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Gendering EU security strategies: a feminist postcolonial approach to the EU as a (global) security actor

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the EU's current re-imagining as a global security actor and its stance as a global promoter of progressive gender norms. For this purpose, we analyse how gender and race are constitutive of the meanings of security and Europe in major EU security strategies, and how this relates to the way gender (equality) is addressed as a policy issue. We find that, in the context of waning liberal world order and manifold internal and external crises, EU security actorness is constructed through narratives of masculinisation that entail feminisation of the EU's own past as a "peace project" and "soft power"; Othering of non-EU spaces and subjects; colonial perspectives on the EU's role in the world as "White Man's burden" and the reconstruction of whiteness through notions of "neutral" masculinities associated with technocratic professionalism, superior knowledge production, and market rationality. This intersectional gendering of EU security limits the emancipatory potential of gender policy through the racialisation of Other women and the simultaneous invisibilisation of postcolonial structures of inequality. Our analysis provides the groundwork for addressing how and why the EUropean security project continues to reproduce intersectional power relations and insecurities, despite commitments to gender equality and non-discrimination.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the EU has continuously strived to build and substantiate its profile as a (global) security actor through integration in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the proliferation of security thinking in other policy areas. Foreshadowed in the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) (EEAS 2016), the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (SC) (EEAS 2022), the newest security strategy, solidifies a trend towards an increasingly threat-based perception of the EU's security environment and a "hard security" approach. In line with previous initiatives such as PESCO, the EU Battlegroups, or the European Peace Facility, the document calls for a stronger commitment towards joint defence activities and build-up of military capacities to address security challenges

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ranging from traditional threats and geopolitical competition to terrorism, organised crime, and hybrid threats. At the same time, in internal security, the EU Security Union Strategy (SU) (European Commission 2020) promotes a "whole-of-society" approach (p. 2) that foregrounds the protection of its citizens, values, and "the European way of life" (p. 1). This entails a broader securitisation of areas such as technology and innovation (Bellanova *et al.* 2022), markets, and borders (Huysmans 2000, De Genova 2017, 2018, Léonard and Kaunert 2022). Alas, the EU is engaging in a broad project of (re)imagining itself as a (global) security actor - an open-ended process in which the meanings of security and Europe, and with them the EU's identity and its role in the world, are being renegotiated (Kurowska and Pawlak 2009, Mälksoo 2016). While this process has been underway since the Treaty of Amsterdam extended the EU's mandate in external relations, it has gained renewed legitimacy and urgency in the context of the Russian war on Ukraine.

Yet, security is not an unproblematic concept that can be neutrally introduced into the politics and practices of the EU to the equal benefit of all. Rather, security in general and processes of militarisation and securitisation in particular have been shown to render some people, regions, and communities more secure than others. Security logics specifically have a tendency to enhance gendered and racialised inequalities, e.g. through marginalising the security needs of women and non-citizens, fostering gender-based violence in conflict settings and inequity in security institutions, or putting female migrants at heightened risk of border violence (Tickner 1992, Stern 2006, Sjoberg 2009, Zalewski 2010, Freeman and Maybin 2011, Wibben 2011, Welfens and Bonjour 2021). Since gender equality is central in the foundational myths of the EU (Macrae 2010) and its self-understanding as a global actor (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Debusscher and Manners 2020, Guerrina *et al.*, this issue), the EU has partly acknowledged these problems and introduced gender equality measures in the framework of the United Nations (UN) Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and beyond. These attempts to mainstream gender in the security realm however continue to be marginal and privilege technocratic and instrumentalist approaches that do not take broader gendered power relations into account (Haastrup 2017, Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Jenichen *et al.* 2019, Beier and Çağlar 2020, Mühlenhoff *et al.* 2020). In particular, EU equality policies tend to disregard the intersection of gender with other structures of inequality, such as race (Verloo 2016, Guillem 2017). The EU's security project thus remains at odds with the EU's stance as a global promoter of progressive gender norms and non-discrimination.

To make sense of the causes and implications of these contradictions, we shift the attention from explicit EU gender policy in the security realm and its shortcomings to the gendered and racialised meaning-making processes by which the EU is constructing and legitimising itself as a security actor (Stern 2011, Kinnvall 2016a, 2016b, Hoijtink and Mühlenhoff 2020). We argue that these processes have bearings on how gender is problematised in EU security policy by defining whose security counts and whose does not and by legitimising particular security practices and actors. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial scholarship in security studies (Tickner 1992, Barkawi and Laffey 2006, Sjoberg 2009, Zalewski 2010, Wibben 2016, Machold and Charrett 2021) and EU studies (Białasiewicz 2016, Kinnvall 2016, Mamadouh and Białasiewicz 2016, Van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2020), we develop a Feminist EU Security Studies approach to examine how major EU security strategies are constituted by gender and race. We argue that imaginations of EU security actorness support understandings of Europe as white and masculine, invisibilise

intersectionality, and do not account for postcolonial power relations that continue to shape the EU's emergence as a (global) security actor (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013, Kinnvall 2016, see also Introduction, this issue). This is an important piece to the puzzle of how and why the EU as a security actor reproduces and exacerbates intersectional power relations, despite its proclaimed role as a global gender actor. In a time of war in Europe, and one with immense gendered impact (Wright 2021, Phillips and Martsenyuk 2023, O'Sullivan and Kratochvil, 2023), this provides the groundwork for examining the involvement of the EU's strategic visions in the reproduction of societal power relations and the implications of this involvement in the EU's attempts to address gendered and racialised violence and insecurity in regional and global crisis prevention and management.

To investigate the role of gender and race in the meaning-making that defines the EU's role and self-understanding as a security actor, we analyse three recent security strategies: the EUGS (EEAS 2016), SU (European Commission 2020), and SC (EEAS 2022). Conceptualising security strategies as exercises in (re-)inventing, imagining, and negotiating the EU by ordering the world and Europe's place in it (Mälksoo 2016), we show that, in the context of a waning liberal world order and multiple internal and external crises, EUropean[1] security is built on narratives of masculinisation that manifest in aspirations to overcome the EU's feminised past as a "peace project" (Della Sala 2018) and "soft power" (Mälksoo 2016). These narratives depend on racialised Othering of non-European spaces and subjects, colonial imaginaries of the EU's role in the world as "White Man's burden" (Narayan 1995), and the reconstruction of whiteness through notions of "neutral" masculinities that are associated with technocratic professionalism, superior knowledge production, and market rationality. In this context, gender equality increasingly serves as an explicit goal in the making of the EU as a security actor, yet the framing of gender issues fits rather than disrupts the overall masculinised construction of EU as a security actor and particularly promotes racialising and postcolonial tropes. We conclude by outlining the contribution of a Feminist EU Security Studies approach to grasping the EU's significant and growing power to render some people and regions more secure than others.

2. The EU as a (gendered) security actor

Critical research on the EU as a global and/or security actor has shown that historically contextual ideas and foundational myths of Europe - most prominently as a peace project and a normative power - are consequential for the EU's perception of its role as a global actor and thereby shape EU security politics and foreign policy (Diez 2005, Manners 2010, Nițoiu 2013, Della Sala 2018). Conceptualising processes of European integration as narrative sense-making activities (Manners and Murray 2016), this research emphasises that security politics is a main field in which Europe and security are defined and constitute each other in ways that give meaning to the EU, particularly in times of crisis (Manners 2010, Mälksoo 2016). While this scholarship highlights the importance of Self/Other dualisms in the shifting narratives of the EU as a security actor (Mitzen 2006, Mälksoo 2016), it has not yet systematically investigated the role of gender, race, and colonial legacies in the creation of these dualisms. To trace the gendered and racialised meanings of EU security, we, therefore, draw on and combine, on the one hand, scholarship on gender and EU security that has focused on gender as a *policy issue*;

and, on the other hand, feminist and postcolonial scholarship on how gender and race are constitutive of understandings of (EU) security.

The first scholarship has so far shed light on the efforts to integrate gender equality policies and measures, especially with regard to the UN WPS agenda. Focusing on institutional constraints as well as possibilities for change, results suggest the prevalence of instrumentalist approaches towards gender and/or marginalisation of gender concerns altogether (Haastrup 2017, Mühlenhoff 2017, Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Jenichen *et al.* 2019, Beier and Çağlar 2020, Welfens 2020). This is despite the EU's role as a "global gender + actor" (Debusscher and Manners 2020) that institutionalises gender equality as a guiding principle and EU value in different policy areas. While gender thus underpins normative positions in EU security and defence policy, the EU acts as "a gendered normative actor" that "strategically co-opts gender narratives to promote the interests of the organization" (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 277).

The second scholarship has explored how gender is constitutive of the processes by which the EU imagines and designs its role as a military and security actor. From this perspective, Stern's (2011) analysis of the EUGS' predecessor, the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), shows "how gender discourses underpin productions of (naturalised) European identity and the strategies employed to secure 'Europe'" (p. 30). Foregrounding both spatiality and temporality, Stern sheds light on how the ESS constructs the feminised Others (and subordinated masculinities) as always already "outside of and before Europe", and thereby produces different, shifting types of superior masculine-marked Europe(s). In a similar vein, Kronsell (2016a, 2016b) found that developments in the CSDP reconstruct different, but binary constructions of militarised masculinities and femininities. Building on Kronsell, Hoijtink and Mühlenhoff (2020) have shown how increasingly aggressive masculinities underpin claims to the EU as a *military* power and how the evolution of the CSDP is entrenched with narratives of the EU's need to become fully masculine in the face of Europe's vulnerability to multiple threats.

Our analysis aims to contribute to the above scholarships by (1) connecting research on gender as constitutive in the imaginings of the EU as a global security actor to the question of how and why gender policy remains limited in EU (security) politics, and (2) strengthening an intersectional perspective on gender and EU security as situated within the (dis-)continuities of Europe's colonial history and present. Previous research has to some extent already discussed how the non-European Other is invoked in EU gender politics (Debusscher and Manners 2020) and how gender equality serves as a discourse to keep neighbouring countries "at a spatial and temporal distance outside Europe" on the basis of colonial practices of Othering and hierarchical Self-Other definitions (Kunz and Maisenbacher 2017, p. 123); how racialised Others sustain security narratives (Stern 2011, Hoijtink and Mühlenhoff 2020, p. 368); and the relative absence of race in policy and academic discourse on gender in the EU (Verloo 2016, Guillem 2017). Yet, a systematic engagement with the co-constitution of gender and race in EU security that is embedded within an analysis of the postcolonial condition of the EU is still missing. In the following, we, therefore, develop a novel framework by drawing on feminist security studies (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, Sjoberg 2009, Zalewski 2010, Wibben 2011) and combine it with critical geography, geopolitics, and EU studies on how colonialism and associated processes of racialisation and Othering continue to influence current EU

governance, policies, and integration processes (Hansen and Jonsson 2011, Kinnvall 2015, Ponzanesi 2015, Mamadouh and Białasiewicz 2016, Jenichen *et al.* 2019).

3. Feminist EU Security Studies approach

For our analysis of intersecting processes of gendering and racialisation in current security strategies, we conceptualise security as inherently gendered, i.e. building upon and reproducing a hierarchical difference between masculinities/femininities (Tickner 1992, Sjoberg 2009, Zalewski 2010, Wibben 2011). While gender has often been the dominant category in feminist security studies, this approach is intersectional (Crenshaw 1991, Yuval-Davis 2006), i.e. considers the co-constitution of gender in EU security with other categories of oppression and inequality. We particularly foreground the intersections of gender with notions of race (Ayoob 1995, Barkawi and Laffey 2006, Hönke and Müller 2012, Vukov and Sheller 2013, Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019) that categorise "humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye 2014, p. 3). These racial orders have particular bearings on the field of security which is "predicated on the production of racialised Others in need of differentiation and/or elimination" (Machold and Charrett 2021, p. 40). By securing "us", not only are "they" created as dangerous, threatening Others (Stern 2006) but the Self is produced as white - a seemingly de-racialized and neutral position that invisibilizes structural power and justifies violence against racialised subjects as security (Jenichen *et al.* 2019, Sabaratnam 2020, Baker 2021). Gender and race thus matter in determining which bodies and territories are subjected to security politics in the sense of protection, authority, and violence, and, in doing so, give legitimacy to security actors, policies, and practices (Stachowitsch and Sachseder 2019, Sachseder *et al.* 2022).

From this perspective, we centre the "work" that gendering (Zalewski 2010), i.e. feminisation and masculinisation, and racialisation are doing intersectionally as processes of hierarchical categorisation and meaning-making in EU security strategies that maintain broader structures of inequality and hierarchies between non-/European subjects and spaces. This opens the analysis of EU security to questions of "how, by whom, when, where, and to what end" different meanings of [European] security are produced and enacted in the context of structures of inequality (Wibben 2016, p. 138). It further paves the way for investigating how different gendered and racialised subjects of protector, protected, and threat underpin security strategies, and how these not only reflect gender stereotypes but reproduce gendered insecurities (Stern 2006).

A theorisation of EU security as gendered and racialised however needs to go beyond an intersectional critique of security and unpack how the EU security project is interwoven with and constituted by postcolonial constructions of Europe as universal, superior, and exceptional (Bhambra 2016, Chakrabarty 2000). Colonial legacies underpin the EU's self-understandings, policies, and integration processes (Hansen and Jonsson 2011, Kinnvall 2015, Ponzanesi 2015, Białasiewicz 2016, Jenichen *et al.* 2019), particularly in policy fields such as external relations and foreign policy (Bilgin 2018, Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013, Berlingozzi, 2023, Musina, 2023) and borders and migration (De Genova 2017, Sachseder *et al.* 2022, Isleyen, 2023, Campbell-Futak and Küçük, 2023). Colonial ideas and narratives of Europe as the dominant and universal Self and the subaltern non-European Other demarcate European from non-European spaces and bodies in terms of spatiality

and temporality whereby non-Europe is understood as always "outside of and before Europe" (Stern 2011, p. 45, Said 2003, van Houtum 2010, Brambilla *et al.* 2015). These hierarchies constitute Europe as rational, progressive, and democratic, and non-Europe as associated with irrationality and backwardness, articulated through dichotomies between masculine/feminine and non-/white which map onto security politics in gendered and racialised constructions of protector/protected and threat/victim. Intersectionally gendered notions of security and colonial notions of Europe thus constitute each other, for example, in understandings of Europe as feminised/vulnerable to a racialised, non-European threat (Moffette and Vadasaria 2016, Bissonnette and Vallet 2022); normative claims of European humanitarianism and masculinist protectionism towards the feminised Other (Young 2003, Skinner and Lester 2012, Pallister-Wilkins 2021); claims to world leadership as responsibility and duty opposite the less-emancipated (Nițoiu 2013), sometimes understood as "White Man's Burden" (Narayan 1995); or constructions of the EU as a white and masculine security actor (Stern 2011) that is at the same time presented as "post-racial" (Isakjee 2020) and a promoter of progressive gender norms (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Debusscher and Manners 2020).

These patterns of gendered and racialised hierarchisation are not limited to formerly colonised subjects and spaces but shaped by unique European histories of imperialism, war, postsocialist transformations, and EU security politics. Europe is therefore centrally constituted through "not-quite-European" semi-peripheries, such as Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Mälksoo 2016, Baker 2021, Kušić 2021, O'Sullivan and Kratochvil, this issue). These regions serve as another significant Other with an "imperial and (quasi-)colonial legacy" (Boatcã 2012, Kušić *et al.* 2019, p. 8) to the formation of idealised European identity (Todorova 1997). As such, they are understood "as targets of enlargement, peacebuilding and neighbourhood policies, and/or security threats" (Deiana 2020, p. 2). The Yugoslav wars and the ensuing peacekeeping and nation-building projects have solidified constructions of the EU as a security actor that centre the peace project narrative (Della Sala 2018). This legacy is perpetuated in policies of EU enlargement and accession and the associated processes of Europeanisation (Musliu 2021) that draw on "exclusionary logics and processes of Othering" (Deiana 2020, p. 3) and thereby construct hierarchies of Europeanness through racialisation and hierarchies of whiteness (Baker 2021). Gender equality initiatives, including LGBTQ + rights, are central to this project of Europeanisation and security politics that keep specific non-EUropean regions at a distance under the banner of "inclusion" (Rexhepi 2016, see also Kunz and Maisenbacher 2017, Musliu 2021).

Building on an intersectional and postcolonial approach to both security and Europe that takes inner-European histories into account as well, in the following section, we outline our methodological approach to studying how security strategies construct (non-)European subjects and spaces intersectionally, how gendered and racialised notions of Europe act as a source of institutional authority and legitimacy based on colonial Self/Other dualisms, and how this relates to how gender and race are (not) addressed and problematised in the strategic documents.

4. Methods and material

To study the EU's role and self-understanding as a security actor, we conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Van Dijk 1993, Wodak and Meyer 2009) of

central security strategies. Drawing on this approach, we study meanings produced through security strategies as part of larger discourses, i.e. socially produced forms of knowledge that shape the possibilities to think, write, speak and act, and as such not simply represent reality, but are part of its production. As two defining documents on the external security dimension, we analyse the EUGS (EEAS 2016) and SC (EEAS 2022). The former was the first grand strategic vision since the ESS in 2003, strongly influenced by the impression of a declining liberal world order (Tocci 2016). It laid out the foundation for further integration of the CSDP with the aim of taking greater responsibility for the EU's own security, creating financial tools for member states and industry to develop defence capabilities, and concrete actions for cooperation with NATO. The SC represents the latest strategic document for European security and defence, developed to improve proactive monitoring and management of crisis. It provides the EU with both a strategic vision and a plan of action in all areas of security and defence policy for the next decade (EEAS 2022, p. 50), strongly advocating for the build-up of concrete defence capabilities.

Understanding the formation of the EU as a security actor as a comprehensive, cross-policy project - as the EU itself sees and portrays it - we further include the SU (European Commission 2020) in the analysis. This document is geared to internal security but strongly emphasises the internal-external nexus. Largely ignored by critical security research, it conceptualises a "whole-of-society approach" (European Commission 2020, p. 2) to engage EU bodies, member states, the private sector, and individuals in the protection of the EU and its citizens. It explicitly aims at bringing together all policy areas potentially relevant to security issues and links this endeavour to the preservation of the "European way of life" (ibid., p. 1).

We study the three documents not as the authorial voice of the organisation, but as temporary and powerful manifestations of meaning-making processes that are always multi-voiced and contested (Freeman and Maybin 2011). They are important sites in which the EU's identity as a security actor is negotiated in institutionally consequential ways, in which desirable futures of the EU in the defence and security field are reflected, and form part of wider processes of defining the intersections between security and "Europeanness". Thus, the documents represent ideal spaces for studying how gender and race are inscribed into security policy and discourse over time. Building on our feminist and postcolonial theoretical framework, in a first step, we ask how the documents construct Europe and its Other and how these constructions intersect with notions of feminised, masculinised, and racialised threat, victimisation, and protector status. In a second step, we study how gender and race constitute the EU as a security actor, i.e. how "being European" in the field of security is linked to hierarchical concepts of femininity and masculinity, Self/Other, and non-/whiteness. In a third step, we pay attention to the framing and problematisation of gender equality in sustaining the EU's legitimacy as a security actor, i.e. how the documents explicitly bring up issues of gender and relate them (or not) to European values and security.

5. Analysis: The EU as a masculine and white security actor

Our analysis shows that EU security strategies constitute the EU as a security actor through various processes of gendering and racialisation. Contemporary imaginaries of security actorness strongly draw on a narrative of masculinisation when constructing

the EU's role and future as a global actor. This narrative, as outlined in section 5.1., is formulated against a feminised past of the EU as a "peace project" (Della Sala 2018) associated with "soft power" (Mälksoo 2016) that the strategies seek to overcome, and characterised by a ramping up of colonial tropes of a racialised Other that is simultaneously threatening and weak. EU security is further connected to constructions of whiteness, as outlined in Section 5.2., through claims to superior values and normative positions that justify the EU's power politics in terms of "White Man's burden" (Narayan 1995). These constructions are underpinned by "neutral" masculinities that are associated with technocratic professionalism, superior knowledge production, and market rationality. As discussed in Section 5.3., gender equality has become an explicit goal in the making of the EU as a security actor. Yet, its meaning is largely confined by the main narrative threads of masculinist protectionism and racialised Othering. This not only circumscribes the emancipatory potential of gender policies in the field of security but also contributes to the reproduction of intersectional, colonial power relations.

5.1. Masculinisation and its Others: the feminised past and the racialised threat

The narrative of masculinisation presented in the analysed documents is constructed against two Others: the EU's feminised past and the racialised, non-European threat. The first is largely expressed in aspirations to overcome the EU's former status as a soft power that is passive, dependent, slow, lacking unity, and inefficient, towards a newly masculinised identity in the context of an unquestioned "return to power politics"[2] (EEAS 2016, p. 14). This association of EU security with traditionally masculine traits is intensifying over time: The EUGS (EEAS 2016) still mentions a potentially less masculinised notion of soft power as central, if not sufficient in a "fragile world" (EEAS 2016, p. 44), to the EU's security identity and suggests that it needs to be partnered with a complimentary "hard" power approach. The SC (EEAS 2022) staunchly rejects and Others these notions as a thing of the past that is failing and even dangerous. It rather projects the EU as a "robust" (EEAS 2016, p. 33), and "more assertive and decisive security provider" (EEAS 2016, p. 62) that is "ambitious" (EEAS 2016, p. 13), and "willing" to act (EEAS 2016, p. 10) in the face of "challenges of a more dangerous world" (EEAS 2016, p. 43):

> The European Union has always prided itself on its soft power – and it will keep doing so, because we are the best in this field. However, the idea that Europe is an exclusively "civilian power" does not do justice to an evolving reality. For instance, the European Union currently deploys seventeen military and civilian operations, with thousands of men and women serving under the European flag for peace and security – our own security, and our partners'. For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand. (EEAS 2016, p. 4)

> While since 2016 we have reinforced our work to strengthen the EU's role in security and defence, we recognise that there is a new strategic landscape emerging that requires us to act with a far greater sense of urgency and determination and show mutual assistance and solidarity in case of aggression against one of us. The moment for decisive steps to ensure our freedom of action is now. (EEAS 2022, p. 23)

This specific gendered framing diverges from narratives previously identified as central to European global identity, namely as built against the backdrop of Europe's violent history of nationalism and fascism whereby a violent, war-prone past becomes the ultimate Other (Diez 2005, Nițoiu 2013). While earlier strategic visions like the ESS also draw on gendered

imaginaries, the affirmative view of the EU's past, and the firm placement of the Other outside of and before Europe (Stern 2011), the EUGS and SC follow a different temporality that constructs a desirable masculine future of the EU by feminising and thereby delegitimising its role as a diplomatic, dialogue-oriented actor:

> Yet today terrorism, hybrid threats, economic volatility, climate change and energy insecurity endanger our people and territory. An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders. We will therefore enhance our efforts on defence, cyber, counterterrorism, energy and strategic communications. (EEAS 2016, p. 9)

> Our new cooperative frameworks give us a chance not to repeat the fragmentation and inefficiencies of the past and pursue a European approach from the outset. (EEAS 2022, p. 47)

In the face of past and world "fragility" (EEAS 2016, p. 44), cooperative multilateralism and peaceful interdependence are increasingly problematised as sources of insecurity, e.g. by claiming that interdependence and soft power are becoming "increasingly conflictual" and are being "weaponised" (EEAS 2022, p. 4).

The narrative of masculinisation is thus made intelligible through hierarchical gendering of the past/future. It is further constructed against the backdrop of two different non-European Others. The dominant Other is constructed through a diffuse sense of threat emanating from chaotic, dysfunctional non-European spaces and described in particularly racialised terms with reference to postcolonial regions in North Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, though to a smaller extent, South Eastern Europe and the Balkans as the long-established Other of EUropean security politics maintain a continuous presence in sustaining ideas of Europe as a masculinised, enlightened, and rational security actor. In the latter instance, EU security politics and operations coincide with EU enlargement processes (Rexhepi 2016). Patterns of gendering that inform the broader project of Europeanisation (Musliu 2021) are therefore reflected in security strategies that also feminise these semi-peripheral regions as "fragile" (EEAS 2022, p. 38), yet as "partners" (EEAS 2022, p. 55) that are "attracted to" the EU (EEAS 2016, p. 33). Particularly in the EUGS, they are seen as capable of approximation to full Europeanness, if made "resilient", i.e. overcoming their feminised status and thereby joining the EU as a fully masculine actor:

> State and societal resilience is our strategic priority in the neighbourhood. Many people within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) both to the east and to the south wish to build closer relations with the Union. Our enduring power of attraction can spur transformation and is not aimed against any country. (EEAS 2016, p. 25)

> We remain committed to improving the resilience of societies and democratic processes, political institutions and critical infrastructure in the Western Balkans, as well as boosting cybersecurity, countering disinformation and supporting counter-terrorism efforts in the region. To help build civilian and military capacity and resilience in the region, working closely together with the UN, NATO and the OSCE is of the utmost importance. We welcome the regular contributions our partners in the Western Balkans have made to our CSDP missions and operations. In view of the threat to the sovereignty, stability, territorial integrity and governance of our Eastern partners, we will boost our cooperation in the area of security and defence with a view to strengthening their resilience. (EEAS 2022, pp. 55–56)

While gendered narratives of fragility, attraction, and resilience with regards to South Eastern Europe remain relevant in EU security strategies and concrete aggressors such

as Russia are occasionally named (EEAS 2016, p. 33), global threat scenarios are increasingly racialised, particularly in the SC. This sharpened racialisation is loosely tied to a growing focus on formerly colonised spaces and issues of border security and migration, but does not only mean a shift in geographical or policy focus. Rather, it presents a more general worldview that sees Europe not merely uncritically as an attractive peace project, but as defensive against an ambiguous Other that is constantly threatening to move into Europe. These patterns of Othering locate chaos, violence, crime, "socio-economic imbalances" (EEAS 2022, p. 20), natural disaster, and environmental degradation (p. 38) strictly in non-European, racialised spaces. Political or social conflicts therein are constructed as irrational by ascribing them to "religious and ethnic tensions" (EEAS 2021, p. 17). In a nativist discourse, this is presented as a threat to "our people and territory" (EEAS 2016, p. 8) and "our European way of life" (European Commission 2020, p. 26):

> Europeans today face a security landscape in flux, impacted by evolving threats as well as other factors including climate change, demographic trends and political instability beyond our borders. […] Security threats are also becoming more complex: they feed on the ability to work cross-border and on inter-connectivity; they exploit the blurring of the boundaries between the physical and digital world; they exploit vulnerable groups, social and economic divergences. […]; and what happens outside the EU can have a critical impact on security inside the EU. (European Commission 2020, p. 2)

> Local and regional instability dynamics that feed on dysfunctional governance and contestation in our wider neighbourhood, often nourished by religious and ethnic tensions. (EEAS 2022, p. 17)

In line with colonial imaginations of the Other, non-European spaces are imagined as simultaneously threatening and vulnerable. "Terrorism and violence plague" them (EEAS 2016, p. 13), but at the same time, they are a "breeding ground" for threats (EEAS 2022, p. 8), "nourish" (EEAS 2022, p. 17), and "feed on" (European Commission 2020, p. 2) "turmoil" (EEAS 2016, p. 34). By invoking disease and bodily functions, these metaphors naturalise the Othered status of non-European spaces and anchor it in an embodied, feminised imagery as "fragile" (EEAS 2022, p. 38) and "vulnerable" (EEAS 2022, p. 38). At the same time, these spaces are seen as having potential which the Other is however unable to realise without intervention and guidance from EUrope. This portrayal as in need of protection and proper development reproduces dichotomies between nature-culture, civilization-wilderness, mind–body:

> Given its economic and demographic growth, the African continent has considerable potential. However, ongoing violent conflict, poor governance and terrorism across the continent affect our own security. This is in particular the case in Mali and the wider Sahel region where instability, terrorist groups, weak State structures and widespread poverty constitute a dangerous mix and call for sustained EU engagement. (EEAS 2022, p. 19)

The "challlenges of demography" (EEAS 2016, p. 34) non-European populations is here mentioned as a rationale for understanding them as threatening, linking to racist discourse on overpopulation of non-European societies, that has shaped EU external relations, particularly with Africa, on the basis of colonial ideology (Hansen and Jonsson 2011, Berlingozzi, this issue). The intense focus on "the integrity of our borders" (EEAS 2022, p. 19) and migration as a hybrid threat (EEAS 2022, p. 13) additionally fosters anxiety over Othered regions and their frequently described problems seeping

into the EU. The ambiguous, often actor-less threat of non-European spaces in security strategies is thereby connected to Othered bodies that need to be managed and detained. This legitimises militarisation of border security and securitisation of migration and positions these trends as a guiding example for the CSDP (EEAS 2022, p. 27).

Taken together, while the quasi-colonial Other of South Eastern Europe and the Balkans remains an important reference point for constituting the EU as a security actor, racialised Othering underpins the increasingly global outlook of security strategies and the focus on becoming a "robust" and "ambitious' security actor. With this racialisation of threat also come different de-racialised and colonial self-perceptions of Europe, as discussed in the next section.

5.2. The EU as a white security actor: "White Man's Burden" and neutral masculinities

While the past and different non-European Others serve as background and rationale for the masculinisation narrative, they also reconstruct European security actorness as white. This is achieved through appeals to the EU's superior values and normative positions that constitute its leadership in the world as "White Man's burden" (Narayan 1995), and through the construction of various "neutral" masculinities that are de-racialised as white. In the first instance, the documents typically characterise EUrope as a space of prosperity, democracy, security, and freedom in the preamble or opening sections that strives for a rules-based international order and advocates human and fundamental rights. These normative positions that are devalued in other contexts (see above) are presented as the overall rationale for why a masculinised approach is needed. These references to the EU's superior values make frequent use of the possessive pronoun "our" and are in most cases followed directly by invoking an existential threat to these values through the above-described violence and volatility associated with non-European spaces and actors:

> We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned. To the east, the European security order has been violated, while terrorism and violence plague North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Europe itself. (EEAS 2016, p. 7)

> Our security is linked to our fundamental values. All the proposed actions and initiatives in this strategy will fully respect fundamental rights and our European values. These are the foundation of our European way of life and must remain at the core of all our work. (European Commission 2020, p. 26)

Building on the EU's image as a peace project, the EU has a longer legacy of understanding its role in external relations as a "sacred duty" of a "unique international actor […] promoting its peace for the emancipation of other states and peoples" (Nițoiu 2013, p. 244). These narratives continue to underpin neighbourhood, Europeanisation, accession, and enlargement policies (Rexhepi 2016, Deiana 2020, Musliu 2021). In the context of the perceived end of liberal world order and the increasing racialisation of non-EU Others described in the previous section, they are however increasingly undermined in security strategies which become more evocative of tropes of "White Man's burden" (Narayan 1995). While colonial imaginations of unique civilisational achievements as the basis for

the EU's role in the world are not new, the examined security strategies less envision a confident Europe bringing peace to the Other, but rather paint the picture of a reluctant, yet responsible Europe needing to defend its interest. In this sense, the documents demand that the EU should "shoulder a greater share of responsibility for its own security and that of the world" (EEAS 2022, p. 13) and "take a more active stance to protect its citizens, defend its interests, project its values, and work with partners to provide security for a safer and more just world" (ibid., p. 18). Such shifts in responsibility and leadership are largely justified by a hostile global environment that requires a disinclined Europe to step in and reproduces the dichotomy between a threatening outside and a peaceful inside:

> The Mediterranean, Middle East and parts of sub-Saharan Africa are in turmoil, the outcome of which will likely only become clear decades from now. Solving conflicts and promoting development and human rights in the south is essential to addressing the threat of terrorism, the challenges of demography, migration and climate change, and to seizing the opportunity of shared prosperity. (EEAS 2016, p. 34)

> In view of the world we face, we need to step up our efforts to prepare for crises and threats and to project stability, in our neighbourhood and beyond. (EEAS 2022, p. 25)

The masculinisation narrative is thereby sustained through colonial imaginings of the white Self as carrying the burden of global responsibility. Whiteness is therefore a central element in constructing the EU as a masculine security actor. It supports the legitimacy of its militarised power politics as normative and ethical by reframing them as an obligation and responsibility of those with "a world-historic mission" (Narayan 1995, p. 135).

Interrogating the masculinity ideals behind the "White Man" as a European security actor, we found that, beyond militaristic ideals, the "whole-of-society approach" in particular (European Commission 2020, p. 2) opened up additional space for the reconstruction of whiteness through diversified notions of masculinity associated with rationality, technocratic neutrality, and professionalism. The Commission's attempts to play a greater role in the traditionally intergovernmental security realm (Hoijtink 2014) provided the grounds for this through a broader conceptualisation of security and legitimacy production rooted in areas such as the market economy, innovation and technology, and border management.

Constructions of Europe as a global actor that draw upon market ideology and economic rationality have historically shaped the EU's self-representation as an economic power (Manners 2010). In the examined documents, this is expressed in frequent mentions of the market economy as central to building security actorness, most frequently in combination with references to technology and innovation. The EUGS already refers to the importance of increasing "investment" for "better and shared assessments of internal and external threats" (EUGS 2016, p. 45). The SC names one of its four pillars "Invest", highlighting the importance of building military capabilities through technology and innovation, with the aim of strengthening the European defence industry and improving permeability between civilian and military research and development (EEAS 2022, p. 47):

> We need to invest more and better in capabilities and innovative technologies, fill strategic gaps and reduce technological and industrial dependencies. (EEAS 2022, p. 12)

Aside from direct reference to economic goals and incentives, documents apply concepts and terminology from neoliberal market discourse to make sense of security threats. While earlier documents tend to work with the classical notion of threat, the SC switches to centring the concept of "competition", invoking adversaries as "(strategic) competitors" and "zones of influence" (EEAS 2022, p. 14; see also p. 18). As issues from terrorism to vaccines, data, and technology standards to migration are seen as "instruments of political competition" (EEAS 2022, p. 14), these fields are conceptualised as sources of insecurity. Competition is, therefore, an important frame through which ever more fields are integrated into the security logic. This frame sustains narratives of masculinity and whiteness through allusion to market rationality (Garlick 2021). This happens on the one hand through the feminisation of non-European spaces as passive, empty, and agency-less objects of global power competition, such as the Indo-Pacific as "new centre of global competition" (EEAS 2022, p. 19), or:

> As key trade routes, stability in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa remain a major security imperative for the EU. At the same time, we see growing geopolitical competition in Africa, with an increased presence of both global and regional actors. Some of them do not hesitate to use irregular forces in zones of instability, thereby undermining international efforts towards peace and stability. (EEAS 2022, p. 19)

On the other hand, the de-racialised Self is constructed as linked to rational, depoliticised masculinity that occupies the neutral position of the knowledgeable and knowledge-producing subject:

> Innovation should be seen as a strategic tool to counter current threats and to anticipate both future risks and opportunities. Innovative technologies can bring new tools to help law enforcement and other security actors. Artificial intelligence and big data analytics could harness high-performance computing to offer better detection and quick, comprehensive analysis. A key precondition to develop reliable technologies is high quality data sets, available to the competent authorities to train, test and validate algorithms. (European Commission 2020, p. 25)

> This Strategic Compass sets out how we will act and be prepared to respond to various crises and challenges. It specifies how we should anticipate threats, secure our interests and protect our citizens. This in turn requires that we innovate and invest in technologically superior and interoperable defence capabilities and reduce technology and resource dependencies. In all these efforts, we must deepen partnerships where it serves EU values and interests. (EEAS 2022, p. 23)

In these quotes, Europe is not only associated with "high-performance" and "independence" but also depicted as the (colonial) epicentre of objective expertise, competition, innovation and progress. Under the guise of neutrality, science, and managerialism, these constructions sustain whiteness as superior to the less advanced Other (Axster *et al.* 2021). As an important source of EU security, they contribute to the legitimacy of potentially violent and harmful security practices.

5.3. Gender (equality) in European security

Gender equality is an important cornerstone of the EU's claim to normative power and also increasingly informs its ethos as a global security actor. Security strategies reflect to some extent the gender discourse in the EU's external relations, neighbourhood

policies, and various nation-/peace-building projects that relies on and deepens Self-Other-dichotomies and serves as a tool to maintain distance to non-/not-yet Europeans. Yet, the masculinised and (de)racialised construction of EU security that is the main narrative thread in the examined documents more firmly anchors gender discourse in masculinist protectionism – a narrative that foregrounds superiority of the protector on the basis of masculine authority and the feminisation of the protected as subordinate (Young 2003). The power that comes from the protector status is rendered unproblematic because it is linked to unquestioned, even progressive norms and values. In this sense, gender equality mostly serves as a link between the EU as a security actor and the value claims that constitute Europe as the beacon of democracy, human rights, and humanitarianism. This often reduces gender to an identity marker and item on longer lists of "soft issues':

> The EU needs to ensure a secure environment for everyone, whatever their racial or ethnic origin, religion, belief, gender, age or sexual orientation. (European Commission 2020, p. 2)

Slightly more detailed considerations of gender are found in references to mainstreaming and efforts to enhance women's representation in security institutions and operational forces:

> In addition, all efforts should be made to reinforce gender mainstreaming and strengthen women's participation in law enforcement. (European Commission 2020, p. 25)

> We will systematically mainstream a human rights and gender perspective in all civilian and military CSDP actions and increase the number of women in all functions, including leadership positions. By 2023, we will strengthen our network of human rights and gender advisers in our CSDP missions and operations. (EEAS 2022, p. 31)

These instances reflect instrumentalist views of gender equality as a means to another end, i.e. security, and equate gender with the presence of sexed bodies ("women"). This changes slightly with the SC, otherwise the most masculinised document, which features several stand-alone references to gender, a significant upgrade from the draft version of November 2021 (EEAS 2021) which only included a few rather shallow mentions. As such, the SC goes farthest in referring to the WPS framework and the need to include gender in conflict analysis:

> We are strongly committed to delivering on the EU objectives on women, peace and security. Tackling gender inequalities and gender-based violence is a critical aspect of the prevention and resolution of conflict as well as for building resilience to security threats at community level. EU external action, including civilian and military missions and operations, should actively contribute to empowering women and to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict setting, based on the rights and different needs of women, men and girls and boys. We will further promote gender equality and systematically mainstream a gender perspective, based on gender analysis, in all civilian and military CSDP planning and actions, focusing also on the equal and meaningful participation of women in all functions, including in leadership positions. (EEAS 2022, p. 28)

Even though gender is mentioned more substantially in the SC, serious engagement with the gendered causes and effects of war and conflict is missing, including the gendered consequences of what the strategy itself promotes, e.g. military build-up and hardened borders. The framing of gender issues fits rather than disrupts the overall masculinising

construction of EU security, largely discussing gender within the logics of "add women and stir" or "womenandchildren" (Enloe 1990) with a focus on women's passive status as victims of gender-based violence (Chappell and Guerrina 2020). This view is underscored by Othering along colonial non-/European dichotomies, specifically when foregrounding conflict-affected women as agency-less Other, or gender equality as something to be brought to non-European communities (Berlingozzi, this issue, Munisa, this issue). In this sense, masculine protectionism is linked to white supremacist humanitarianism (Pallister-Wilkins 2021) that sustains the superiority of Europe as enlightened and in the position to educate the Other about gender equality, while maintaining the importance of deterrence and control:

> We will significantly step up our humanitarian efforts in these countries, focusing on education, women and children. Together with countries of origin and transit, we will develop common and tailor-made approaches to migration featuring development, diplomacy, mobility, legal migration, border management, readmission and return. … We must stem irregular flows by making returns more effective as well as by ensuring regular channels for human mobility. (EEAS 2016, p. 27)

The increasingly colonial underpinnings and racialisation of the EU's security project are consequential for the way gender equality is perceived and addressed outside the confines of dedicated gender equality frameworks. Stereotypical representations of Other women and technocratic solutions with a focus on the number of women in missions are dominant in the examined documents, with intersectional perspectives and racial inequality, as well as issues of sexuality and gender identity, such as LGBTQ + rights, remaining silenced. Security strategies are thus falling behind less reductionist and more intersectional understandings of gender in other areas of external relations, even if the progress towards intersectionality is modest there as well (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018). The problem with the approach to gender in EU security is thus not only that it is insufficient and narrow, but that the EU's overarching goal of becoming a global security actor, a project built on masculinised and (de)racialised understandings of security and Europe is antagonistic to an emancipatory perspective. As EU security identity becomes more entangled with masculinity and whiteness, the concept and problematisations of gender can be expected to become narrower.

6. Conclusion: The gendered and racialised making of the EU as a security actor

Bringing together feminist scholarship on EU security and postcolonial critiques of the idea of Europe and the EU, this paper developed a Feminist EU Security Studies approach to explore what kind of security actor the EU is imagining itself to be and how this is linked to gendered, racialized and postcolonial forms of inequality and insecurity. Our framework expanded the conceptual and empirical scope of feminist research on EU security to meaning-making processes by which the EU constitutes itself as a legitimate security actor in the context of Europe's postcolonial legacies. We proposed that these processes – particularly recent attempts to become a "robust" global actor - are productive of colonial understandings of (in)security that draw upon and reproduce hierarchical, dualistic notions of Europe, deny agency and full humanity to non-Europeans, and at the same time invisibilise racial injustice. Thereby, postcolonial (dis-)continuities are reinscribed

into policy frameworks and EU institutions. This is part of why the EU as a security actor reproduces rather than alleviates intersectional inequalities, despite repeated commitments to gender equality in security and defence policy.

Our Feminist EU Security Studies approach reveals both the changes that the idea of "global Europe" has undergone in recent years, but also the continuities of the violent trajectories of colonialism and imperialism as the roots of this idea (Bhambra 2016). Generally, the EU's claim to security actorness is advertised on the basis of gendering and racialisation as intersectional processes of meaning-making and hierarchisation. Through interlinked notions of whiteness and masculinity as superior categories, security and what it means to be a relevant actor in this field are connected to and reproduce colonial understandings of Europe and "Europeanness'. After the decline of liberal world order and in the context of the EU's multiple crises, this self-representation is not only formulated against a (racialised) Other "before and outside of" Europe (Stern 2011), but also against the EU's own feminised past as a "soft power". While Othering has a long history in making the European Self, the notion of unprecedented threat and its increased racialisation as well as the rejection of the peace project image as feminised past leads to a more unapologetically colonial stance. Entanglements of whiteness and masculinity further provide the grounds for re-claiming leadership and the EU's proper status in the world on the basis of alleged superiority of European values and way of life. This superiority is underpinned by masculinity ideals based on technocratic professionalism and market rationality which are becoming important sources of security actorness.

While the links between gendered and racialised ideas of the EU as a security actor and concrete policies need to be further studied, our analysis indicates that these constructions affect the framing of security issues and the priorities set in strategies and policies, and particularly points to the limiting effect these constructions have on gender and non-discrimination race politics in the security realm. These limitations might not only curtail the potential of the EU as a global gender actor, but rather contribute to legitimising gendered and racialised inequalities, insecurities, and violence against those who are defined as non-European, seen as detrimental (e.g. migrants), or not relevant (e.g. conflict-affected women) to EUropean security. Thus, the ways in which gender, race and coloniality are inscribed in imaginations of the EU as a security actor likely have an impact on whether the EU's future crisis management is capable of mitigating gendered and racialised causes and effects of conflict, addressing the security needs of marginalised populations, and eliminating gendered and racialised violence – all capabilities that are desperately needed in the context of the current war in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

Notes

1. When using the term "EUrope", we are not equating EU and Europe but rather aim to explore the relationship and tension between them, while acknowledging that the EU does often conflate them (Mamadouh and Białasiewicz 2016).
2. We recognize that some parts of the world are indeed becoming more aggressive and authoritarian and some non-EU countries and organisations are equally guided by increasingly masculinised discourse and practices. Yet, rather than evaluating whether or not a more threat-based perception is justified, we are interested in whether and how gender and race are mobilised to make this perception intelligible.

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