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Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions: Problematising Current Responses

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Introduction

The concepts of agency and victimisation have been the subject of much debate within discussions of prostitution, where scholars have been divided on viewing it as exploitative work or sexual and gender-based violence.¹ Much of this literature has been developed in and through feminist and gender lenses, highlighting the causes and consequences of prostitution in relation to female subjectivity. Many scholars have expanded the analysis to include other intersecting factors and identities, including the way in which racism and classism lead to precarity for black and/or working-class women.² In addition, some scholars have argued that without a deeper consideration of the histories of colonialism and imperialism, prostitution debates can never be adequately discussed or resolved.³ Despite a rich plethora of theoretical and political writing on the subject more generally, little of the *diversity* of positions on the subject appears within the context of militarised places and spaces.⁴

This is surprising, considering that, for example, peacekeeping is one such context that has begun to receive more media and NGO attention in regard to reports of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).⁵ Importantly, the academic and policy-related literature on sexual violence, sex work, and SEA in militarised settings has been steadily growing in the past 15 years, especially as reports on sexual 'scandals' in peacekeeping missions have been gaining public exposure.⁶ Events reported have implicated peacekeepers in the maintenance of commercial sex industries,⁷ incidents of sexual violence,⁸ and numerous accounts of SEA, most notably those involving 'sex for food'.⁹

breadth of issues raised by these contributions, there has been little dialogue amongst different communities of scholars. Those providing gendered critiques of SEA or prostitution in militarised and peacekeeping contexts have rarely been in conversation with those writing on prostitution, trafficking, and sexual violence more generally, neglecting the specific and unique nature of militarised settings and the complex discussions on sex work and sexual violence more broadly.¹¹

The state of knowledge about SEA and related practices in peacekeeping missions remains somewhat patchy and problematic. NGO (and subsequent media) accounts have tended to highlight the suffering of those women and girls living in postconflict contexts and how SEA by peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel is evidence of opportunistic and unethical men in positions of power in contexts of extreme vulnerability and dependence on foreign aid and intervention.¹² These NGOs, such as Save the Children and Refugees International, have conducted studies and exposed serious cases of misconduct by peacekeepers and other humanitarian personnel in a number of missions including Haiti, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Bosnia in the last ten years. Yet, reports from these agencies have tended to focus mainly on a variety of incidents of SEA by foreign (and sometimes local) workers, rather than conventionally on the establishment and flourishing of commercial sex industries. Problematically, many of the cases outlined by NGOs and the media conflate a range of diverse practices from street prostitution to the kidnapping and rape of minors, making it difficult to distinguish exactly what forms of sexual 'misconduct' and sexual violence are taking place. For example, in Martin's compelling report for Refugees International, UN personnel and other humanitarian staff are noted to trade food in exchange for sex with women and young girls in refugee camps.¹³ However, the women's and girl's experiences are catalogued alongside those of women in other disadvantaged contexts, such as those who sell sex to foreign workers and businessmen in Port-au-Prince's wealthy streets, and clearly these practices need to be carefully distinguished and understood in a more complex and sensitive manner.¹⁴

Importantly, the majority of these reports frame women in postconflict regions as two-dimensional victims. The women are rarely, if ever, acknowledged to be agents who might be mistreated or exploited in regard to the poor conditions under which they are labouring. Instead, women and girls feature predominantly as essentialised victims, coerced by predatory and privileged humanitarian workers, including international civilian and military personnel. This is evident through the conflation of many different

the terms under which 'third world women' in postconflict contexts can be understood. In keeping with colonial perceptions of locals, women do not feature as independent subjects in their own right.¹⁵ As such, readings of SEA in peacekeeping missions are then also influenced by the historically dominant representations of women from the Global South as infantile, passive victims and local men as perpetrators.¹⁶

Because of the relative neglect of critical, academic engagement with the peacekeeping context (in respect of the multiplicity of exploitative practices), the dominant knowledge about gender relations in peacekeeping missions has tended to come from powerful sources such as the media.¹⁷ Rather exclusively the media's and other governmental organisations' approaches have been primarily concerned with gender relations between peacekeepers and local women focusing on the inherent power inequalities involved in these male-female encounters. This chapter argues that two important features which do not appear in any of the discussions to date should be considered in pushing a limited understanding and analysis of prostitution in peacekeeping contexts further. The first is that 'race' and colonial relations are central to peacekeeping relations more generally as well as to the context of prostitution. As such I agree with the critical peacekeeping literature which argues for understanding peacekeeping not simply as an organic, benevolent response to conflict but as a moral project¹⁸ and civilising mission.¹⁹ I suggest that this political backdrop needs to be accounted for in any analysis of sexual exploitation within peacekeeping contexts. Second, colonial and racial ideologies play a significant role in how the figure of the peacekeeping prostitute can be imagined. For example, is a woman in a post-conflict context always coerced into prostitution? Is she only ever and always a victim – both of war and geopolitics? Is there scope for viewing women in these contexts as sexual agents? And of what use or benefit would viewing them as such be?

Thus, I argue that peacekeeping and prostitution are politicised 'institutions' where the exercise of colonial power is evident and should be recognised alongside other types of power, including those based on gender and other differences. Although there are gendered and socioeconomic power imbalances between foreign men and local women in peacekeeping missions that need to be acknowledged, I argue that a tendency to focus exclusively on gender difference and the related issues of coercion and choice obscures the possibility of alternative and more complex understandings of sexual relations in postconflict settings and potentially leads to policies and programmes that undermine women's status and livelihoods.

In this chapter, I summarise the literature on prostitution and the military demonstrating that it is not only gender that needs to be included in any theoretical analyses but also the role of colonialism and the importance of geopolitics. Then, I provide a critical synopsis of two conceptual approaches to the subject of prostitution through the lens of colonialism. These two

approaches help in considering other axes of power in the peacekeeping environment – a militarised and masculine space which is also steeped in colonial ideologies. Finally, I provide a brief exploration of the ways in which the UN has responded to SEA in some documents pertaining to the suggested conduct of peacekeeping personnel. In particular, I focus on the way in which the UN has prioritised gender and socio-economic differences between international personnel and local people as the *main* causal factor of SEA. This, I argue, is at the expense of acknowledging 'race' and colonial relations between peacekeepers and local people. Consequently, I argue that the case of prostitution in peacekeeping missions through a critical postcolonial and 'race' lens provides an opportunity to look at the figure of the peacekeeping prostitute in a much more complex and nuanced way: as an agentic subject, who is likely to face considerable and multiple conditions of constraint. In complicating the discussions, I hope to rethink the primacy of any approach which prioritises gender as an exclusive and singular identity and provide openings for thinking anew about representations, prostitution, and agency in militarised settings such as peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping as a colonial project

Peacekeeping has for some time been under the spotlight by academic scholars who have argued that military intervention into 'humanitarian' crises is far from benign.²⁰ Paris has argued that peacekeeping can be understood as a civilising mission that works more in the service of the neoliberal order than the needs of conflict-affected populations, and as such has often contradictory and destabilising effects on war-affected states.²¹ Following on from this discussion, scholars such as Pugh have argued that studies of peacekeeping should account for the inequalities embedded within the global system in order to understand the ways in which contemporary peacekeeping practice contributes to conflict by upholding binary views of the west as essentially peaceful and those states named by the west as 'failed' as inherently conflictual.²² Similarly, Zanotti argues from a Foucauldian perspective that peacekeeping missions can be understood as systems of surveillance, where states named by imperial powers such as the UN as 'chaotic' are created and regulated through peacekeeping discourses themselves.²³

Feminist scholars have pushed the critical peacekeeping studies literature further by arguing for a consideration of the specificities of gender and 'race'.²⁴ Enloe advocates for looking closely at those living and working in peace support operations, suggesting that processes of militarisation have a significant impact on local populations.²⁵ Whitworth traces the ways in which masculinity has played out in the discourse of the UN and the practices of predominantly male peacekeepers in such contexts as Cambodia and Somalia.²⁶ And Razack pushes the analysis in a somewhat different direction,

through a socio-legal case study of Canadian peacekeepers' violence in Somalia she argues that colonial power was exercised in order to assert and reassert Canadian national identities.²⁷ By using the international image and reputation of the Canadian soldier as a quintessential peacekeeper, she reveals the masculinist and racist rhetoric permeating the Canadian-led mission to Somalia, which culminated in a young Somali teenager being tortured and murdered by those sent to maintain peace and protect citizens. Razack is keen to unravel the colonial desires embedded in the problematic language of helping and saving others. She attacks the very rhetoric used by peacekeepers themselves where they turn themselves into the primary victims of conflict because they have had to 'witness the evil'.²⁸ Her work is particularly relevant because she draws out the ways in which 'race' features in the relations between predominantly Western-controlled peacekeeping ventures and the host societies almost exclusively located in the Global South. In doing so she challenges the gendered critiques of peacekeeping for being short-sighted. She writes:

From Somalia to Bosnia, it is hard to find a peacekeeping venture that has not included incidents where peacekeepers tortured, raped and killed, as well as racially degraded the population they came to assist. The violence of peacekeepers has often been ignored... it is rare to find an acknowledgement that peacekeeping violence occurs, and rarer still to encounter explanations that pay attention to the racial features of the peacekeeping encounter.²⁹

Like Razack, I attempt to make some of the racial features and colonial power relations of the peacekeeping encounter more visible. I do so in order to expose the problems of approaches to SEA in peacekeeping missions that focus heavily on gender differences between peacekeepers and local populations.

Prostitution and the military

Sexual practice is one of the sites of masculinity's – and femininity's – daily construction, but that construction is international. Tourists, colonial officials, international technocrats and businessmen, and soldiers have long been the internationalizers of sexualized masculinity.³⁰

Feminist scholars have been at the forefront of examining the links between

prowess and the objectification of women.³² For example, soldiers seek out camptown women in order to fulfil their gendered and militarised roles.³³

Enloe and others have shown how these practices are intimately connected with international politics.³⁴ Historically, these have ranged from sexual slavery in Japan, kidnapping and rape in Vietnam, and the establishment of commercialised sex industry in Korea and the Philippines located near several, large US military bases.³⁵ Importantly, most of these feminist IR scholars have been pioneers in acknowledging that gender analyses alone are not enough to understand sexual exchanges within the context of international politics. For example, work has included analysis of the role of military cultures in shaping masculine expectations of soldiers; the politics of 'race' in civilian-military relations in camptowns; the play of international relations and international governments in promoting or controlling military prostitution; and the economies created, sustained, and withered by the influx of military capital and personnel.³⁶ Enloe has challenged a natural link between male-dominated military sites and the establishment of different sex trades because military prostitution is a practice that is in the interests of both foreign militaries (and the governments of those militaries) and local businesses (and the governments of those businesses). Moon, following Enloe, argues that 'military prostitution is not simply a women's issue, sociological problem, or target of disease control, but a matter of international politics and national security'.³⁷ According to Moon, military prostitution in Korea was not just an unintended consequence of the establishment of foreign militaries – instead both the US and Korean governments had common interests in maintaining prostitution and ultimately controlling Korean women's sexuality and bodies.³⁸

Following Moon, Cheng³⁹ and Yea⁴⁰ have examined military prostitution in Korea through women's own accounts. Both have written about the transformation of military prostitution in Korea since the 1970s which has resulted in a different group of women in the sex trade, not exclusively from rural villages in Korea, but from the Philippines and Russia. Cheng argues that with a decrease in the number of Korean women willing to serve American soldiers, 'third world' women were imported to relieve the shortage of entertainers.⁴¹ Cheng and Yea examine the testimonies of migrant women in the camptowns, trying to gain insight into their experiences of both victimisation and agency. Cheng's account reveals that commercial exchanges are not solely determined by men's ability to buy women. Instead, a narrative of 'a romantic parable of discovery' is deployed by soldiers, where 'the conquest of the U.S. American (white) explorer, who is rewarded with an alien and exoticized lover who is both submissive and devoted' becomes

'autonomous agents exercising control over their bodies and sexuality'.⁴³ Cheng argues that because of the ways in which women entertainers demonstrated a degree of agency in using specific narratives of romance in order to cope with the stigmatised form of work and to transform relations with soldiers, no singular definition of prostitution was utilised by women themselves.⁴⁴ This demonstrates that women working in prostitution may label the work they are performing in different ways – some may view it as violent and exploitative, while others may view it as a legitimate, but difficult, job. Similarly, Yea shows in her study of Filipina entertainers that their accounts of 'relationships, romance and sometimes even love have often been ignored in the burgeoning literature on sex tourism, militarized prostitution and trafficked entertainers'.⁴⁵ Yea argues that accounts which focus exclusively on victimisation have eclipsed a deeper understanding of women's experiences.

It is not surprising that scholars of prostitution have written mainly about relations between US and European, white soldiers and 'third world' women sex slaves and workers; however, few scholars have commented on the politics of 'race' or colonialism in their analyses. I argue that it is precisely within the power imbalances of the histories of colonialism and the economic and political power of the US and many European countries and militaries that such sex industries and relations are established and maintained. This is essential to keep in mind when considering the case of prostitution in peacekeeping missions. Is there something about peacekeeping that makes it different from other military sites? Enloe has argued that '[t]here is nothing inherent in international peacekeeping operations as currently structured that makes soldiers immune to the sort of sexism that has fuelled military prostitution in wartime and peacetime'.⁴⁶ However, the explicit critiques of peacekeeping as a colonial, civilising, and moral project suggest that any analysis needs to account for the politics of 'race' in understanding the figure of the third world prostitute and her appearance in accounts of SEA by peacekeepers in the contemporary period. Very few of the contentious debates on prostitution have drawn on coloniality or postcolonial theory to consider the politics of 'race' and imperial power.⁴⁷ In the next section, I draw on two scholarly accounts of prostitution through the lens of coloniality in order to rethink the topic of prostitution in peacekeeping environments.

Prostitution as colonial violence

For military men slated for combat, sex with prostituted women is the cap to the socialization process... This is sexual imperialism, worked out on the bodies of women selling their sexual labour.⁴⁸

Razack argues that prostitution should be understood as a form of colonial violence, rather than singularly as gendered violence or gendered work

because it is based on a racialised (and classed) ideology that demarcates those in any given society as 'respectable' sexual and moral beings. She argues that by excluding 'race' and class, scholars 'fail to consider the hierarchical relations among women and how the system of prostitution may benefit women who are not prostitutes'.⁴⁹ In doing so, Razack argues that prostitution works to determine the power relations between and among men and women, but through the intersection of capitalism and colonialism.

Razack outlines how the body of the prostitute has historically been figured as racially 'inferior' and often imaginatively linked with a descent into 'blackness'.⁵⁰ She challenges the idea that prostitution can ever be a legitimate form of work because, she argues, racialised women are always already seen to be sexually suspect – they are seen to 'naturally' inhabit the space of prostitution.⁵¹ She writes, 'racialized bodies can seldom leave the space of prostitution in the white imagination; it is a space worn on the body'.⁵² In this way, it is not possible for racialised women to subvert sexual expectations by embracing prostitution – rather an adoption of sex work can be read as conforming to the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism.⁵³ Importantly, she stipulates, this division sets up a problematic polarisation where white women become 'bad' girls by entering prostitution and black women become 'good' girls by exiting prostitution. However, in her view this erases the 'specificities of the women whose bodies are used in prostitution and neither subversion disturbs the making of the bourgeois subject'.⁵⁴ Consequently, middle-class women have a stake in the racism and economic exploitation of poor black women in that they are able to remain socially and politically 'respectable'.

Thus, when mapping Razack's theory of prostitution as a form of colonial violence onto the peacekeeping context, some compelling parallels can be drawn. For example, it could be argued that through global inequalities, local women in peacekeeping missions (the majority of which are located in the Global South) are always already viewed in a racially inferior and sexually suspect manner and thus cannot take up a position as agentic subjects. Instead, their engagement in prostitution is always embedded within the structuring relations of patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism. This is especially the case when peacekeeping is itself understood as a form of colonial practice, and peacekeepers themselves figured as agents of a civilising mission. In such respects, any sexual involvement with local women would necessarily be mediated by colonial power.

Razack's account of prostitution as a form of colonial violence is a compelling one – a perspective that could easily be incorporated into recent responses to accounts of SEA in peacekeeping missions.⁵⁵ However, Razack's account provides little insight into the micropolitics of the gendered or colonial encounter. Is the local woman always already a victim because of the inescapability of colonial scripts? Is her victimhood just made intelligible by multiplying the types of oppression she is subject to?

Colonial legacies of representation

They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.⁵⁶

Similar to Razack, Doezenia begins with a detailed examination of the historical legacies of colonialism, but, in particular, on the representations of 'third world' prostitutes. Doezenia's research demonstrates that the construction of third world women prostitutes as in need of rescue has long been a feature of colonial discourse and that such accounts are still evident in contemporary trafficking anxieties.⁵⁷ In particular, Doezenia argues that the discourses (both historical and contemporary) provide insights into the construction of white feminine bourgeois identities. She writes that the 'modern concerns with prostitution and "trafficking in women" have a historical precedent in the anti-white-slavery campaigns that occurred at the turn of the century'.⁵⁸ The history of what Doezenia calls a moral panic over a white slave trade reveals more about the fears and anxieties of nationalism, migration, and women's emancipation than they do of the well-being of third world women.⁵⁹ Contemporary discussions utilise many of the same tropes and images as nineteenth-century reformers, argues Doezenia, constructing the 'other' as in need of saving and the white Western woman as the ideal rescuer. Historically, the prostitute victim was constructed as virginal, white, and unwilling to be a prostitute. This was because it was, according to Doezenia, inconceivable that white women could enter into sexual relations with foreign men of their own free will and that coercion must have been exercised on these vulnerable women. Current trafficking discourses are implicitly racist in their portrayals of third world women (and men) because they are represented as unable to act as agents or make uncoerced decisions to work as prostitutes – hence they are seen as sex slaves.⁶⁰ As such, the portrayal of third world prostitutes as victims is founded on an understanding of prostitution as (localised) gendered violence.

Doezenia argues that the fears and anxieties exhibited by nineteenth-century campaigners were essentially fears of women's free movement and growing independence and transgressing boundaries of 'respectability'.⁶¹ The fears of women transgressing these boundaries were a foil to keep women contained at home so that they could remain morally pure and maintain the family's and the nation's honour. Control over white women seemed to increase during times of colonial crises – demonstrating that sexual control was also invested in maintaining class and racial lines as much as it was gender.⁶²

Doezenia's critique of the representations of prostitution as steeped in colonial ideology is important for thinking about prostitution and peacekeeping. Returning back to the question of media and NGO accounts, I argue that it is impossible to read the accounts of sexual violence and sex work in peacekeeping missions without the colonial baggage that Doezenia

argues accompanies accounts of third world women's involvement with prostitution. How can the figure of the peacekeeping prostitute ever be read as agentic, with the burden of the colonial image of the third world woman as a victim in need of rescue?

UN discourse on prostitution

In this section, I outline the ways in which the UN has addressed issues of prostitution in peacekeeping through the development of policies on SEA. Although there are many interesting aspects to the varieties of language chosen to capture SEA in its broadest sense, prostitution is explicitly prohibited and consequently there are few official documents where the concepts of consent and choice are used. In this way, agency is already constructed and imagined as lying outside of prostitution in peacekeeping missions.

In 2004, following a number of media accounts of SEA in peacekeeping missions, the UN Secretary General commissioned an investigation into SEA in the Democratic Republic of Congo which led to the production of a document titled *The Secretary General's Bulletin (SGB)*, which demonstrated that the UN was taking a proactive approach to issues of sexual misconduct.⁶³ It was followed by a series of other documents which formalised the UN's disciplinary position *vis-à-vis* peacekeeping personnel and acts of sexual misconduct (including prostitution and sexual abuse). Importantly, in the development of these numerous documents, the UN did not explicitly prohibit sex for its peacekeeping staff. Essentially, the UN distinguished between 'ordinary' sexual relations and SEA by defining SEA as something that involves the exercise of power or the presence of power asymmetry, or unequal exchange. Following on from the Zeid report, there are three documents that are connected with the SGB of significant importance. These are the *UNDPKO Standard Operating Procedure: Public Information Activities on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*;⁶⁴ *Ten Rules: Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets*;⁶⁵ and a guide used by a number of UN departments and agencies titled *IASC Scenarios Covering Prohibited Acts of Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse for the Various Categories of United Nations Personnel*.⁶⁶ These documents not only set out the main tenants of the SGB (in a more digestible form) but also provide specific guidance in a variety of mediums/genres for peacekeeping personnel, respectively. For example, the *Standard Operating Procedure Document* summarises the key messages of the SGB by outlining what constitutes SEA:

- 1) sexual activity with children (under 18) regardless of national or local laws;
- 2) exchange of money, employment, goods services or assistance to beneficiaries of assistance for sex, including sexual favours or others form of

humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour. This means UN staff are prohibited from soliciting or engaging in prostitution.

3) The SGB strongly discourages (but does not prohibit) sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries of assistance, since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics, and undermine the credibility and integrity of the work of the United Nations.⁶⁷

There are a number of assumptions built into the above definitions that are important when considering how the agentic subject is marginalised or erased in the context of peace support operations. First, through the use of a specifically broad and formal language (for example, omitting controversial terms such as choice, coercion), the document limits the host populations and beneficiaries from being viewed as capable of 'equal' relationships with peacekeeping personnel. For example, in section 1, those beneficiary individuals who are under the age of 18 are categorised as incapable of being in a consensual or equal sexual relationship with peacekeepers because they are considered, by the UN, underage and therefore not in a position to give (legitimate) consent. Here there is no ambiguity – the circumstances of the relationship, the motivations, and intent of the actors involved are not relevant to the UN because the policy is guided by a standard age marker. Second, the UN implies that exchanges for sex (with beneficiaries – note there is no specific provision for SEA involving other UN personnel who are not considered locals) are inherently exploitative because the nature of the relationship is one of inequality. In this case, the focus is the context. The UN's underlying logic is elaborated on in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the above document:

Sexual relationships between UN peacekeeping personnel and beneficiaries of assistance are strongly discouraged because they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. UN peacekeeping personnel have money, food, and shelter whereas the local population is often very vulnerable and does not have easy access to these essentials... '[t]he focus is not on the individual or whether there is consent, but on the nature of the relationship.'⁶⁸

In this explanation, the terms of exchange are not relevant, but rather that a specific differential is *always* present and that a local is likely to be exploited by a practitioner. Note that within these explanations both the peacekeeper and the local person are not given specific gender attributions, and thus the guidelines are broadly inclusive of both men and women. On the one hand, this allows scope for including cases where female peacekeepers are exercising power over local men or women and on the other hand for including cases where male peacekeepers are exploiting local men. However, the document does go on to provide further explanation of the problems

with prostitution, and the general gendered aspects of SEA in peacekeeping contexts are revealed:

Prostitution is not a victimless crime, as it is an act of sexual exploitation which abuses a position of differential power for sexual purposes. Furthermore, prostitution in war-ravaged societies and in countries hosting a peacekeeping mission frequently involves extremely vulnerable women and children, including victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Those who have money to buy sex, have more power than those who sell their bodies to survive. When UN peacekeepers buy sex, they fuel the demand and trap people in the sex industry. Buyers of sex can walk away; sellers of sex rarely can.⁶⁹

Here, the UN does not provide any alternative view of sexual exchange – there is no mention of sex work or of a legitimate or illegitimate sex industry. In this way it is impossible to view any local woman involved in some form of sexual exchange as anything other than a victim. Furthermore, the power differential that is conveyed is partially based on gender and socio-economic differences; but, importantly geopolitics and 'race' do not feature in any of the documents. Thus, local women and children are more likely to be the ones in a 'vulnerable' position *vis-à-vis* peacekeepers, but this vulnerability is based on their 'lack' of social and economic development – specifically in their inability to find 'legitimate' forms of work or economic income and security. More importantly, the asymmetry of power is highlighted further by the fact that the [male] peacekeeper figures as the subject who most likely has agency and therefore choice to 'walk away'. In this way agency is connected with economic privilege and wealth and can be exercised in the form of consumption and exit. The peacekeeper has the power to choose to leave the situation because s/he is in a professional and economic position of privilege in the context of global relations. One positive interpretation of the UN's text here is that it places the responsibility for decision-making on the part of the peacekeeper, challenging stereotypes of male peacekeepers as beholden to some notion of biological necessity to have sex while posted to peacekeeping.⁷⁰

In outlining SEA, the UN states that asymmetrical power relations based on a context of socio-economic inequalities make for exploitative conditions. However, this is based on the idea that gender and sexual relations outside of this specific set of relations take place on even ground. It assumes that there is equality in some sets of gender relations and implicitly this is not the case in postconflict and peacekeeping contexts. This is further highlighted in some of the scenarios used in training and education programmes on SEA. For example, one of the scenarios reads:

Marie is a 30-year-old refugee whose desperate circumstances have forced her into prostitution. On Saturday night she was picked up by John, a

UNICEF staff member in a UN car, as he was driving back home after dinner. John took her home and paid her for sex. As prostitution is not illegal in the country where he is posted, he figured he was doing nothing wrong.⁷¹

But is economic asymmetry the only frame through which one can understand these encounters? Surely, gender is not the only axis of power to consider? Clearly, many peacekeepers are in positions of power when posted to peacekeeping missions. On average, European troops have more money than local people. Furthermore, as agents of an international governing body they represent a particular world view and are symbolically positioned as representatives of Western values. Clearly, the colonising gaze that peacekeeping institutions come with to postconflict countries has an especially powerful effect on the local population, especially in relation to stereotypes of different groups of peacekeepers and how they might be perceived to be more or less masculine.⁷² By taking account of the colonial nature of peacekeeping, it might also be possible to view other practices as equally exploitative, even if they do not obviously invoke a gendered analysis. For example, peacekeepers posted to many missions are often required to find their own accommodation and usually employ at least two individuals to work for them. These arrangements are mostly informal, without the use of written or even verbal contracts. Peacekeepers with their own accommodation usually hire domestic workers to clean and/or cook. Sometimes these workers are underage, and they work long and excessive hours within the domestic context, especially with peacekeeping staff who do not have fixed hours and who might be expected to work six days a week. Men employed as security guards for households also work long hours/shifts, guarding homes, equipment, and cars for night shifts exceeding 12 hours. While these examples are, of course, also gendered, it appears that the 'race' and colonial power relations at play here need further consideration. More importantly, it is possible to recognise exploitation in its multiplex form, but depriving those living in missions from being viewed as agentic subjects produces another set of representational abuses, which are considered in the last section.

Peacekeeping and prostitution: colonial projects meet?

Richard Holbrooke, a former US ambassador to the United Nations, once famously said that '[w]here peacekeepers go they attract prostitutes'.⁷³ His sentiments could be interpreted as suggesting a natural and causal link between the presence of peacekeepers and prostitutes. Despite the longstanding myth of militarised men and their 'need' for sex while on tours of duty, the historical accounts of prostitution in peacekeeping missions have done little to account for the subjective experiences of those engaging in sexual

exchanges. Recent writing on prostitution and peacekeeping has begun to open up debates on the role of agency.⁷⁴ To date, Cockburn and Hubic's chapter is the only account that explicitly solicits the views of those women working in the sex industry as to their experiences. Cockburn and Hubic found that what some sex workers wanted was for there to be fair trading conditions between peacekeepers and themselves, rather than to eliminate sexual exchange altogether.⁷⁵

This raises questions about the collective silence on issues to do with agency and the figure of the peacekeeping prostitute. Why, for example, have so few feminists been willing to view 'third world' prostitutes as capable of exercising agency? The reporting on sexual practices in peacekeeping missions generally presents prostitution as a form of violence against women and as having destabilising effects on the local population more generally.⁷⁶ Importantly, the accounts of sexual violence and exploitation coming from non-governmental organisations and media point to a *serious* imbalance in power relations between mostly male peacekeepers and local women in missions. However, an approach which extends the definition of prostitution as violence needs to be suitably scrutinised for its full value. Accounts which approach prostitution in peacekeeping as an ultimate form of patriarchal (and military) violence do not necessarily adequately account for the structuring role of 'race' and colonialism as violence against women marked as racially 'other'. Yes, the relationships between male peacekeepers and local women can be understood to exemplify and mirror inequalities between the sexes more generally; however, the mission itself brings with it a whole host of ideological practices that stem from a colonial world view. As such, the peacekeepers that come to inhabit mission spaces express colonial power in their everyday encounters with the local population. Like Razack, I argue that no matter what country they originate from, male peacekeepers are able to position themselves within colonial scripts and possibly enact a colonial violence on local and migrant women in their consumption of the 'exotic other' in 'adventurous' and 'treacherous' terrains.⁷⁷ As Razack writes, historically 'prostitution, like imperial conquest, was the site of ambivalence, fear and the systematic enactment of what it meant to be white, bourgeois, and male'.⁷⁸ The peacekeeping context is one in which power relations are inscribed on the landscape and the bodies inhabiting such militarised spaces.

While one reading of peacekeeping missions is that they are another space within which to enact colonial violence and fantasy, another reading is that these spaces are also sites of contestation and resistance, much of which does not get transmitted in the problematic portrayals of the postconflict victim (read as female).⁷⁹ Rather, the view of peacekeeping missions and the gender relations within tends to reinforce stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, as well as 'third world' cultures. In these accounts, all local women become passive and desperate victims of foreign military men, and all male peacekeepers become abusers, exploiters, and sexual predators. There are

many problems with these representations and the ways in which international audiences come to understand the sexual practices of local women and foreign men in peacekeeping missions. First, the dominant accounts of sexual relations and prostitution polarises women as passive victims with little or no agency and men as perpetrators of patriarchal and sexual violences. The problem with this form of representation (even if it is reflecting a necessary political perspective) is that it essentialises men and women's identities and social practices, preventing an analysis of peacekeeping missions as sites of gendered contestation, negotiation, resistance, and even collusion. Are women always victims of male peacekeepers? The UN documents suggest there is no other way to understand these gendered and racialised interactions. Third, these constructions are not only based upon oppositional gender categories. 'Race' and the legacies of colonialism play a significant role in the image of local women in the eyes of mostly male peacekeepers. This is especially true in Asia and Africa where longstanding colonial imagery and stereotypes are still introduced in order to justify the 'different' sexual behaviours of other women.⁸⁰

A critical approach needs to recognise and account for the ways in which 'third world women' have been sexually used and abused by colonising powers in order to preserve the purity of white Western women.⁸¹ Local women in many missions are constructed as lacking agency, especially because they have been victims of previous conflict and war,⁸² and there is an implicit contrast to Western women, who are also monolithically portrayed, as sexually liberated, rather than enslaved. Whatever the theoretical perspective used to understand their positionality, it is impossible to read them outside of these colonial discourses. The colonial baggage attached to these contexts makes it difficult to understand women's involvement in selling sexual services without the stereotypical portrayals and longstanding cultural images influencing the reading. However, the scenario painted of missions does not allow space for doing this. For example, is it possible for local women and male peacekeepers to be in relationships of mutuality or even of love? Or do the differential power positions always result in women's disempowerment?

More worryingly, the notion of local women as victims, and especially as prostitution victims, ironically justifies a continued need for a peacekeeping presence. And even more problematically, after the male peacekeepers are named and shamed as the perpetrators, Western feminist organisations skilled in dealing with trafficking become the new rescuers.

Finally, the overwhelming images of victim and perpetrator are embedded within a further problematic. The peacekeeping mission is a distinctive social site, different from traditional military bases. The work of peacekeeping missions differs significantly as its focus is generally on establishing and maintaining peace (however problematic the means of achieving and maintaining it). As such, peacekeepers have traditionally been represented as humanitarian workers, rather than as pure warriors.⁸³ Despite

this overwhelming image, peacekeepers are trained in conventional military ways. And their warrior training has been invoked in responses to accounts of peacekeepers behaving 'badly'. Consequently, the contradictory discourses which condemn and simultaneously justify the behaviour of peacekeepers suggest that the international community often views the essentialised identities of local women and military men in much the same way as the media and other popular forms of representation. Will first-world boys only be first-world boys?

Conclusion

Our complicity is our freedom from the violence.⁸⁴

This chapter briefly outlines the ways in which prostitution has featured in military settings and the ways it can be understood within the colonialist space of the peacekeeping mission. The chapter proposes that peace missions have not been examined in sufficient detail and that they provide an opportunity for thinking through some of the colonial remains in feminist analyses of third world women and prostitution. The main problems with the conceptualisation of prostitution and peacekeeping are that there is a lack of diversity of perspective, a non-sensitivity to colonial legacies, and very little empirical evidence from women making a living in missions.

As such, it is not just a matter of women's equality but a gender issue interconnected with global orders, new and old imperialisms, militarisation, and often a politics of 'race'. This chapter examines the ways in which the peacekeeping prostitute is inscribed into colonial discourses as the 'victimised' woman. What I argue is that despite ongoing debates amongst feminists on whether prostitution can be conceptualised as work or violence, the activities of women in mission sites has uncritically fallen into the latter of these two sides. Why is it that women who are involved in relationships with male peacekeepers are not able to be categorised as partners, lovers, or wives – at least in some circumstances? Instead, they remain representational victims of patriarchy and, less visibly, colonialism. Is it not possible that third world women act within conditions of constraint to maximise their autonomy and agency within these environments, just as their counterparts do in the global North? Is it not Western-centric to assume that only Western women can wilfully be in love and be involved in consensual sexual and romantic relationships?

On the other hand, it is clear that it is not just gender relations that need to be considered in attempting to understand prostitution in peacekeeping missions. Rather, the cultural, ethnic, national, and 'racial' perspective of peacekeeping more generally informs the types of power relations that are operationalised in missions. As such, anyone attempting to transform the

situation of prostitutes or peacekeepers must consider very carefully the role of colonialism in determining relationships and representations.

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9

Does the Body Make a Difference?

Anne Phillips

A number of the essays in this book take issue with the way a binary of *either agency or coercion* misframes the issues, encouraging us to think that one must be either a free agent or coerced and failing to recognise their mutual coexistence. This thought provides the background assumption to my chapter. Agency, in the sense of capacity to act and reflect, is a feature of pretty much anyone not bound and gagged and delivers too minimal a notion of what it is to exercise choice. Faced with repeated jibes about women being more passive, more submissive, less capable of acting and taking initiatives than men, we have spent too much time seeking out evidence of activity in order to substantiate our claims to equality. We should not, however, still be debating who has agency, for anyone not in a coma has this. The more taxing questions relate to what counts as coercion, and at what point the social pressures we can none of us escape turn into unacceptable coercion. Social relationships always involve pressure: they will always predispose us towards certain actions and away from others, and often actively push us in particular directions. Much of what we count as the exercise of (both individual and collective) agency is dealing with these pressures, working out at what point persuasion is turning into pressure, pressure into coercion, and coercion into something we need to resist. The aspect of this that concerns me here is what difference, if any, the body makes.

In one sense, the body is crucial, marking a clear boundary line between acceptable pressure and unacceptable coercion. For many people, we enter the realm of unacceptable coercion precisely at that point where we are subjected to the threat or reality of physical violence. Anything we 'agree' to under such circumstances cannot be counted as our own decision. We do not, on the whole, think the kidnapped person who manages to escape from her captor is morally bound to pay the sum she had agreed as a ransom; nor that the person who participates in a marriage ceremony because she has been told she will otherwise be killed is thereby committed to making the relationship work. Here, the very physicality of the pressure exerted makes it all too evident that this is coercion.