bangladeshi peacekeepers. Due to the lack of research, it is difficult to find sources that detail Bangladesh's participation and

the complexities of its peacekeeping roles. Several limitations were identified during my research. First, there is no formal process for creating an inventory of best practices on Bangladeshi peacekeepers' involvement, grounded in thorough research. Consequently, there is no system for learning from past mistakes or for adopting best practices. Second, there is no strategic plan for designing training materials that incorporate these experiences and best practices. Third, there is no platform for sharing experiences with future peacekeepers through well-structured training and mentorship programmes. The next section highlights some of these shortcomings in BIPSOT's training materials.

BIPSOT Training Materials

During my empirical research, I contacted BIPSOT and sent them a questionnaire (Appendix D). After receiving their responses, I reviewed their training manuals on the WPS agenda, SSR, DDR, CRSV and SEA. My overall impression of the training materials is positive: they are standard, up to date, and informative. They reference the latest UN policies and resolutions, and trainers supplement these principles with field examples, providing rich context. This approach effectively prepares trainees for multi-dimensional and robust peacekeeping. However, a notable limitation is the lack of a gender perspective in many materials, which focus on peacekeeping facts and tactics. Only specialized materials that address 'gender' include discussions of gender. This gap suggests that gender has not yet been fully integrated into peacekeeping concepts and tactics, particularly in discussions on SSR, DDR, and overall mission planning.

Regarding reading materials, BIPSOT uses guides from the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and other NGOs in partnership with the UN. These guides offer gender perspectives on security sector reform, police reform, defence reform, justice

reform, penal reform, border management, parliamentary oversight of the security sector, national security policymaking, and civil society oversight of the security sector, as well as gender training for security sector personnel, among other topics. However, this extensive list of reading materials reflects Eurocentric perspectives. These materials address security issues from a defence viewpoint, often overlooking the root causes of gender injustice in peace processes within post-conflict countries. They do not recognize that concepts such as gender injustice and human rights violations can also be significant security concerns. Gender inequality may also be a cause of conflict. Research has indicated that countries with high levels of gender inequality tend to experience increased social tensions and violence (Hudson et al., 2012). The interconnectedness between gender inequality and conflict is notably absent in these materials.

Training materials use definitions of gender and a normative framework of gender equality developed in Western contexts by Western scholars and interlocutors, primarily for Western trainees, which limits understanding of local and Indigenous perspectives. Discussions on gender are restricted to specific courses on CRSV and WPS, overlooking the broader socio-cultural roots of gender injustice. A more comprehensive understanding of these systemic factors is essential for peacekeepers to effectively address gender inequality, including reducing SEA and SGBV.

In Table 4, I present specific observations to support my earlier argument about the course materials on CRSV, focusing on the trainers' PowerPoint slides.

Table 4*BIPSOT Training Materials on CRSV and Observations*

No.	Slides' subject matter	Slides' information	My observations/comments
1.	CRSV - An Overview	Defines CRSV as one of the worst global protection challenges. Mention of UNSCR 1960 The mention of UNSCR 1325 highlights its role as the foundation for recognizing CRSV, while UNSCR 1820 (2008) acknowledges CRSV as a tactic of war. Furthermore, UNSCR 1888 (2009) mandates that PKOs address CRSV. Under CRSV principles, the primary responsibility of the host state is outlined, as are the duties of UN peacekeepers and the mission's overall responsibilities. It also emphasizes a community-centric, gender-sensitive, and survivor-centric approach, along with principles of non-exclusivity and ethical reporting.	The terminology of the concepts highlights the protector-protected dichotomy. References to Resolution 1325 primarily focus on the protection doctrine. The lecture does not mention the human rights approach, although under 'legal aspects,' it recognizes that the CRSV is a gross violation of international human rights law and humanitarian law. It overlooks the fact that integrating a human rights approach is crucial to ensuring a comprehensive understanding and effective responses to CRSV.
2.	UN-CRSV tactical level: Application of Mission Essential Tasks (MET)	i) The slide identifies core METs: situational awareness, outreach and engagement, cordon and search, and patrolling. ii) Other identified METs include disarmament and demobilization, evacuation, joint operations, extraction of SV victims, maintenance of a buffer zone, detention, and asset protection. It also mentions support for MARA (Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Arrangements) as per UNSCR 1960.	i) The lecture fails to define or explain CRSV and its contributing factors. ii) In the tasks related to 'outreach and engagement,' there is no mention of involving local women, despite referencing 'key leader engagement.' The 'outreach and engagement' slide emphasizes the goal to 'shape attitude and behaviour' but overlooks the necessity of addressing masculinized attitudes and behaviours as well as patriarchy. iii) Although MARA requires a network of community-level information sources, such as civil societies, women's groups, local and international NGOs, and government institutions, the slide fails to acknowledge this crucial aspect.

3.	CRSV: Coordination and Constructive Engagement: Operational level: POC	i) The slide shows that states are mainly responsible for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of everyone. National ownership is crucial for tackling the root causes of sexual violence in armed conflict. ii) UN peacekeepers must promote responsiveness and accountability by actively engaging with all parties involved in the conflict and strengthening the capacity of national institutions to address CRSV threats and eliminate impunity effectively. iii) The slide indicates that UN military and police components must mentor, assist, or operate with national military and police forces to address CRSV.	i) Partnerships with local women and NGOs are not mentioned. Such collaborations are essential for the effective implementation and sustainability of peace and security initiatives. ii) The lack of agency for local women remains unaddressed. Advocacy alone is ineffective without concrete measures for prevention and reparation. iii) The slide does not address the need to end impunity for local perpetrators, including those from national military or police forces. Holding perpetrators accountable is essential for justice and deterrence. Ignoring this aspect undermines UNSCR 1325+ and efforts to combat CRSV effectively.
4.	Prevention & Response to Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Operational Level	Our focus is solely on operational-level activities.	The slide overlooks crucial aspects regarding the circumstances and reasons behind CRSV. It lacks a gendered analysis and fails to reflect on the dynamics and triggers that can lead to CRSV occurrences. Effective prevention emphasizes a strategic understanding of these factors and their gender implications. Prevention efforts remain incomplete without such insights into the backdrop of CRSV occurrences.

Drawing attention to Table 4, the absence of locally led gender equality initiatives and the predominant emphasis on international frameworks in the listed documents reveal a Eurocentric bias in the understanding of gender mainstreaming. This may result in limited engagement with or comprehension of Indigenous knowledge systems and local gender norms, potentially reducing the effectiveness and cultural relevance of policies. As a result, the materials inadvertently favour Western concepts of gender equality over locally meaningful approaches. This situation reflects

neo-colonial attitudes and racialized representation in UN peacekeeping training (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Mohanty, 1988; Razack, 2002, 2004; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988; Whitworth, 2003).

In Table 4 above, we observe that training on CRSV is delivered within a protection doctrine, and the relationship with peacekeepers is seen through a ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy. In this kind of dichotomous mindset, women are often excluded from decision-making because they are classified as ‘protected’. For example, the table above shows that the trainer mentions the Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) of UNSCR 1960, adopted in December 2010. According to operative paragraph 8, the resolution asks the UN Secretary-General to engage with UN actors, national institutions, civil society organizations, healthcare providers, and women’s groups to improve data collection and analysis of incidents, trends, and patterns of rape and other sexual violence under MARA on CRSV. Contrary to the resolution’s instructions, the slide does not mention the involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), healthcare providers, or women’s groups. I do not suggest that this omission is deliberate, but rather that it is due to a lack of gender awareness or gender sensitivity training among the trainers. Including CSOs in peacekeeping training would improve its relevance by incorporating grassroots gender expertise, survivor perspectives, and local context, making sure that the content addresses actual community needs rather than just theoretical ideas. This inclusion fosters a stronger peacekeeping culture and supports ‘horizontal and vertical interoperability’²²⁹ as discussed in Chapter 3 (Rubinstein, 2003, 2005, 2016; Rubinstein et al., 2008).

Similar observations seem relevant for the training materials on SEA. The slides begin by highlighting the vulnerabilities of women and children, drawing on perspectives from the

²²⁹ Horizontal interoperability ensures that all sectors are aligned and mutually reinforcing in their efforts to address gender issues. Vertical interoperability ensures that gender policies at the strategic level are translated into actionable outcomes on the ground. Together, they create a cohesive framework to promote gender equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and engage women meaningfully in peacebuilding processes (Rubinstein, Keller & Scherger, 2008).

protection doctrine (Holvikivi, 2021). However, none of the slides mention hegemonic and militarised masculinities or patriarchy as the root cause of SEA. It is unlikely that a military organization would do so (Laplonge, 2015; Peuchguirbal, 2010a; True, 2010; Valenius, 2007). I do not expect the training to delve deeply into these underlying issues of gender inequality, patriarchy, masculinity, and militarism, especially considering that even UNSCR 1325 has not explicitly addressed them. This absence is a key example of the strategic and normalized silences within institutional approaches to gender. However, it is essential to acknowledge that increased discussion of gender and Resolution 1325 has promoted greater gender sensitivity, indicating some progress. It is worth noting that the materials primarily focus on prevention without providing context for the occurrence of SEA in male-dominated peacekeeping missions. As noted, CRSV training materials reveal a ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy and crucially, do not mention hegemonic and militarized masculinities or patriarchy as the root causes of SEA. This omission limits the effectiveness of training in addressing the core drivers of misconduct. This aligns with critical feminist critiques of how gender is often narrowly framed. To move beyond simplistic prevention and protection frameworks, training should explore how cultural norms contribute to gender inequality. Highlighting these issues and exposing these silences would deepen knowledge and understanding, ensuring that institutional and societal cultures are recognized as significant sources and contributors to gender inequality.

Code, Consent and Eurocentrism

Furthermore, there is no mention of the *Code of Conduct* that governs peacekeepers. Even if the training referenced the Code, it would have limited impact on the behaviours of peacekeeping personnel without an accountability setup and monitoring mechanism (Peuchguirbal, 2003). On one slide titled “SEA in the Workplace,” a UN infographic is displayed. It highlights the prevention

of SEA among UN personnel, particularly discouraging sexual relations with aid recipients. It emphasizes “Sexual relations in your private life: your private life, your own concern.” However, engaging in sexual relations with beneficiaries of aid, especially minors under 18, in exchange for assistance or through intermediaries is strictly prohibited. I observe that the definition of ‘private life’ is vague and open to various interpretations, thereby upholding the Western notion of personal freedom. Secondly, if private life is considered solely an individual matter, it becomes difficult to prevent SEA because there are no clear guidelines to regulate such personal conduct. The ambiguous definition of ‘private life’ in UN peacekeeping creates a significant loophole for preventing SEA. In that case, it undermines accountability and allows various abuses, not just against locals but also against civilian personnel and other peacekeepers, to occur unchecked within missions. From the perspectives of structural and critical feminism, as well as the FI, this necessitates a clearer code of ethical conduct in peacekeeping institutions to strengthen accountability and to address SEA effectively.

Further in this discussion of ‘private life,’ my interviewee, Maimuna, observed that during the training, the trainers mentioned that a sexual relationship with consent is not an issue. She even noted that the mission authorities made ‘condoms’ available and free for peacekeepers on the mission premises (personal communication, November 24, 2019). However, obtaining consent can be difficult due to gender power imbalances between men and women. As mentioned in Chapter 7, when there are unequal gender power relations combined with social and economic disparities and unequal access to influence and authority, consent becomes highly problematic. In situations of severe inequality and vulnerability, what may appear to be ‘consent to sexual favours’ is often a survival strategy driven by the need for food, protection, or other essentials, rather than a genuinely free choice. The extreme power imbalances in such situations inherently negate

meaningful consent, rendering any apparent agreement exploitative. Poverty and marginalization, often shaped by gender, complicate the concept of consent in cases of SEA. When a young woman exchanges sexual favours for basic needs like food or security, her ‘choice’ reflects systemic oppression, not free will. The intersectionality of poverty, sex, and gender, including structural inequalities, is not addressed in any discussions within the training.

Unfortunately, none of the training materials emphasized the critical role of gender dynamics in SEA or focused on the *Code of Conduct*, particularly the ten rules of personal conduct for the blue helmets (the *Pocket Code of Conduct*), which are publicly available.²³⁰ The ten rules include, among others, respecting the host country’s laws, land, culture, traditions, customs, and practices. They advise against engaging in immoral acts of sexual, physical, or psychological abuse or exploitation of the local population or United Nations staff, especially women and children. They also recommend exercising the utmost discretion when handling confidential information and matters of official business that could endanger lives or damage the reputation of the United Nations (from Ten Rules: Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets). As previously mentioned, a mechanism should be established to monitor compliance with the *Code of Conduct* to prevent SEA (Puechguirbal, 2003). Although the training materials include the UN Infographic on managing SEA allegations and the investigation process,²³¹ these do not address accountability or monitoring of the personal codes of conduct prior to any potential SEA incidents.

I observed that the WPS training materials I received from BIPSOT were developed by an Australian trainer, reflecting the Australian Government and Armed Forces’ perspectives and their NAP on WPS. However, for Bangladeshi peacekeepers, WPS training should focus on

²³⁰ Please see https://conduct.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/code_of_conduct-blue_helmets-pocket_card.pdf

²³¹ Reference to the SEA Infographic at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/sea-infographic#:~:text=Promoting%20youth,%20peace%20and%20security>

understanding the significance of the agenda, Bangladesh's role in adopting UNSCR 1325, the importance of implementing it, Bangladesh's own NAP, and the obligations under this resolution, especially as a leading TPCC. Unfortunately, the Australian trainer was unable to tailor the WPS training to meet the specific needs and understanding of the Bangladeshi troops. The trainer presented the WPS agenda from the perspective of their national Armed Forces, which adheres to the Western normative framework of gender equality and reflects their nation's priorities (Holvikivi, 2021). Bangladesh has different historical, socio-political, and legal perspectives on its commitments to the WPS agenda, deeply rooted in the country's liberation war in 1971 and the wartime sexual violence endured by Bangladeshi women.²³² It is difficult for a foreign trainer to fully and precisely understand the range of national sentiment and reflect a country's collective commitment to the WPS agenda, given its historical and socio-cultural backgrounds. This aligns with postcolonial feminist views on gender mainstreaming in international interventions and Western priorities in peacekeeping (Agathangelou & Ling, 2009; Mohanty, 1988; Razack, 2002, 2004; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988; Whitworth, 2003).

Furthermore, customized training materials are essential to effectively communicate nuanced concepts and stories about women's equal rights to advance the WPS agenda during peacekeeping missions in regions with diverse socio-political contexts.²³³ For example, the *Sharia*

²³² Reference Bangladesh's NAP on WPS at [Bangladesh – 1325 National Action Plans \(peacewomen.org\)](https://peacewomen.org/1325-national-action-plans/bangladesh)

²³³ Women's rights can be culturally contingent. Bangladesh's Constitution advocates equal rights for men and women, but the country follows Sharia Law regarding Muslim Inheritance law. Bangladesh, therefore, has reservations on Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) concerning women's equality with men.

Reference at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n06/309/97/pdf/n0630997.pdf> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

law prevails in Sudan, Darfur, Mali, Somalia, and Afghanistan.²³⁴ This is evident from the insights of my respondents, namely, Eirene, Sophia, and Reaz, who served in Sudan, Darfur, and Afghanistan, respectively. My respondents observed situations involving patriarchy, masculinity, militarization, and the treatment of women in those regions. They reported on how gender inequality is normalized and diffused through religious and cultural norms (Hudson et al., 2009). In peace operations in those countries, applying the WPS agenda should be grounded in narratives of women's equal participation in peace processes, rather than in equality between men and women, as discussed in Chapter 6. While the Darfur Peace Agreement emphasized women's participation in decision-making, it did not explicitly guarantee gender equality across all spheres, reflecting Sudan's adherence to Islamic Sharia norms. This highlights that inclusion does not necessarily equate to societal acceptance of equal rights for women, underscoring the importance of understanding the nuances of different societies through 'cultural relativism' (Halliday in Grant & Newland, 1991).

Since it falls under the responsibility of the national governments of the TPCCs to organize and sponsor training, there is an urgent need to offer additional training for peacekeeping instructors, especially to enhance the skills of local trainers. Currently, the 'training for trainers' in BIPSOT mainly focuses on topics such as the Protection of Civilians (POC)²³⁵ and the International Protection of Refugees²³⁶. This training should also explore gender issues, connecting the WPS agenda, UNSCR 1325, and other related topics such as patriarchy, male dominance, masculinity, and militarization to mainstream gender effectively.

²³⁴ References: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/zifconferencereport_expertworkshop.pdf and www.cfr.org/background/understanding-sharia-intersection-islam-and-law#:~:text=About%20half%20of%20the%20world's

²³⁵ Reference: https://bipsot.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=58&Itemid=250

²³⁶ Reference: <https://www.bipsot.net/images/Latest-News-and-Visit/2024/TOT-Workshop-2024/1.jpg>

My respondent, Maimuna, suggested that Bangladesh should increase investment in training by hiring foreign trainers, as local trainers are not experts. Greater investment in training might help close the gap between pre-deployment and induction training (personal communication, November 24, 2019). UN trainers likely have more specialized expertise on gender issues than national trainers, who often lack the resources and specific training to teach effectively on gender-related topics. However, local trainers may better understand the unique needs of the troops, and some may have prior experience with the UN. For example, to prepare troops for the political and socio-cultural nuances of host communities, former national peacekeepers with regional experience can offer more detailed insights. A peacekeeper who previously served in the Gender Unit on a peacekeeping mission could be a suitable trainer for the female engagement team or platoon. According to the relevant UN website, the UN Office of Military Affairs focuses on developing curricula to support national contingents for deployment. The curriculum provides customized, pre-deployment training through scenario-based exercises that teach the technical skills needed to engage with civilians.²³⁷ Effective cooperation between UN experts and local trainers in developing training materials can help reduce Eurocentrism in peacekeeping training.

Gender Mainstreaming and Essentialism in Training, Recruitment, and Deployment

According to Meghna Guhathakurta, an IR scholar and gender expert, first-time participation in peacekeeping missions offers meaningful learning opportunities for female officers and soldiers, helping them overcome historical exploitation and discrimination (personal communication, January 24, 2020). This view was echoed by female respondents, namely Atiq,

²³⁷ Reference [Action for Peacekeeping: Engagement Platoons champion gender parity in peacekeeping and beyond | United Nations Peacekeeping](#)

Lily, Maimuna, Sophia, and Selene, who stressed the importance of female peacekeepers challenging gender stereotypes, thereby gaining valuable life and career lessons. However, Ferdous Ara Begum pointed out systemic issues in the recruitment and training of female soldiers, noting that inadequate training stems from a lack of facilities. She highlighted that increasing female participation in UN peacekeeping must involve elevating women to decision-making roles. This is vital because men currently dominate decision-making, with 90% of uniformed peacekeepers male, which obstructs the inclusion of essential female perspectives in recruitment, training, and deployment (personal communication, January 13, 2020).²³⁸

Commander Lily specifically recounted being denied specialized training because she was the sole female participant (personal communication, November 18, 2019). Furthermore, Lieutenant Commander Poseidon²³⁹ revealed that warship designs lack separate accommodation for women, which restricts female naval officers' access to advanced training and deployment. As a result, they are assigned to administrative or engineering roles at ports, inadvertently exposing a deep-rooted gender bias within military structures (personal communication, November 29, 2019).

Providing training and facilities for female personnel is required under UNSCR 2538 (2020). In Bangladesh, despite official recognition of a 'Third Gender,' the armed forces still maintain a binary view of gender in recruitment, as in many other countries. Creating separate facilities for women is seen as a step towards gender equality, especially for those from conservative backgrounds, where shared accommodations pose a significant barrier. However, the system often overlooks deeper issues such as discrimination, harassment, and power imbalances

²³⁸ For further details, please see:

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_77_august_2024.pdfhttps://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_77_august_2024.pdf

²³⁹ Poseidon is a pseudonym for a Navy officer from Bangladesh who served in the UN peace operations in Lebanon.

that hinder women's career progression. For non-binary individuals, recruitment into the armed forces does not currently exist, nor is it expected in the near future. The combination of inadequate training facilities, male-centric infrastructure, gendered protection norms, and gender discrimination systematically restricts opportunities for women and non-binary persons, indicating that the problem extends beyond recruitment to the entire career path and operational environment.

When I inquired about gender-sensitive training for peacekeepers, my interviewee from the Bangladesh police, Selene, noted that in Bangladesh, gender-related training is offered only to women. Based on discussions with other interviewees, I understand that all peacekeepers receive some gender training, but female officers receive more targeted instruction. There is a common belief that female peacekeepers are better suited to engage with women in host communities. Consequently, male peacekeepers are not considered in need of gender training, nor are they expected to handle issues related to women in host communities, according to Selene. However, she believes men should receive more gender-related training than women, as female peacekeepers are already aware of the gender issues they may encounter in peace operations (personal communication, December 23, 2019).

My respondent, Major Archer from the peacekeeping mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), informed me that, aside from SEA training, he had not received any specific training on gender issues. This information confirms Selene's statement. Archer further suggested that as the number of female officers increases, they should receive gender training to enable them to engage effectively with local women and girls. Additionally, he mentioned that female gynecologists are being deployed to MINUSCA to provide medical treatment to local women (personal communication, January 21, 2021). These interviews reveal a problematic perception that female

peacekeepers are only suited to assist local women, implying that men do not require gender training for such roles.

When I asked about the level of commitment to gender training and gender mainstreaming in Bangladesh, Selene said that institutional dedication varies across organizations. While there is some commitment at the mid-level, training mainly covers general ideas and the history of the ‘gender’ concept. Despite significant efforts to promote gender balance in peacekeeping, such as encouraging female candidates and advancing women into leadership roles (for example, the appointment of the UNMISS (South Sudan) Police Commissioner), the UN faces challenges due to the limited number of women available for deployment (personal communication, December 23, 2019).

My respondent, Selene, highlights two key issues: conflating gender parity with the inclusion of gender perspectives, and a notable lack of qualified women. Achieving genuine gender mainstreaming requires increasing the number of women; their scarcity hampers qualitative changes, such as creating inclusive environments. This shortage also suggests potential gender discrimination in access to training or the influence of gendered perceptions that discourage careers in the military and police. The UN must incorporate gender considerations into recruitment to address these systemic barriers and ensure fair representation.

A notable lack of transparency in UN recruitment policies leads to institutional shortcomings, as highlighted by the 2012 Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) Report, which documents favouritism and political influence (JIU Report, 2012, para. 27). This can disadvantage women, given male-dominated networks and limited experience in senior roles, resulting in their under-representation (Emma Bjertén-Günther in Scheuremann and Zürn, 2020, p. 36). The exclusion of female peacekeepers reflects a complex reality. Chapter 6 recounts Atiqa’s narrow escape from

abduction in Darfur, while Chapter 7 describes Lily's survival of an ambush in the CAR. These events underscore how insecurity blurs the line between safe and unsafe environments. Karim and Beardsley (2017) define 'safe spaces' and 'safe tasks' within peacekeeping, arguing that a gendered protection norm often relegates female peacekeepers to base operations or headquarters for administrative work, limiting their deployment and participation (pp. 37-38). Their research, including studies of Bangladeshi peacekeepers, shows that mobility restrictions, such as requiring male escorts, reduce the effectiveness of female peacekeepers and cause frustration (Ibid.). From the perspective of FI, this illustrates how institutional policies and 'gendered protection norms', when rooted in essentialist assumptions of women's vulnerability, can undermine their full and equal participation (Ahmed, 2012; Holmes, 2020; True, 2010).

To improve women's involvement in UN peace operations, it is essential to recognize that gender mainstreaming, as required by UNSCR 1325, goes beyond simply increasing the number of women in these missions. Genuine gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations means ensuring equal participation of men and women at all levels. Focusing too much on the numerical count of women peacekeepers or taking tokenistic steps to include them in peace processes can hinder the achievement of UNSCR 1325's goals. Such strategies fail to address the deeper structural inequalities central to the resolution's aims.

Challenges and Opportunities for Peacekeepers

UN peacekeepers play a crucial role in strengthening host communities by providing technical assistance and training to local police, rather than merely ensuring security. This capacity-building is vital for sustainable peacebuilding, especially given that local police often face significant resource constraints. Selene stressed that their main duty was to advise and train local police on policing systems, human rights, and gender-based violence, while monitoring their

adherence to proper procedures. She also noted the difficulty of motivating South Sudanese police due to their very low salaries, which can be as little as five dollars a month (personal communication, January 2, 2020). The peacekeepers also assist in reforming, restructuring, and developing local police and law enforcement agencies. Effective gender mainstreaming relies on providing specialized training to peacekeeping personnel so they can, in turn, train local police on gender issues, while strengthening local law enforcement and enhancing the security of the host community.

While pre-deployment training is crucial for peacekeepers, it is impossible to prepare them for every unpredictable scenario in volatile post-conflict environments. Haider Ali Khan, a seasoned police official who served in Timor-Leste, Darfur, and Haiti, explained that situations can change rapidly, with local populations exhibiting unpredictable behaviour, posing inherent risks and potential casualties for peacekeepers. He emphasized that adaptability is key, as structured frameworks for such dynamic environments are unfeasible. Regarding the recruitment of female peacekeepers, Haider described a rigorous selection process involving physical, medical, mental, academic, and linguistic assessments, followed by intensive tactical training. The final selection is made by UN teams (FPAT/SAT),²⁴⁰ ensuring no interference from the Bangladesh Government or Police Headquarters. Haider asserted that there are no attitudinal or institutional barriers discouraging women from joining peacekeeping missions; instead, women are actively encouraged to participate (personal communication, September 19, 2019).

While male respondents praised the training, several female respondents noted its inadequacy and lack of customization to their specific needs, particularly in areas such as safety, social expectations, and community interactions. My respondent, Meghna, further explained that

²⁴⁰ After the technical training, the successful personnel are tested by the FPAT (FPU Pre-assessment Team) sent by the UN. Candidates selected for CivPol and UN Pol are evaluated by the SAT (Selection Assistance Team).

although the training broadly covers gender, its practical focus remains primarily on women's issues, with less attention to masculinity or gender dynamics, particularly at local institutional levels, due to 'gender blindness' rooted in traditional norms (personal communication, January 24, 2020). She added that Bangladesh's Police, Army, and other institutions provide extensive training on gender, harassment, violence against women, and transgender issues.

My respondent, Masud, observed that peacekeeping training has evolved to reflect the multidimensional and robust nature of modern peacekeeping, especially in gender training following the adoption of UNSCR 1325. The training materials examined by Fetherston (1998), Mackay (2003), and Puechguirbal (2003) have evolved, as shown by more recent studies by Laplonge (2015) and Holvikivi (2021). The key question is whether the security institutions responsible for peace operations have the knowledge and tools to adapt effectively to these changes, particularly amid shifting dynamics in gender training. From the discussion in this chapter, I conclude that security institutions need to develop and apply specialized expertise in gender-responsive peacekeeping, including updated training on masculinities, conflict-related sexual violence, and community engagement, to stay aligned with evolving global standards and mission requirements. These institutions cannot continue to treat gender training as a mere 'problem-solving' tool. While it should not be viewed solely as a quick fix, expanding the nature of the 'problem' to include a more comprehensive analysis of institutional and socio-cultural drivers of inequality is essential. Therefore, designing better tools to reflect this broadened range and depth of challenges is welcome. Furthermore, training should not be delivered as a hegemonic transnational practice dominated by the Global North. Instead, peace and security institutions must transform this training into a 'game changer' in the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Conclusion

This chapter deepens understanding of gender training in UN peacekeeping by critiquing its dominant ‘problem-solving’ approach, which narrowly focuses on issues such as SEA and CRSV rather than promoting a broader analysis of systemic gender dynamics, power, and masculinity. FI is essential to this analysis because it shifts attention from individual acts of misconduct (the ‘problem-solving’ approach) to the institutional, structural, and political environment of the UN, explaining why SEA cases are often treated as isolated incidents rather than as signs of deeply embedded masculine institutional cultures. By treating the UN as a gendered space, FI enables the study of how its formal policies (e.g., gender training) can be co-opted to reinforce existing gender hierarchies and power imbalances, thereby explaining why training frequently fails to cultivate a transformative understanding of systemic power, patriarchy, and militarised masculinity.

Drawing on critical feminist scholarship, the analysis highlights how this narrow focus, often politicized through Eurocentrism, omits discussion of hegemonic and militarized masculinities in training materials, reinforces existing gender hierarchies, and overlooks the deeply embedded roots of gender injustice. Examining the imposition of Western normative frameworks offers a postcolonial feminist perspective on the Eurocentric biases in peacekeeping training. The theoretical analysis, drawing on structural and postcolonial feminism, deconstructs the masculine assumptions of the ‘protector-protected dichotomy’ prevalent in training, in which women are primarily portrayed as vulnerable, thereby limiting the training’s effectiveness in fostering genuine, transformative change. Most significantly, the chapter addresses structural power imbalances within peacekeeping institutions, referencing FI.

While FI provides the core framework for critiquing the UN's gendered policies, the analysis is strengthened by incorporating insights from structural and postcolonial feminism to explain how these institutional biases operate. These complementary theories deconstruct masculine assumptions embedded in training (structural feminism) and expose the Eurocentric nature of the 'protector-protected dichotomy' (postcolonial feminism), offering a layered critique of the UN's systemic failure to implement meaningful change. This chapter further calls for a more comprehensive engagement with feminist scholarship on how gender both shapes and is shaped by institutional narratives and practices, with the goal of mainstreaming gender as mandated by UNSCR 1325.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Lessons Learned

UN peace operations represent an intriguing area of research. In this study, I have endeavoured to understand the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations from a distinct perspective. I examined gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations by prioritizing the lived experiences of peacekeepers and policy practitioners, recognizing the importance of individual narratives in understanding gender issues. Rather than focusing solely on high-level policy frameworks or institutional analysis, I examined the practical realities. I asked my respondents about their experiences and about the challenges they faced. In this dissertation, I have investigated various questions concerning the challenges and opportunities in UN peace operations, as experienced by peacekeepers and policy practitioners at the individual, organizational, and operational levels. This chapter will conclude the study by summarizing the key research findings on the research questions regarding gender mainstreaming challenges, as well as the value and contribution of this thesis. The chapter will also review the limitations and propose several recommendations for further research.

Research Questions and Key Findings

This study aimed to explore the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. Its purpose was to understand the experiences of peacekeepers facing the personal, organizational, and operational realities of the WPS agenda, and to identify the obstacles and opportunities for integrating gender equality into peace and security efforts. I employed the case study method and applied Feminist IR perspectives within standpoint and post-structuralist approaches. This thesis brought together different feminist perspectives through a single framework that tracks how gender policies actually ‘travel’ through the UN system. I looked at three levels: the strategic (the rules and rhetoric), the organizational (how the peacekeepers

actually functions), and the individual (the day-to-day reality for peacekeepers). By looking at these levels together, I could map the ‘friction’ that happens when high-level mandates from New York meet the reality of the field. Ultimately, this showed that the success of the WPS agenda is not just about having the right policy; it is about how that policy is reshaped by institutional structures and individual behaviour.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study synthesized five core conceptual frameworks: the ‘gender-sex’ distinction, the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy of UNSCR 1325, the critique of mainstreaming as a problem-solving rather than analytical tool, the tension between transformationalist and integrationist approaches, and the nexus of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. Together, these frameworks provided the analytical rigour necessary to diagnose why UN gender mandates often result in tokenistic inclusion rather than a fundamental shift in the gendered power dynamics of post-conflict reconstruction. These concepts appeared repeatedly throughout the study.

The multi-level theoretical framework drew on FSS, masculinities theories, postcolonial feminist studies, and FI. The focus was on peacekeepers from Bangladesh who had served or were serving in various UN peace operations. I deconstructed the interconnected systems of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization that shape these experiences, creating barriers to implementing gender equality in UN peace operations. Additionally, my study examined the complexities involved in achieving gender mainstreaming. I highlighted the significant role of Bangladeshi female peacekeepers, who, through their courage and determination, challenged traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Through their experiences in different deployments, I gained insight into the challenges faced by host communities in post-conflict societies where these peacekeepers had been stationed.

I employed feminist curiosity and reflexivity, starting with a broad question: why is it problematic for peacekeepers to implement gender mainstreaming as outlined by UNSCR 1325 in UN peace operations? My inquiry was based on the findings of the UN's *Global Study* (2015) and the *HIPPO Report* (2015). Through my literature review and empirical research, I found that the challenge at the organizational or strategic level lies in understanding the concept of 'gender mainstreaming.' Policy practitioners often interpret the UN's implementation of a top-down, uniform policy on UNSCR 1325 as simply adding more women. Gender mainstreaming is frequently seen as just including more women, especially when addressing issues of SEA and CRSV. Although UNSCR 1325 emphasizes gender equality during war and peace, 'gender mainstreaming' is not a primary focus within peacekeeping units. Instead, it is often used as a 'problem-solving tool' to address the SEA crisis or is reduced to a 'checklist.'

For the study, I formulated three specific research questions. The first question was: What challenges do UN peacekeepers face when integrating gender equality into peace and security? The theoretical analysis in Chapter 3 argues that gender mainstreaming often stalls because policies reproduce gender binaries and institutional masculinities rather than challenging them (Basini, 2017; Parpart, 2017; Tiessen, 2015; Willet, 2010). In empirical Chapter 6, I identified various challenges faced by Bangladeshi peacekeepers. These included risks and problems encountered by peacekeepers, cultural constraints, political contingencies, militarization and illegal arms, gender subjugation and injustice, rape and mafia cultures, racism, and neo-colonialism. Additionally, I identified numerous institutional and attitudinal barriers, such as gender blindness, gender essentialism, familial obstacles, workplace harassment, sexual exploitation, a patriarchal mindset, and a lack of training. At the operational or tactical level, my main finding was that the lack of gender consideration in peacekeeping units hinders the success

and potential of UNSCR 1325. We expect peacekeeping units to promote gender equality within host communities. However, these units themselves are not fully integrated concerning gender and, simply put, cannot support normative progress towards gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction. At the individual or behavioural level, I heard stories from female peacekeepers about workplace discrimination, microaggressions, and harassment. All these factors and challenges complicate gender mainstreaming policy and limit the effectiveness of UNSCR 1325.

My analysis of peacekeeping realities on the ground reveals a significant gap between the active, context-specific approaches needed to address cultural contingencies and deep-rooted gender inequalities while promoting the WPS agenda. As a result, the research indicates that the current implementation of UNSCR 1325 does not effectively address the interconnected institutional and attitudinal barriers to gender mainstreaming across operational settings. There is an urgent need to improve the practical application of the WPS agenda, UNSCR 1325, and 1325+ at the field level by adopting context-sensitive guidelines and gender-sensitive training that respect cultural differences, challenge persistent gender inequalities, and offer practical solutions to the individual and operational issues peacekeepers face.

My second question was: What socio-cultural challenges influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across various societies, particularly regarding patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization? The literature review in Chapter 3 has shown that patriarchy, hegemonic and militarized masculinities, and neo-colonial logics influence both host societies and peace operations, leading to different and often adverse gender outcomes (Connell, 2002; Enloe, 2005; Razack, 2004). My key finding in Chapter 7 is that peacekeeping institutions are based on patriarchal structures where male peacekeepers dominate not only through numbers but also through masculine practices in decision-making and power. Female peacekeepers are mainly

assigned administrative roles or confined to ‘safe spaces.’ I have found that peacekeepers perceive militarization solely as weaponization, overlooking a gendered perspective. My interviewees reported the dire conditions of women in host communities who are often oppressed and marginalized. They reported how local women are intimidated and subjugated by patriarchal oppression, violence, and militarization. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the data consist of respondents’ shared descriptions and narrative testimonies, which inherently illustrate women’s vulnerable and marginalized position in host states. These first-hand qualitative accounts in Chapters 6 and 7 serve as compelling evidence of the institutionalized marginalization and oppression that peacekeepers observed on the ground.

Nevertheless, the peacekeepers themselves are not adequately trained to recognize gender injustice within their units. I have found evidence of postcolonial feminist scholars’ claim of subtle racism and hidden ‘hegemony of whiteness’ in military culture among peacekeepers (Razack, 2004; Turenne-Sjolander & Trevenen, 2010; Whitworth, 2003, 2004). I have noticed a lack of gender integration among peacekeepers due to exclusionary practices. Several critical and post-structuralist scholars have theorized about the discrimination faced by female peacekeepers (Karim & Beardsley, 2016, 2017; Newby & Sebag, 2020). I have found additional evidence of female peacekeepers experiencing sexual abuse and workplace harassment.

One of my key findings is that UN peace operations primarily focus on security and stability rather than on gender norms. However, integrating gender equality is essential, driven by the adoption of UNSCR 1325, and has become part of the peacekeeping mandate through the *Capstone Doctrine* and relevant UNSC resolutions. Many of my interviewees had only a vague understanding of the primary goals of UNSCR 1325. Nevertheless, their training on gender mainly emphasized SEA as part of discipline and conduct, as the UN aims to prevent allegations and

complaints of SEA against their peacekeepers, who are primarily men. Moreover, the participation of female peacekeepers remains largely symbolic and is not based on equal rights. ‘Equal rights’ in this context refers to fair opportunities and treatment for female peacekeepers, which does not necessarily mean equal numbers. However, the latter can serve as an indicator of progress. There is a gap between the policies adopted at UN Headquarters at the organizational level and the practices implemented on the ground at the operational or individual levels. This gap arises from the difference between the gender-inclusive policies devised by UN Headquarters and the often gender-insensitive or outright exclusionary practices encountered and enacted by peacekeepers in the field.

My third question was: What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that UN peacekeepers receive adequate training and develop the necessary competence to implement the WPS agenda on the ground? The literature review in Chapter 3 demonstrated that training and institutional reform are necessary but insufficient unless combined with accountability, contextual adaptation, and efforts to change masculinized organizational cultures (Karim & Beardsley, 2017; Kreft, 2017; Kronsell, 2006; Mackay et al., 2010). My key finding in Chapter 8 is that serving as a peacekeeper at the operational level is challenging without proper training. However, training is an ongoing process that requires funding and facilities to provide the necessary skills. Since it is the responsibility of troop-and police-contributing countries, it depends on the arrangements, funding, and expertise of the concerned states. The lack of adequate training is evident in its failure to address the root causes of conflicts, gender inequality, socio-economic issues, and gender-based violence; nor does it examine the complexities of masculinity or militarization.

During training, 1325 is used as a tool to address SEA and CRSV, as shown in the narratives. I noticed ambiguity in the *Code of Conduct* during training, especially concerning

personal life and consent. Additionally, gender training tends to overlook discussions on men and masculinities, as seen in BIPSOT materials. It heavily focuses on the ‘protector-protected’ dichotomy, an imperial perspective exposed by postcolonial feminism. My analysis shows that training materials on gender are largely Eurocentric and lack transformative approaches; the supporting data are presented in Chapter 8. Trainers rarely address patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, or militarization as root causes of gender inequality. Furthermore, systemic barriers also hinder women’s participation in training. FI, therefore, exposes the gendered nature of peacekeeping institutions, in which masculine norms and Eurocentric curricula dominate training design, limiting its relevance to local contexts.

I recognize the UN’s need for practical, action-oriented training for peacekeepers. However, a more comprehensive educational component that explores the root causes of conflict, such as gendered dynamics of masculinity and militarization, would provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced on the ground. This increased understanding could lead to more effective and context-specific responses in their operational roles. However, it is crucial to note that peacekeeping initiatives, training, and peacekeepers themselves often carefully and strategically navigate policy guidance to uphold military cultural norms. This is achieved by: (1) intentionally reproducing silences around the structural and systemic inequalities embedded within both host communities and military cultures; (2) limiting approaches to gender to those that either uphold or reproduce military norms, such as focusing internally on increasing the number of women peacekeepers or externally on reinforcing gender divisions of labour; and (3) reproducing ‘private’ notions of gender relations by centering women’s reproductive or community roles as central to public peacekeeping activities.

Main Arguments

During my empirical research, while interviewing peacekeepers and policy practitioners from Bangladesh, they reported challenges in their operational duties related to cultural norms, gender identities, subjugation, patriarchal domination, and marginalization, along with local specifics of gender discrimination, hegemonic masculinity, neo-colonialism, racism, and sexism. Other challenges included local women becoming victims of violence, rape, and sexual abuse due to conflicts and militarization. Additionally, peacekeepers working in high-risk settings feel insecure, face attacks, or endure ambushes. These challenges differ across cultures and contexts. However, UN peacekeepers, regardless of their deployment location, are mandated to protect civilians and incorporate gender perspectives into their operations and programmatic actions to maintain peace and security while considering the specific needs and rights of all genders. As agents of peace, they must understand local nuances within particular cultural contexts to mainstream gender and effectively implement UNSCR 1325. We have observed that the diversity of cultures and contexts makes gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping particularly difficult. Nevertheless, peacekeepers are neither equipped nor mandated to address gender inequalities in societies that require local ownership, a task that calls for affirmative action and intervention by local representatives or leaders. Echoing FI (Mackay et al., 2010; Chappell & Waylen, 2013), I argue that gender mainstreaming is often procedural and not transformative, ultimately preserving existing hierarchies rather than challenging them.

The data in Chapters 6 and 7 further showed that the personal and operational realities of the interviewees indicate that peacekeeping units have struggled to mainstream gender. Hence, the question remains: how can peacekeepers implement UNSCR 1325 in a post-conflict society if the peacekeeping forces have not mainstreamed gender? Therefore, I argue that gender mainstreaming

in UN peace operations is impeded when the peacekeeping unit itself cannot mainstream gender. Consequently, the policy of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations faces many challenges because the contexts of these operations are not gender sensitive. In many ways, this thesis offers evidence of the challenges of mainstreaming while simultaneously exposing the intrinsic limits of gender mainstreaming as a transformative policy approach.

Gender inequality between men and women is real and widespread in nearly all societies. However, in post-conflict societies, this disparity becomes even more pronounced, as my respondents reported in Chapters 6 and 7. Unequal gender power relations and hierarchies worsen this inequality. The deployment of male-dominated, multi-dimensional peace operations further exacerbates existing gender gaps. My empirical data, presented in Chapter 6, highlighted numerous accounts of gendered subjugation within host communities and among peacekeeping units interacting with local populations, as observed by Bangladeshi peacekeepers. While cultures and contexts vary across missions, some stories broadly illustrate how Kalashnikov culture and hegemonic masculinity dominate post-conflict reconstruction in Darfur, Sudan, and South Sudan; how patriarchy maintains structural inequality in the DRC; and how militarization contributes to insecurity, fear, and disparity in the CAR. As a result, society remains trapped in vicious cycles of conflict driven by different forms of inequality. Although efforts have been made to address peacekeeping challenges by deploying All-female FPU, these units are often marginalized. I observed the internal struggles of members of Bangladesh's All-Female FPUs in Haiti and the DRC as they navigate dual roles as peacekeepers and women. I also noted that the All-female FPU exemplifies the UN's gender essentialism.

I examined the phenomena mentioned earlier alongside the research data gathered through my content analysis and interviews, incorporating insights from feminist scholars who have

theorized peacekeeping and the WPS agenda. Given the differences across UN peacekeeping settings and the variations in gender relations among post-conflict countries, my goal was to explore the state of gender and gendered power relations within UN peace operations. I question why implementing UNSCR 1325 in UN peace missions is challenging. Using the experiences of peacekeepers from Bangladesh, I further investigated how patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization influence gender relations and hierarchies, creating obstacles to women's meaningful participation in peace processes and thus perpetuating gender inequality. Therefore, the potential of implementing UNSCR 1325 is limited by gender inequality, which is intensified by the impacts of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization.

The barriers present challenges for peacekeepers in integrating gender equality, while training, capacity building, and awareness initiatives may offer opportunities for their participation in UN peace operations. The politics of identities related to gender, race, culture, nationality, and ethnicity influence the dynamics of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, potentially creating obstacles for both peacekeeping personnel and host communities. One of the most troubling outcomes of identity politics is rooted in gender, primarily resulting in discrimination against women and other marginalized groups who fall outside the dominant power structure. The barriers created by the politics of gender identities operate at multiple levels and take various forms, restricting women's roles in peace processes and hindering efforts to mainstream gender. However, the question remains whether these actions and training are merely mitigation efforts or if they can genuinely eliminate the obstacles to achieving gender equality in UN peace operations.

Significant Contribution

This dissertation builds on feminist IR and advances feminist and gender scholarship, particularly feminist security studies and feminist institutionalism, in three key ways. First, it

bridges the gap between high-level theory and the reality of peacekeeping, showing what happens when international gender mandates meet individual interpretation. Second, it offers a practical critique of UN training, arguing that peacekeepers need genuine ‘gender-analytical’ skills rather than just more checklists. Finally, it brings a crucial Global South perspective to the conversation by exploring how Bangladeshi peacekeepers navigate the tension between international expectations and their own experiences of militarized masculinity. Together, these insights push for a peacekeeping model that is as culturally aware as it is strategically sound.

Despite numerous high-level commitments by the UN and its member states, the slow and inconsistent implementation of UNSCR 1325 puzzled me. I wanted to explore the realities behind the non-implementation of this resolution in UN peace processes. As I began reading relevant literature, I discovered that studies on UN peace operations rarely focus on individual experiences. However, without examining these experiences, it can be difficult to understand the realities on the ground, or, more specifically, how peacekeepers interpret 1325 in various contexts. Thus, a disconnect exists between the promises of UNSCR 1325 at the strategic level and the challenges at the operational or individual level. By the time I completed the literature review, it was clear that the difficulties faced by peacekeepers at the strategic, operational, and individual levels had not been thoroughly explored. I questioned whether these challenges worsened the problems of implementing UNSCR 1325. This question warranted extensive research that I aimed to contribute to through this study.

Furthermore, limited research exists on how the interconnected systems of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization affect the WPS agenda. My empirical research clearly demonstrates the link between this interconnected system and the failure to implement the agenda through an examination of real-world situations. My dissertation has contributed to understanding the

challenges faced by peacekeepers and policy practitioners. Through interviews, my respondents have highlighted patriarchal norms within security forces when engaging with local communities in the DRC, Darfur, and South Sudan, as well as SEA incidents in the CAR, and sexual harassment in Darfur, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. The normalization of patriarchal norms and violence in post-conflict societies is evident in my respondents' recollections. They also reported the militarization of societies through weapons and militaristic values in the CAR, the DRC, South Sudan, and Darfur, where gender equality remains elusive.

Another contribution to knowledge is the emphasis on peacekeepers and policy practitioners from key troop- and police-contributing countries in the Global South. Despite being one of the leading contributors, the experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UN peace operations have received limited attention. My dissertation, therefore, provides new insights into this subject, particularly regarding the experiences of Bangladeshi troops in gender mainstreaming within UN peace operations. Understanding their peacekeeping experiences enhances the current literature on gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. It also helps us better grasp the peacekeeping efforts and the challenges faced by peacekeepers from the Global South. As a result, this study offers new perspectives that challenge Eurocentric discourses on peace and security in the context of UN peace operations.

Thirdly, my efforts to contribute to knowledge have been enhanced through in-depth interviews with numerous Bangladeshi peacekeepers and policy practitioners involved in peacekeeping. I am grateful to these highly qualified and professional individuals who shared their knowledge and experiences, allowing me to draw on their wisdom to develop this nuanced study on the WPS agenda. Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate that gender is essential for success in UN peace operations. Without a transformative agenda, integrating gender into UN

peacekeeping remains challenging. My theoretical contribution through this research can be summarized as follows:

- i) A lack of gender integration in peacekeeping units impedes the broader implementation of UNSCR 1325.
- ii) The politics of gender identities, along with gender relations and hierarchies, hinder the full realization of the gender mainstreaming goals.
- iii) The mutual reinforcement of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization creates substantial barriers for women, hindering their ability to reap peace dividends.
- iv) Without a transformative agenda, affirmative actions such as training and awareness-building cannot adequately prepare peacekeepers to integrate gender equality into UN peace operations.

I raised red flags based on my findings to alert policymaking and decision-making bodies, as well as communities, to take measures that ensure equal participation of people in UN peace processes. Puechguirbal (2010a) and other feminist scholars have examined gender mainstreaming and masculinities from an academic perspective; I approached them through the lens of peacekeepers and found that militarization, political instability, and local ownership, all with gendered perspectives, contribute to the challenges of gender mainstreaming. Scholars such as Higate and Henry (2009) have employed a critical perspective, drawing on critical international relations, critical geopolitics, and contemporary sociology to interrogate the challenges of peace operations. They have interviewed staff in international organizations, NGOs, and local communities, but not peacekeepers. I have utilized FSS, masculinity theories, postcolonial feminism, and FI, and interviewed peacekeepers and policy practitioners.

Ultimately, my research connects feminist studies on peace and security with peacekeeping research in three ways. First, this thesis makes an original contribution to peacekeeping studies by integrating FI, postcolonial feminism, and masculinity studies to interpret gender mainstreaming, SEA, and training practices in a way that few peacekeeping analyses have done. This integration expands the field's theoretical toolkit. In Chapters 6 to 8, this thesis redefines 'gender equality' as more than just an instrumental goal, viewing it as a fundamental shift involving radical institutional transformation. Second, I recognize SEA and gender training as structural and political issues, rather than merely behavioural or technical ones. It questions the emotional politics involved in SEA accountability, code of conduct and consent. Third, I focus on local agency and intersectionality, challenging the UN's universalist and often Eurocentric perspectives. It challenges liberal feminist mainstream discourses by highlighting voices from the Global South and exposing the Eurocentric, masculinized rationality underlying peacekeeping training. Using intersectionality-focused, local agency-driven, and affective critique-informed methodologies, the thesis offers a multi-faceted analysis aimed at reimagining gender-responsive peacekeeping beyond mere compliance and representation.

Furthermore, I have incorporated feminist epistemology and ontology related to peace and security, along with gender-based analysis, to examine the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in UN peace operations. This integration of knowledge and practices has enriched my study. Based on my findings, I present my recommendations below.

- i) There is an urgent need to address the existing gender divide in UN peace processes, particularly concerning female peacekeepers and local women.
- ii) A transformative agenda is essential for addressing the root causes of gender injustice in post-conflict reconstruction, including patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization.

- iii) To fully implement UNSCR 1325 and promote gender equality, there must be a stronger effort to dismantle patriarchy, reduce harmful masculinity, and disband militarization within UN peace processes. This initiative should be locally relevant while remaining aligned with widely accepted values and principles of equality within the normative framework.
- iv) Peacekeeping training should incorporate the development of transformational policies and practices with a gender lens.

While the above section captures my main contribution to UN peacekeeping knowledge and practices, I want to highlight that no country can take on this monumental task alone. We need to align our policies and practices to support those seeking peace, security, and gender justice. Therefore, regarding the UN Security Council's WPS agenda, stronger collaboration and cooperation among member states are essential.

Limitations

Although I followed a thorough process in this study to investigate the problems of gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, it has some limitations. First, I conducted empirical research using limited resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, I was unable to visit my interviewees' locations or conduct face-to-face interviews. I had to rely on phone calls and emails for communication. I interviewed peacekeepers and asked them about their experiences with gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations. They shared their insights from the peacekeeping unit and their understanding of the gender mainstreaming issues affecting the host communities. Since I could not visit those communities myself, I was unable to cross-check those stories with local residents. Therefore, I had to rely on the accounts provided by my interviewees

and validate them using scholarly articles and other reliable sources, such as UN documents, NGO reports, and online sources.

Secondly, on several crucial questions, many of my respondents either remained silent or offered limited information. For instance, they did not share their views on confronting racism as a barrier, nor did they provide complete data. Similarly, regarding sexual exploitation and abuse within the peacekeeping units, my respondents either skipped these questions, stayed silent, or requested not to answer. I also noticed that while most of my respondents were not critical of their own security institutions, a few did criticize the UN system. Since the majority of my respondents were uniformed peacekeepers, they are trained to share information in a controlled manner. Consequently, the information shared on critical questions is somewhat self-edited by my interviewees, which could influence my assessment. To address this, my analysis employed techniques to read ‘between the lines,’ looking for consistent messages that emerged across interviews, even if unstated, and analyzing patterns in what certain respondents did not say. These silences and gaps were treated as evidence, often revealing a larger story about institutional constraints and cultural norms, particularly regarding racism, sexual exploitation, and discrimination, beyond explicitly shared responses.

Future Studies

In this dissertation, I explore the challenges and opportunities faced by Bangladeshi peacekeepers and policy practitioners when incorporating gender equality into UN peace operations. I have examined these challenges from the perspectives shared by the peacekeepers. However, it is also essential to consider the challenges experienced by local populations. In my view, further research is necessary into the viewpoints of host communities and their experiences regarding the UN’s gender equality policies and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The

experiences of host communities in their interactions with UN peacekeepers occur at multiple levels, including the central government, local administrative bodies, and the community level. These experiences can differ significantly across these levels, and men and women from host communities are likely to have different perspectives. Similarly, the experiences of refugees and IDPs may vary. Additionally, ex-combatants' experiences can differ. More research is required to understand the perspectives of the various groups involved in peace processes and better grasp the challenges they face. The more we understand these challenges, the better equipped policymakers will be to develop suitable policies, programmatic actions, and training resources.

UN peace operations and UNSCR 1325 do not recognize gender non-binary participants. I have not found any references to this group's involvement in reports or documents. The peacekeeping data remains gender binary. Future research could, therefore, examine the inclusion of this marginalized group, which is absent from peacekeeping discourse.

Furthermore, research on peacekeeping training remains limited. As this study indicates, given the importance of peacekeeping training, it is essential to place greater emphasis on training methods and the policy messages conveyed during training, especially regarding gender equality and the Code of Conduct. The study points out that training on gender and issues of sexual exploitation and abuse faces challenges. With further research and information, experts can develop appropriate programmes for peacekeepers, and trainers can implement the most effective methodologies for relevant training. Future studies can explore various techniques for peacekeeping training.

Conclusion

Being part of a UN peacekeeping unit can be a lifelong opportunity for any peacekeeper, as peacekeeping operations involve working in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial

environment. The experience offers intense learning opportunities. Peacekeepers apply their technical knowledge to help build peace for others. Female peacekeepers serve as role models for women's empowerment, exemplifying the UN's efforts to mainstream gender within the system. Therefore, serving as a peacekeeper enhances professional growth and lifelong learning, especially for female peacekeepers, who often have fewer opportunities in formal employment. Women may face various barriers in their careers, but these can be overcome through determination, education, and hard work. However, some systemic and structural barriers cannot be overcome, even for those who are qualified, successful, and driven. Recognizing these barriers and our willingness to address them is essential.

Finally, efforts should be made to challenge the social, political, and cultural norms identified by feminist scholars that undermine women, reinforce stereotypes about their roles, and create a gender divide in our societies, especially in post-conflict contexts. Men's attitudes should also evolve to view women as equal and capable partners. Sometimes, policies fail to address the underlying socio-economic structures that hinder gender mainstreaming. Therefore, it is essential to connect the human rights and development literature with feminist theory to better understand the conditions that can promote gender equality in peacekeeping efforts, while implementing gender mainstreaming programs and policies outlined in UNSCR 1325, 1325+, and other relevant resolutions. Without a thorough understanding of the relationship between gender equality and peacekeeping, the pursuit of peace and security will remain out of reach.

Epilogue: My Academic 'Nirvana'

This research has inspired me to envision a peaceful world order: one free from fierce competition for power, where people do not eliminate others out of greed or hoard resources for profit. I envision a world liberated from the destructive forces of greed, power struggles, patriarchy, militarization, and hegemonic masculinity. A world where communities thrive without conflict, with the full participation of women, subaltern men, and other marginalized groups; and where zero hunger, zero discrimination, and zero corruption prevail. If we could bring the *Lady Land* from *Sultana's Dream*²⁴¹ to life, perhaps many of today's conflicts could be avoided by removing greedy individuals from positions of power. However, in reality, we remain far from creating such a utopia. At least we can consider how to move closer to that vision. We can take practical steps to reduce conflict, empower marginalized groups, and address systemic barriers.

Nevertheless, *Sultana's Dream* encourages us to embrace 'self-reflexivity' to uncover the root causes of our problems and to address core issues. To do so, individuals must lay down their arms, take positive initiatives, and abandon masculine and militarized perspectives that harm society, create divisions, and pose significant obstacles. The gender power imbalance remains a major barrier to establishing a more peaceful and inclusive society.

The crucial question is whether those in power are willing to descend and allow barriers to be transcended, enabling a more equitable environment for the benefit of all. I anticipated that this study would answer many questions about the precarious conditions of many communities in our societies. However, by the end of this research, which I have undertaken as part of my academic *Nirvana*, I find myself with more questions than answers. Perhaps the pursuit of such insight is a never-ending journey. My saga, as both a researcher and a woman, thus continues.

²⁴¹ Please see the full text of *Sultana's Dream* here: <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sultana/dream/dream.html>

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Appendix A: Profile of the Participants

(Not according to seniority)

Name	Pseudonym	Designation/ Organization	Mission/ experience	Interview Date
Ismat Jahan		Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN and Member, CEDAW	UN Headquarters, New York and Sri Lanka	25 July 2019
Ferdous Ara Begum		Former Bangladesh Civil Servant and Member, CEDAW	UN Headquarters, New York and Geneva	13 January 2020
Meghna Guhthakurta		Professor, Dhaka University	Bangladesh NAP on WPS	24 January 2020
Reaz Islam		Former World Bank Officer	Afghanistan	28 July 2019
Khan Ali Nesar		Retired Colonel, Bangladesh Army	Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Sudan	26 July 2019
Mohammad Mahmood		Retired Colonel, Bangladesh Army	Mozambique	31 July 2019
Mohammad Asaduzzaman		Lt. Colonel, Bangladesh Army	BIPSOT	10 February 2020
Nazmul Haque		Lt. Colonel, Bangladesh Army	Sudan and South Sudan	13 October 2019
-	Eirene	Bangladesh Army	South Sudan	4 October 2019 and 7 October 2019
-	Archer	Bangladesh Army	DRC and CAR	21 January 2021
-	Albert	Bangladesh Army	Côte d'Ivoire and South Sudan	8 October 2019

-	Oliver	Bangladesh Army	DRC	6 September 2019
-	Lily	Bangladesh Navy	CAR	18 November 2019
-	Poseidon	Bangladesh Navy	Lebanon	29 November 2019
-	Sophia	UN Staff	Sudan (Darfur)	2 August 2019 and 26 September 2019
-	Samuel	UN Staff	DRC, Haiti, Mali, Sierra Leone	7 August 2019
Atiqa Islam		Commanding Officer, RAB, Bangladesh Police	Kosovo, Sudan (Darfur) and Haiti	16 August 2019
Haider Ali Khan		DIG, Bangladesh Police	Timor Leste, Sudan (Darfur) and Haiti	19 September 2019
Masud Karim		Director, Training, Police Staff College, Dhaka	Kosovo, Sudan and Timor Leste	29 September 2019
-	Selene	Bangladesh Police	DRC and South Sudan	23 December 2019 and 2 January 2020
-	Maimuna	Bangladesh Police	DRC	24 November 2019
-	Themis	Bangladesh Police	DRC	1 August 2019

Appendix B: Interview Invitation

10 July 2019

Hello,

Greetings from the University of Ottawa. I am Ishrat Ahmed, a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa, Canada and doing research on the following topic under the supervision of Professor Dr. Claire Turenne-Sjolander, Vice Provost, University of Ottawa:

Title of the study: Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations Peace Operations: A Critical Study on the Problems of Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The above-mentioned thesis critiques the operationalization of the gender mainstreaming implementation policy in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 within UN peace operations. Modern-day peacekeeping has become challenging because it is no longer limited to 'keeping the peace' but also 'making peace.' Today's peacekeeping is multidimensional, aiming to ensure a ceasefire and security, and the overall protection of civilians, alongside political and socio-economic stability. There is growing awareness that gender has enormous implications for peace processes. I want to briefly suggest here that gender is not synonymous with women or men in my research. Similarly, gender mainstreaming is not only about the inclusion of more women in peace processes; it is much broader and deeper as it requires attention to the needs, priorities and concerns of both men and women. Scholars have defined gender as power, and gender hierarchies as power structures in which different identities, such as race, class, sex, colour, age, origin, nationality, etc. (i.e., intersectionality) play constitutive roles. Despite much attention to Resolution 1325 since its adoption in 2000 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (1325+), implementation remains sluggish. The question arises whether the focus of the UN and its member states concerning the implementation of the resolution is misplaced, as they are overlooking the leading cause and ground realities of gender subjugation and discrimination. In addition, there are gaps in understanding the term 'gender' and in analyzing the modalities of 'gender mainstreaming.'

The main question I shall ask in my thesis is whether the implementation policy for gender mainstreaming in UN peace operations, in line with Resolution 1325, is problematic and unable to address contextual contingencies, persistent gender inequalities, and institutional and attitudinal barriers. I define 'contextual contingency' as unforeseen occurrences in terms of location and situation that may arise from various cultural and gendered interactions in multicultural, multidimensional settings such as UN peace operations. I shall study whether the operationalization of Resolution 1325 can address the contextual contingencies regarding gender considerations in UN peacekeeping.

I look for evidence of women's marginalization in the implementation of Resolution 1325 in UN peacekeeping and post-conflict societies. I ask whether the marginalization of women is a result of interlocking systems of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarization. There is a conspicuous silence in international fora about patriarchy that encourages masculinity and finally leads to militarization through the arms trade. Women and some men are often victims of these three menaces in post-conflict reconstruction. Therefore, I analyze the obstacles to women's meaningful participation in peace processes and seek to discern the root causes of gender discrimination.

I also ask whether the centrally developed, homogenized policies on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping may face difficulties at the local level. From my interviewees, I am interested in their experiences with unforeseen situations, occurrences, or contingencies they faced while implementing gender mainstreaming, and how they overcame them. In addition, my study shall uncover a few practical reasons for persistent gender inequalities among communities during the transition to peace. My research also has the scope to discern further the institutional and attitudinal barriers that hamper the implementation of resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions.

The aforementioned study will help relevant policy practitioners identify some of the problems in implementing Resolution 1325+ and, if possible, address them. My study will further help trainers by documenting the experiences of peacekeepers and policy practitioners in culturally diverse contexts. The findings are expected to help identify some areas where the training should be further strengthened to protect civilians and mainstream gender. It will therefore bridge the current research on peacekeeping with research on gender, peace, and security.

You are requested to participate in this research because of your invaluable experience while serving in the UN peace operations, your expertise in gender, and your familiarity with the policy of gender mainstreaming of the United Nations and/or the Bangladesh Government. I have enclosed an interview guide and a consent form for your review. If you are interested, you may sign it and return it to me. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, and I will do my best to address them.

Sincerely yours,

Ishrat J. Ahmed
PhD candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Ottawa

Appendix C: Interview Guide

(This guide includes some suggested questions. You may choose to answer or include your own experience in the relevant field. You are also welcome to send your written answers to the researcher's email:)

Title of the study: Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations Peace Operations: A Critical Study on the Problems of Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Name of researcher: Ishrat Jahan Ahmed, PhD candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa; Email:

Theme 1: Gender and gender-mainstreaming in UN Peace Operations

Could you please tell us about your participation in UN Peacekeeping missions? When, for which mission, and for how long did you serve?

What motivated you to join UN peacekeeping? What was the men-women ratio during your service in the mission?

While serving in the mission, were you exposed to the gender mainstreaming policy? If yes, how? When we use the word 'gender,' what do you think is people's primary understanding of gender? Was there any discussion during the training you attended about the gender relations between men and women and gender non-conforming persons?

What kind of policies and programmes did the mission leader(s) undertake to create awareness about gender mainstreaming during your tenure in the mission?

Was there any political commitment to take 'gender' as a cross-cutting issue in the SSR, DDR, electoral and other development and judicial reforms? Was the political commitment adequate in your opinion?

How would you describe your interactions with the local population, e.g., men, women and children?

What was your personal experience with gender training and gender mainstreaming?

What is the level of organizational commitment to gender training and gender mainstreaming?

Do you have any special memories or experiences about the host communities in transition?

Theme 2: UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security

Did you hear about the adoption of the UNSC resolution 1325 on women, peace and security when you were serving in the mission?

Have you been briefed by the mission's leadership about the resolution? Was it included during the pre-deployment training?

Did you receive any training on how to address gender-based marginalization as well as conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)?

Have you heard any discussions about implementing Resolution 1325 during your tenure?

Were you in contact with the 'Gender Unit' in the mission to collaborate on its implementation?

How familiar are you with the women, peace and security agenda? Why is it so important for UN Peace Operations?

Men and women experience war, conflicts and insecurities, as well as peace processes in divergent ways. Do you agree? Would you please elaborate on your experience in the mission?

Did you observe any mechanism to engage the local women in the peace process during your tenure?

Do you think the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda should be revised to include men and replace 'women' with 'gender'? If yes/no, why?

Theme 3: Gender, peace and security nexus

Which area was the most important for UN Peace Operations and why?

Do you think that gender, peace and security are interlinked? If yes, how?

Which population segment do you think is the most vulnerable and why?

How would you define security? Did you experience that local armed groups, former warlords and ex-combatants continue to threaten peace and security in the recipient communities that you served?

Would you say there is a nexus between gender, peace and security? Did the UN Peace Operation you served in have this perspective in mind when planning its activities?

Why should the process of ensuring peace and security analyze gender power relations?

How important was it for the mission that you served in to prioritize the 'protection of the civilians'?

Did the mission use a gender analysis toolkit to assess the insecurities of the civilians?

Did you identify any institutional or attitudinal barriers regarding mainstreaming gender while serving in the mission?

Do you think including more women would better ensure peace and security in the UN Peace Operations? If so, how?

Theme 4: Gender inequality, patriarchy, masculinity and militarization

Did you observe existing gender inequalities in the host country in the transition that you served through the UN peacekeeping mission?

Are there any similar patterns of gender inequalities in your sending and receiving countries?

What are the main reasons, in your view, for gender inequalities in a country in transition and a country at peace?

Do you think that patriarchy plays a significant role in sustaining women's inequality? If 'yes', how and if 'no', why?

What factors threaten 'peace' while excluding women? Do you have any practical experience?

Do you think male dominance is a barrier to women's inclusion in peace processes? If yes, how?

Do you think that militarization/militarism and illegal arms trade hamper the efforts of ensuring security for civilians in the post-conflict transformation? If 'yes', how?

Did you experience racism or imperialism while serving in the mission vis à vis peacekeeping personnel from the Global North and the Global South? Did you experience the same vis-à-vis UN peacekeepers and the local population? Does it constitute any attitudinal, institutional or cultural barrier in discharging peacekeeping duties?

Can you recall any cultural or contextual contingency that you had to adjust to while serving on the mission?

Questions for independent experts/policy practitioners:

(You may like to choose to answer the following specific questions in addition to some of the relevant questions mentioned above.)

Do you think Bangladesh has been successful in mainstreaming gender in security institutions? If 'yes,' how and if 'no,' why?

Bangladesh's National Action Plan for 1325 has been pending for a long time. Why and what are the key issues/obstacles in finalizing it?

Do you think Bangladesh peacekeepers are adequately trained to grasp the importance of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the nexus among gender, peace and security? If yes, how?

What is the popular understanding of gender and gender mainstreaming in security and public institutions, and what factors shape this understanding?

Additional Questions:

1. Was there any gap between the **pre-deployment training** and the actual responsibilities regarding ensuring the **protection of civilians**, the DDR process or SSR?
2. How did you experience the **security/insecurity** on the ground, particularly in terms of gender (and/or women), peace and security?
3. Did you face any **contextual contingency** in maintaining security for the local populations?
4. Did you observe **gender discrimination** among the locals? How do they treat their women and subordinate men? Did you see that **patriarchy** and **masculinity** undermine women, subordinate men, and create gender hierarchy and subjugation among the populations?
5. Did you see any **attitudinal and institutional barriers** to creating gender equality in the peacekeeping context?
6. Did you experience that **militarization** (not institutional military but arms trade and illegal possession of weapons by the local combatants) is a threat to unarmed men and women?

Appendix D: Questionnaire for BIPSOT

Questions for BIPSOT (Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training)

1. Please briefly tell me about your training institute, BIPSOT.
2. Who governs the BIPSOT? Is there any governing body?
3. Who are the trainees in BIPSOT? National and international?
4. Is there joint training, too? With which country? What is the modus operandi of such training?
5. Is the training at BIPSOT funded by the Government of Bangladesh?
6. Who are the trainers? Are there any national or international independent experts, in addition to military personnel?
7. Who designs the courses? How do they design the PDT (Pre-deployment training)?
Is there any mechanism to assess any gap between the pre-deployment training and actual responsibilities? Do you invite peacekeepers returning from their missions to provide feedback on future training?
8. Is there any expert committee to oversee the design of the courses and the instruction? How would you determine that the training being given is appropriate and timely?
9. Who trains the Female Engagement Team (FET)?
10. Is there now one female instructor out of twenty-one at BIPSOT? In the past, there were almost none. Why is that so?
11. How is the centre accommodating female officers and soldiers? Is the institute inclusive of male and female trainees?
12. On 24 July 2017, a Dhaka University-BIPSOT joint seminar on VAW (Violence Against Women) in armed conflicts was held. Have you held such a joint initiative in the recent past?
13. There are standalone courses on CRSV (Conflict-Related Sexual Violence) and WPSC (Women, Peace and Security Course), POC (Protection of the Civilians), as well as on IHL (International Humanitarian Law) and ICRC, etc., at the BIPSOT that are praiseworthy. Are these existing courses sufficient to prepare peacekeepers for their protection/humanitarian roles in missions? Do you have any plans to expand these courses soon?

14. UN resolution 49/37 stipulates that the primary responsibility rests with the sending states for training their peacekeepers. Does BIPSOT have any arrangements with the UN or other organizations to improve training?

15. BIPSOT is regarded as the regional centre for excellence and has an association with AAPTC. IAPTC. How does this association help train the Bangladeshi peacekeepers?

Appendix E: Consent Form

Title of the study: Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations Peace Operations: A Critical Study on the Problems of Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Name of researcher: Ishrat Jahan Ahmed, PhD candidate, Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa; Email:

Name of supervisor: Professor Dr. Claire Turenne-Sjolander, Vice Provost, University of Ottawa; Email:..... Phone:

I am invited by researcher Ishrat Jahan Ahmed of the University of Ottawa to participate in the research project mentioned above, which was conducted for a PhD dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Claire Turenne-Sjolander.

The study's purpose is to understand the challenges of gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping, in line with Security Council Resolution 1325, through the experiences of UN peacekeeping personnel who have served on the ground. It seeks to better understand the problems of contextual contingencies, persistent gender inequalities, and institutional and attitudinal barriers faced by UN peacekeeping personnel.

My participation will consist of one two-hour session during which I will be asked to review an interview guide and share my relevant experiences at the peacekeeping missions. I have the option to submit my written responses. I may be asked to attend subsequent phone or Skype calls to clarify my answers (if necessary).

My participation in this study will involve volunteering to draw on my personal and professional experiences. The researcher has assured me that if this causes me any inconvenience, every effort will be made to minimize the risks. I may refuse to answer any question. I may discontinue the interview at any time.

My participation in this study will help me understand the problems of gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping, improve the training of potential peacekeepers, and highlight the invaluable experiences of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in maintaining international peace and security.

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand the contents will be used only for the PhD dissertation, related publications and/or presentations. My confidentiality will be protected as the researcher will not identify me by name unless I want to be identified.

The researcher has assured me that the interview will be conducted in a quiet and secluded place and that no third party will hear the conversation. The researcher shall safeguard all interview data in a locked cabinet at the University of Ottawa office/home/or hotel and carry that data in a locked handbag while travelling. Further, the researcher shall use computer passwords to safeguard data files and shall use a secure network, such as office or home internet services, as well as an official uOttawa email account for email communication.

I understand that the data collected from hard copies of the questionnaire, interview transcripts, notes, and audio recordings (if applicable) will be kept securely in the researcher's locked cabinet. Original data or a copy of the data shall be kept on the uOttawa campus for the entire retention period, which is indefinite.

I am under no obligation to participate. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. I understand that I will not be paid/compensated for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I choose to withdraw, I shall inform the researcher within two months of the interview date, and my data will be destroyed and shall not be used in the study.

I choose the following option for an audio recording of my interview for analysis purposes (Please put a tick mark):

i) I give permission for audio recording with the option to turn off the device when I feel necessary ☐

ii) I **do not** give permission for audio recording of my interview ☐

I choose the following options for anonymity (Please put a tick mark):

i) My name should be disclosed:

Yes ☐

No ☐

ii) In case my name is not disclosed, the following pseudonym should be used:

.....

iii) My designation should be disclosed: Yes ☐ No ☐

iv) My current posting place should be disclosed: Yes ☐ No ☐

I,,
agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ishrat Jahan Ahmed, PhD candidate,
Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, under
the supervision of Professor Dr. Claire Turenne-Sjolander.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol
Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room
154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5; Tel.: (613) 562-5387; Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix F: Approval from Bangladesh's Armed Forces Division

RESTRICTED		Govt of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Prime Minister's Office Armed Forces Div
		Tel: Mobile: Fax: E-Mail:
06.00.0000.009.20.001.19. 2848		25 Sep 2019
<u>RESEARCH ON PEACEKEEPING</u>		
Ref:		
A. Email received from dt 23 Sep 2019 (Copy att).		
1. In lt of above ref, Ishrat Ahmed, DG (On Lve), MOFA is doing research on 'Gender Mainstreaming in UN Peace Ops: A Critical Study on the Problems of Implementing UN Sy Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Sy' as part of her PhD under University of Ottawa, Canada. For the said research she needs to discuss with few Mil ofrs (UN peacekeeping msn completed ofrs) of BD Army, Navy and Air force. In this regard, you are req to fwd name (with contact number and email address) of 03 ofrs (preferably 1 x female and 2 x male) who all have done UN peacekeeping msn directly to Ishrat Ahmed through email 2. <u>For BIPSOT only.</u> You are req to nominate one ofr and fwd to the researcher (Ishrat Ahmed) directly to provide nec info (Unclassified). 3. Fwd for your nec act Pl.		
		Lt Cdr BN For PSO
Encl:		
1. Ref A - 01 Page.		
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NHQ, Dte of Naval Trg, Banani, Dhaka		
Air HQ, Dte of Air Trg, Dhaka Cantt		
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Appendix G: Certificate from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Ottawa

09/07/2019

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-06-19-4287

Titre du projet / Project Title

Gender Mainstreaming in the
United Nations Peace
Operations: A Critical Study on
the Problems of Implementing
UN Security Council Resolution
1325 on Women, Peace and
Security

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

09/07/2019

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

08/07/2020

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher Affiliation

Role

Ishrat Jahan AHMED

Institut d'études des femmes / Institute of Women's
Studies

Chercheur Principal / Principal
Investigator

Claire

TURENNE-SJOLANDER

École d'études politiques / School of Political Studies

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-06-19-4287

Titre du projet / Project Title

Gender Mainstreaming in the
United Nations Peace
Operations: A Critical Study on
the Problems of Implementing
UN Security Council Resolution
1325 on Women, Peace and
Security

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Renouvelé / Renewed

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

09/06/2020

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

08/07/2021

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Ishrat Jahan AHMED	Institut d'études des femmes / Institute of Women's Studies	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Claire TURENNE-SJOLANDER	École d'études politiques / School of Political Studies	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

Appendix H: Certificate from the United Nations Senior Women Talent Pipeline Program



Ishrat
Ahmed

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED
THE SENIOR WOMEN TALENT PIPELINE
PROGRAM

Candidates who have completed the program are considered strong candidates for senior positions in field offices of the United Nations system.

The program is sponsored by the Department of Operational Support at the United Nations in New York.

Chaste Abimana
Chief, Staffing Service
Human Resources Services Division
Department of Operational Support

Appendix I: Certificate from the United Nations Senior Mission Leaders Course

