



**Peacekeepers as New Men?
Security and Masculinity in the United Nations
Mission in Liberia**

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Abstract:

Drawing on a small scale qualitative study of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), this paper provides an insight into the ways in which those who work and live in this post-conflict site made sense of the styles of security provided by male peacekeepers. Interview material was subject to analyses through the gendered lens in ways that sought to examine the extent to which male peacekeepers were seen as derivatives of the 'New Man' on account of their dominant representation as 'soft warrior' in UN and other imagery. A three stage typology was developed from the data including the 'hard (traditional) warrior', the 'soft warrior/humanitarian' and the 'peacekeeper as New Man'. Our findings suggested that national contingent identity shaped participant understandings of the gendered styles of peacekeepers security practices to which they were subject. Here, Nigerian troops of the previous ECOMOG presence were seen as 'hard men', Bangladeshi troops were considered as somewhat 'weak' or 'soft' and Swedish and Irish contingent personnel were framed as 'fair' and 'professional'. In conclusion we argue that different styles of peacekeeping articulated at a national level find expression 'on-the-ground', as they converge with national stereotypes held by participants. In this way perceptions of national identity arose at the interface of (1) national-domestic approaches to peacekeeping (2) observable security practice and (3) imaginings of particular peacekeeper masculinities. In turn these gave rise to the content and form of national stereotypes through which male peacekeepers masculinised identities were perceived to shape the provision of a variety of securities.

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Introduction

In 1993 Cynthia Enloe asked the question: ‘Are peacekeepers real men?’ (Enloe, 1993). This provocative question continues to evoke discussion about the masculinity of the blue-bereted humanitarian warrior or ‘peace soldier’ (Moskos, 1976). For example, scholars have been concerned with the extreme military masculinities of peacekeepers responsible for murder in Somalia (Whitworth, 2004), and sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone (Higate, 2004, 2007). In all these cases, the subordination of the ‘other’, whether it is local females or males, is seen to flow from an intersection of masculinity, nationality and neo-colonialism framed by stark power differentials (Razack, 2004). Although it is clear that these kinds of activities can have tragic results for members of the host population as well as create insecurity, high-profile instances of violence and exploitation should be seen within the context of the overall security provided by peacekeepers. In this way, peacekeepers’ impact on host populations is uneven and contradictory. At times they provide reassurance, allay anxiety and assist countries in the transition to peace whilst at other moments they may exacerbate the insecurities of those disproportionately affected by conflict, such as girls and women. Yet, the range of securities to which peacekeepers give rise tends to have been overlooked as, justifiably, scholars have remained sensitive to ongoing social problems in Peace Support Operations (PSOs). Given this, our aim in the current article is to try and highlight how those who live in a particular PSO differentiate between the numerous ‘styles’ of peacekeeping security practice in ways that speak to diversity, rather than a crude binary of ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ security; here our questions turned on gendered perceptions of peacekeepers. Were these men seen as ‘traditional soldiers’, humanitarian ‘new men’,¹ or a mix of both when looked at through their security practices? The rationale for this research was to broaden and deepen empirical understandings about how peacekeepers are perceived in their security work from the perspective of those who work and live in a particular PSO. In this way, we hoped to contribute to wider literatures including security studies, the critical peacekeeping and the peacekeeper/masculinities literatures through drawing out relational and gendered dimensions of security. In sum, this article seeks to recast Enloe’s opening question, from whether or not peacekeepers can be considered ‘real’ men, to the ‘kinds of men peacekeepers are perceived to be’ by those they are sent to secure. In so doing, this investigation demonstrates how the concept of masculinities can be used as a lens through which to interpret the sentiments of those who witness the everyday security practices of the hybridised soldier-humanitarian.

Structure of article

The following section provides a number of contextual observations around the rise of the humanitarian warrior in regard to his ‘empathetic’ masculinity. Thus, set against the canvas of broad social and cultural change there has emerged a form of peacekeeper masculinity that might be argued to resonate with a number of feminine qualities; somewhat ironically these inhere within a reassuring masculinised figure. Next, we discuss details of the study alongside the method employed to generate qualitative material from a diverse sample of those who

¹ Our use of the concept ‘new man’ should be seen as heuristic rather than literal given the critique levelled against it by numerous scholars.

work and live in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). This is followed by a brief sketch of the Liberian fieldwork site, with a particular focus on the numerous peacekeeping operations conducted here over the last decade and a half. The study findings are organised around four national peacekeeping contingents: the Nigerians, the Bangladeshis, the Irish and the Swedes. Here, illustrative narrative accounts provide a sense of the different perceptions to which their security performances gave rise. We then turn our attention to possible explanations for these perceptions by invoking the recent history of the peacekeeping presence in Liberia, together with the broader stereotypes in circulation in this particular mission. Prior to the conclusion, we consider how stereotypical understandings of national identity may play an important role in the ways that peacekeeper identities are mediated in respondent accounts in regard to the security they provide.

The Genesis of the ‘Soft Warrior’

Enloe’s question arose within the very particular period of the early 1990s, a moment at which the figure of the traditional warrior became vulnerable to disruption by feminists, anti-militarists and those in the peace movement acting to realise the much vaunted ‘peace dividend’ of the early post Cold War years. Because the end of the Cold War gave rise to a series of so-called ‘new wars’ characterised by intra- rather than inter-state conflict (Kaldor, 1999), conventional military interventions proved increasingly ineffective or at least inappropriate. An exemplar was the peacekeeping debacle in Somalia that resulted in the US governments’ reluctance to contribute troops to subsequent UN operations (Burk, 1999). The changing nature of conflict together with the military’s attempts to establish a new discourse of legitimacy in the post-Cold War era led in turn to the broadening of potential soldierly roles - here emergence of the ‘new humanism’ framed military intervention in humanitarian terms (Chomsky, 1999). In this context, and pitched in opposition to the US more generally, Canada, as one of a number of nations, (re)presented itself and its military as the archetypal peacekeeping force (Razack, 2004). More importantly, the development of the humanitarian warrior drew on ideologies of both masculinity and femininity. As Enloe suggested:

The form of military force that is inspiring perhaps the greatest hope is the UN peacekeeping force. It inspires optimism because it seems to perform military duties without being militaristic. And its troops *at first glance* appear to escape the distorting dynamics of militarism because they may not depend so heavily on patriarchal masculinity. (Enloe, 1993:33; emphasis added)

These sentiments, drawing on and reinvigorating the imagery of the traditional and impartial peacekeeper over the previous 40 years, were crystallized in the symbolism of the phrase ‘blue helmets and white armor’ (Ben-Ari and Elron, 2001). The UN, and more particularly the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), whilst not consciously orchestrating their informal representational practices to resonate with the emerging gendered discourses of the post-traditional warrior, nevertheless tapped into the zeitgeist of the popular mood within which the UN was making its bid for ascendancy. More widely, the 1980s and 1990s paid witness to shifts in men’s popular representation through the influence of feminism, a growing men’s movement and an emerging commodification of masculinity from which the so-called new man emerged (Digby *et al*, 1998; Bordo, 1999; Pease, 2001; Adams and Savran, 2002). This new man appeared actively to embrace so-called feminine qualities together with the emotional labour that went with it. Images of men holding new born babies, doing housework or busy in the kitchen preparing the family meal became increasingly prominent in magazines, television advertisements and Hollywood films. This apparent blurring of historically discrete gender-representational domains was also noted in other spheres where, hitherto, traditional ideas of masculinity had remained largely fixed. Thus, set

within the context of an exponential growth in peacekeeping operations (MacQueen, 2006) broadly coinciding with the zenith of the new man in the early 1990s, was the increasingly prominent figure of the blue bereted peacekeeper. He and increasingly she² were frequently presented in ways that unsettled, or at least expanded, traditional understandings of what it was to be a soldier, through playing up the caring dimensions of peacekeeping work (Tronto, 2006). Though dominated by troops of the combat arms trained in the use of lethal violence (Betts-Fetherston, 1995), military members of peacekeeping forces were often pictured holding children aloft, providing humanitarian relief and generally ‘doing good’ around the world. These images are antithetical to the stereotypical hypermasculine warrior, where sensitivity, empathy, and compassion are often subordinated to displays of emotional control (Higate *et al*, 2003).

Potential shifts in the evolution of peacekeepers’ traditional military masculinities continues to be of interest to scholars. For example, a recent report for INSTRAW³ by Claire Duncanson has sought to identify the influence of PSOs on military masculine culture. Here, she highlights the emergence of key themes in formal British peacekeeping doctrine that resonate with the new man imagery, including those of sensitivity, negotiation and mediation in operations (Duncanson, 2006: 13 of 45). Arguably then, peacekeepers’ enhanced ability to communicate with a wide range of male and female citizens in post-conflict settings places them at the polar extreme of the grunting, emotionally cold Rambo figure who is invariably armed to the teeth and bent on destruction. As Horrocks writes about this iconic Hollywood soldier and veteran, ‘to become the man I was supposed to be I had to destroy my most vulnerable side, my sensitivity, my femininity, my creativity’ (Horrocks 1994: 25). Contemporary photographic representations of military peacekeepers on UN mission websites and publicity leaflets, through to the extensive bank of Getty Images used by the global media, convey these untraditional masculinised iconographies: peacekeepers more than ever are sold as the ‘good guys’.⁴

Yet, this narrative of the peacekeeper as new man has not gone unchallenged in the intervening years, as we suggested above. Set within the context of a stream of reports detailing male peacekeepers’ sexual exploitation and abuse of local women and girls, it would appear that the traditional soldier ‘within the peacekeeper’ has remained impervious to change (Higate, 2004a). Here, the abuse of financial, cultural and gender privilege provides one possible response to Enloe’s puzzle: if manliness is about exercising power over feminized others, then indeed, a significant number of peacekeepers continue to perform authentic ‘real’ or ‘macho’ man masculinity. Reports of exploitation have given rise to questions that signal the limits to the transformative potential of traditional soldierly identity within the context of peacekeeping masculinity:

Can we create a new soldier identity that is available to both women and men? A soldier who is seen as, is expected to be, and feels on the one hand assertive competent and courageous and on the other hand relational, responsive and caring? (Enloe, 1993: 35)

Dominant views of peacekeeper masculinity can be crudely summed up by the two extremes sketched here. On the one hand, peacekeepers continue to be informally represented as humanitarian warriors whose skills and attributes speak to shifts in hegemonic military

² Though it should be noted that female peacekeepers constitute a tiny proportion of the overall peacekeeping force.

³ United Nations International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

⁴ Getty Images is an on-line photographic resource used by the world’s media. The search term ‘peacekeeper’ will invariably produce numerous images of male peacekeepers framed in regard to an empathetic caring role.

masculinity where the caring dimension is played-up. On the other empirically informed dimensions, peacekeepers are akin to soldiers of old, frequenting brothels - or worse - in their exercise of gender power.⁵

Our concern is to develop a sense of balance in ways that can shine a light on the plurality of securities to which peacekeepers give rise in their everyday work. Ultimately, this contribution may help to neutralise the scholarly and practitioner stand-off between those who see military peacekeepers as somewhat negative in regard to their 'militarizing' effects (Whitworth, 2004) versus others who argue that 'peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers can do it' (DeGroot, 2001).

Study and Method

The line of enquiry pursued below coalesces around the key theme of security in direct relation to the presence of peacekeepers, as seen by those who work and live in a particular PSO. Here, we set out to capture the potential range of securities to which peacekeepers gave rise. This approach was operationalised through asking participants a series of open-ended questions intended to explore their perceptions of peacekeepers' security work. Participant accounts were then subject to gender-analytic readings sensitive to those traits, attributes or ideologies typically associated with the archetypal warrior, the caring humanitarian or an embodiment of both. Thus, physical toughness and military robustness would indicate the presence of a traditional soldierly identity in participant accounts, whereas reference to caring and sensitivity would signal the humanitarian dimension. Whilst this somewhat normative approach works well at the abstract level of ideal-types, it has been critiqued for amputating masculinity from its broader historical and cultural frames (Connell, 1995:70; MacInnes, 1998; Nagel, 1998:246). However, we attempt to situate our findings in their historical and cultural contexts in discussions below, in order to highlight the contingent effects of these influences on participant perception.

This work draws on qualitative data collected during two fieldwork trips to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2005 and 2006.⁶ The first trip took place during the early part of 2005, prior to the UN-backed elections and almost two years into the UN-led PSO. The second took place one year later, after Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as president in early 2006. Our ethnographic approach included observation of peacekeepers alongside informal, systematically applied, in-depth one-to-one and group interviews involving: 63 interviews with international UN military and civilian personnel; humanitarian workers from a variety of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); Liberian citizens who worked in hotels, schools, restaurants and shops as well as in religious organizations and local NGOs and political parties.

The vagaries of the post-conflict setting, in terms of logistical, language and cultural challenges militated against the design of a generalizable study; rather, we opted for a purposive, gender-sensitive, theoretical sampling approach (Arber, 1993). We attempted to generate a range of responses (hence the sample diversity) to the particular question of how individuals make sense of security in the presence of UNMIL peacekeepers. Interviews were transcribed either in-mission or soon after return from Liberia using the notes and quotes approach.⁷ Each of the three-member research team shared one-another's raw data to ensure rigour in coding leading to the development of three ideal-type categorizations of peacekeeper

⁵ See also Martin (2005).

⁶ This work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under their *New Security Challenges Programme*, grant number: RES-223-25-0061.

⁷ Though we had secured funds for professional transcribers, the notes and quotes approach provided us with greater intimacy with the data than would otherwise have been the case.

masculinity. The end result was a significant archive of empirical data that is currently being written-up in the form of a jointly authored volume and a number of journal articles.⁸

The remaining sections of the paper are divided into three parts. The first part includes a condensed overview of the conflict in Liberia, together with the regional and international peacekeeping interventions in the country. The second part details illustrative participant quotes from Liberia, alongside schematic reflections on how they might be interpreted in regard to our central research question. The final part provides a discussion of our findings.

Study Context: Liberia

The West African country of Liberia shares borders with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Founded by former American slaves who came to be known as 'Americo-Liberians' in 1847, this country has witnessed two civil wars in rapid succession, broadly coinciding with the end of the Cold War—the First Liberian Civil War (1989–96) and the Second Liberian Civil War (1999–2003). The causes of the conflicts are complex and contested.⁹ Suffice it to say that the conflict involved a web of political, economic and socio-cultural hierarchies that were intersected and facilitated by ethnic, tribal, religious and geographical identities. In sum, Americo-Liberians assumed the position of power and privilege in Liberia, leading to a dualistic state system that legitimated minority rule and the oppression of the majority indigenous people for over a century. For these reasons, the 1980 coup that brought Samuel Doe to power was welcomed by many Liberians, who saw it as the overthrow of the ruling elite. This internal nexus of power and privilege reverberated beyond Liberia's borders and civil wars repeatedly ignited conflagrations in neighbouring states. The decision to intervene in Liberia proved contentious and centred on whether it ought to be a regional (ECOWAS¹⁰-led) or an international (UN-led) endeavour. The decision was ultimately informed by the unwillingness of the latter to get involved in the conflict, and the fears of the former for regional security. From the beginning of the first civil war, ECOWAS undertook various initiatives aimed at attaining a peace settlement in Liberia. In 1990, led by Nigeria, it sponsored peace negotiations and deployed ECOMOG,¹¹ which initially comprised approximately 4,000 troops (though numbers later increased to 16,000) from The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. As well as contributing the great majority of both troops and funding, Nigeria dominated the high command of ECOMOG, [which was described as authoritarian in Liberia did not cease. Doesn't make sense?] From 1990 to 1997, twelve separate peace settlements among the warring parties were negotiated, but each of them failed to materialize. Charles Taylor was inaugurated as president in August 1997. By July 2003 the situation in Liberia had deteriorated once again. Fighting between government forces and various warring factions intensified and a humanitarian tragedy threatened. On 1 August 2003 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1497,¹² authorizing the establishment of a multinational force in Liberia. Soon after, the UN deployed a peacekeeping force of 15 000 troops from 49 countries including Ireland, Sweden, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, China, Ukraine, Philippines, Nepal and Ethiopia to operate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

⁸ These include a book entitled *Insecure Spaces: Peacekeeping in Kosovo, Haiti and Liberia* (London: Zed Press, forthcoming, 2008), and three articles in progress entitled: 'Thoughts on the UN Habitus'; 'From the Everyday to the Geopolitical: Space and Security in Liberia', and 'The Price of Security'.

⁹ For more detailed accounts of Liberian civil wars, see: Ellis, 1999; Ero, 1999; Reno, 1999; Youboty, 2004; Richards, 2005.

¹⁰ The Economic Community of West African States.

¹¹ The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

¹² It is important to note that this was a 'Chapter VII' mandate permitting more vigorous peace enforcement engagement if necessary.

Study Findings

Overall, our sample considered UNMIL successful in bringing peace and stability to Liberia. Participants demonstrated an acute sensitivity to the differences between national peacekeeping contingents and saw their country of origin as the key explanation for the ways they carried out security work. The following section illustrates participant opinions in relation to Nigerian, Bangladeshi, Swedish and Irish peacekeepers. Comments about these particular peacekeepers reflect the geographical spread of the fieldwork that concentrated its efforts in the sector sites to which these contingents were deployed. While other peacekeepers may have made similar (or different) impressions on the local populations, we use these four groups as illustrative of the connections between perceptions of security and ideas about peacekeepers and their national(ised) masculinities.

ECOMOG and Nigerian Troops: The 'Hard' Men of Peacekeeping

While the Nigerian-led ECOMOG intervention was initially welcomed by a large segment of the population, this response has given way to growing apathy and suspicion among a number of Liberians. Nevertheless, participants tended to see the newly blue-hatted Nigerians in a nostalgic light; this BBC report encapsulates the general feelings of the sample in regard to the fighting proficiency of the Nigerians:

The Nigerians were the hard men of the ECOMOG force. On checkpoint duty they were considered rude and arrogant, but when there was fighting to be done they were usually the ones who did it, even if they were not too fussy about the finer points of their peace-keeping mandate.¹³

Because Nigerian peacekeepers were among the first to arrive in Liberia in 2003 they were often hailed as 'heroes' for helping bring an end to the conflict. However, they were also viewed in contrast as aggressive, unpredictable and often corrupt. In participants' accounts, Nigerian peacekeepers were consistently portrayed as more 'muscular' than others, and seen to epitomize a specific image of the 'hard' peacekeeper. For some of our participants, the presence of Nigerian peacekeepers wearing blue helmets was a source of security, precisely because they were seen as being strong, capable and manly. Repeatedly, participants in Monrovia suggested that the 'Nigerians were feared and respected' and it was suggested that they continue to 'set the standard' against which the current PSO troops are judged. A male Liberian taxi driver said: 'We had the Nigerians here with ECOMOG. Our historical perception of them convinces people that they are more robust and more active.' Another Liberian male employed as a private security guard suggested that people continued to feel unsafe and wondered whether current peacekeepers would be as willing to protect Liberians as well as the now departed Nigerian troops. The theme of respect was echoed by a local Liberian male working in an advocacy organization in Monrovia:

In a serious ex-combatant episode, you would prefer to have the Nigerians intervene. The ex-combatants have a great respect for Nigerians. We look at them as no-nonsense, good fighters.

Similarly, a European female NGO worker, revealing her thoughts on who was most likely to evoke confidence and 'get the job done', said that 'we have a contingent of Nigerian police here who people feel much more confident about. The Nigerians are better known for rushing in, firing first, and asking questions later.'

¹³ BBC, 'The Perils of Liberian Peacekeeping', 4 Aug 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3113009.stm>, accessed 17 Dec 2007.

For some Liberians, the idea that Nigerians could be both peacekeepers and soldiers was problematic, because as one young male resident of Monrovia put it, ‘they don’t handle you “like a peacekeeper” - they have handled people very badly’. Participants talked openly about how Nigerian peacekeepers continued to be linked to organized gangs, the drugs trade and crime in Liberia. For example a Liberian male university student argued that:

The Nigerians harbour criminals, they are involved in criminal activities. At night they give arms to gangs and carry out robberies. Last night at eight o’clock there was an armed robbery, they tried calling the Nigerian peacekeepers but they waited until after the robbery had been accomplished to come.

There was also a certain anxiety about the approaches adopted by the Nigerian contingent. One Liberian female NGO worker suggested that ‘the only contingent that the Liberians are really afraid of is the Nigerians. When the Nigerians arrive, everyone starts to panic’. There was a general acceptance amongst our broad sample that Nigerians provided a particular kind of gendered security in ways that centred on a muscular military masculinity, although it was not only Africanness that was noted to intersect with masculinity. In this way, notions of professionalism, authority and competence were also woven into accounts, albeit in a more peripheral manner than that of warrior masculinity. Responses from the sample turned on the idea that Nigerian troops had improved from aggressive, ill-disciplined fighters to more proficient and controlled troops. This is summed up by a journalist writing in the *International Herald Tribune* whose views mirrored many of those we interviewed. He argues that unlike earlier operations of the 1990s, those conducted in 2003 showed marked improvement:

The Nigerian and other West African peacekeepers appear omnipresent. This time they seem disciplined, effective and well trained—unlike the soldiers in a badly conceived and badly led peacekeeping operation sent in 1995 and 1996 by Nigeria's military government. Its troops were brought ignominiously home, 1,000 of them in body bags, after earning an appalling reputation as rapists, looters and brutalizers. Today observers including the UN chief representative, the US ambassador and American officers on the ground speak highly of the Nigerian troops’ proficiency.¹⁴

These illustrative quotes and journalistic observations point to a particular framing of the Nigerian peacekeepers that stresses the warrior dimensions of peacekeeper masculinity, rather than those that resonate more obviously with the caring humanitarian. Next we turn to a brief consideration of troops from Bangladesh, one of the numerous South Asian contingents. What kinds of men were these peacekeepers seen to be when framed through the lens of their security work?

Bangladeshi Troops: the ‘Soft’ Men of Peacekeeping

Bangladesh, alongside India and Pakistan, is a major troop-contributing country to UN peacekeeping missions. Indeed, much like Canada, these countries cast the involvement of their troops in peacekeeping operations in ambassadorial terms, and more generally as a way of raising the profile of their countries and militaries with the international community. In line with this approach towards such operations, Bangladeshi battalions worked hard to ensure that they were highly visible amongst the local community. As members of UNMIL they operated within the context of the mission’s Chapter VII mandate where the potential for

¹⁴ See *International Herald Tribune*, ‘Peacekeeping and Diplomacy. Why Liberia is a Turning Point for Africa’. http://www.iht.com/articles/2003/09/05/edpower_ed3_.php, accessed 17 Dec 07.

more traditional soldiering was permitted in line with the strategy of peace enforcement. In spite of this, they tended to be framed as ‘humanitarians’ rather than ‘warriors’ by participants. If the Nigerian contingents of UNMIL were seen as ‘hard’ men, the contingents from South Asia - and in particular the Bangladeshis - were often imagined in equally problematic and contradictory ways in regard to their security performances. Sometimes seen as ‘soft’ men, peacekeepers from Bangladesh were constructed as ‘weak’ because it was believed by a number of participants that they were unable to command respect and exercise authority. Yet in the eyes of others, they were constructed as hard-working, polite and generous; many viewed their presence as reassuring. As a Liberian male university student in Monrovia argued, ‘unlike the Nigerians, the Bangladeshis are much better, because for them peacekeeping rules are very important, they guard you’. Yet, while contingents from South Asia are trained in much the same way as other national militaries, they were consistently represented as less ‘robust’ soldiers in comparison to Nigerian peacekeepers. Here, they lacked the military legitimacy of the Nigerians because it was argued that they failed to demonstrate characteristics associated with a particular type of ‘hard’ peacekeeper embodying martial qualities, including physical prowess and confidence, together with a willingness to get ‘stuck in’. For example, a Liberian male working for an NGO in Monrovia suggested that the Bangladeshis were seen as ‘essentially different from Nigerians and Africans’. He argued that ‘the combatants would fear the Nigerians most, unlike the Bangladeshis or Pakistanis who might wave a peace flag’. A Liberian female working for a local organization in the Liberian ‘hinterland’ relayed an incident at one of the internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camps in which ‘the Bangladeshis got injured’, and where she believed that the ‘Nigerians bailed them out’. Another incident, conveyed by a foreign female worker for an international NGO, painted a similar picture. She believed that ‘people are frightened of the Nigerians but they are not frightened of the Bangladeshis’. She elaborated:

I was in the field last week and we went with a Bangladeshi patrol. We took an engineer from the Bangladeshi battalion to do an assessment. At this crossing point the bridge was completely broken. There were some local youths trying to make a bridge. Some were ex-combatants and they were pushing cars through and asking people to compensate them, somebody refused to pay and they started fighting. There was a big group with sticks and everyone was rolling around in the mud with cutlasses. It was very fast to erupt. I was there with a patrol car of Bangladeshis, including one officer who was armed. There was another Bangladeshi officer and a soldier standing there watching. They ought to be stopping this happening! I had to go to him and say, “Where are your men?” You could really see that there was no respect for the Bangladeshis from the ex-combatants. It is less likely that this would happen if we had been with Nigerians.

Another international NGO worker summarized the incident by saying that ‘people are laughing about that. You can’t imagine them laughing about it with a different contingent’. She went on to argue that in her county:

Local people don’t respect them. The ex-combatants don’t respect them, and those who are not ex-combatants don’t trust that they have enough clout. They are not strong enough, not strong enough.

The ‘consultative’ rather than strictly ‘military’ approach was seen to have significant limitations. Ultimately, however, this female Liberian NGO worker believed that the Bangladeshi contingents could be relied on:

There is a Bangladeshi Commander who calls me regularly for advice, which is fine. It's good to be consulted, but sometimes you would like to know that he knew what to do! People think that the Bangladeshis have a very softly, softly approach, but I am confident that if it comes to real implementation of a Chapter VII mandate they will take that on board. They now have signs on the Bangladeshi base that say "Do not trespass or you will be fired."¹⁵

Yet, in contrast to Nigerian troops of the ECOMOG force, others of the sample viewed the Bangladeshi contingents as quintessentially humanitarian in their work with local people. A Monrovia-based Liberian female suggested that:

The Bangladeshis have done exceptionally well. They forfeited one day's food per week to give the local population a sense of security. They've opened a clinic that provides health services and they provided over 350 soccer balls to the villages where young people are. Young people can play and there is a sense of fullness - that is security!

She went on to discuss how members of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani contingents interacted with local people, together with how they broke down the social barriers between themselves and members of the host community:

I have personally interacted with the Bangladeshi and the Pakistani forces and I think they are among the best I have seen. They are polite and organised and they do engage with the local community. There is a Pakistani Colonel who moves around without a bodyguard and who builds rapport with local people. The local people wrote a letter to the government of Pakistan to get them to extend their stay by three months. The Pakistanis follow the principles of peacekeeping directly.

On one occasion a member of our research team witnessed a four-man patrol of Bangladeshis driving slowly through villages throwing sweets to local children from the back of their UN four-wheel-drive vehicles. The children heralded this encounter with smiles and cheering, as they ran alongside the vehicles, scrambling for sweets and cheering 'Banga! Banga!' On another field trip, two members of the research team who have South Asian heritage were greeted by small children with a begging gesture. Children put their fingers to their mouths every time the researchers walked through the village. UN workers confirmed that this was because the Bangladeshi contingent in the area had donated food to the local children and as such had 'created a culture of begging'.

The Swedish and Irish peacekeepers: Equipped, Effective and Efficient

The Swedish and Irish UN troop contingents in Liberia comprised the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), deployed as part of the UNMIL presence to quell civil disturbances and generally respond to situations requiring military action. In relation to most other battalions they were extremely well equipped, in terms of both military kit and troop numbers. Given their deployment as a special force, it is unsurprising that they were seen to be 'quick' and 'responsive' by many participants. The Swedish and Irish contingents are accommodated in Camp 'Hotel Africa' in Monrovia, located next to the former hotel of the same name. Members of the QRF maintained a visible presence amongst the local population by

¹⁵ A standing joke had developed among a number of international workers around the double meaning of the sign erected by the Bangladeshis.

appearing regularly on the streets of Monrovia and in outlying regions via helicopter, to conduct high-profile patrols, either in tanks or on foot. Like some other troops within the mission, they did not officially participate in the more explicitly humanitarian, reconstructive work, such as that carried out by Chinese engineers or Jordanian medics, but rather assumed a policing role, responding to outbreaks of violence. A foreign female NGO director in Monrovia said in relation to potential civil disturbances: 'I would expect them to bring out the Irish Special Forces. They have been particularly effective in calming things down.' In bringing an end to the three days of rioting and burning of churches in Monrovia in October 2004, military skill coupled with effective negotiating were seen to be the preserve of these peacekeeping 'all-rounders'. A locally based security officer working for an NGO in Monrovia stressed both equipment and military efficiency: 'When you say "the Irish are coming", people know they are about to see a well-equipped Quick Reaction Force.' The feeling of security generated by the Irish and Swedish troops was linked to their perceived professionalism as much as their technically advanced and 'cool' peacekeeper masculinities. As a foreign female working for an NGO argued:

I think the Swedes and Irish act more professionally. They are strict and a lot more focused. I think that they make local people feel more secure. Once a month the Swedish and Irish come to patrol and the local people see it. People are happy that they can rebuild their lives and get on with it. It's not just the reputation of the Swedes and the Irish that gives the impression of greater security, but *you can just see it*. When they patrol, they look very professional and they walk next to the tanks. I saw them doing a patrol in a tank with the Bangladeshis who were following on a little motorbike behind (emphasis added).

Similarly, an African female working for an NGO in Monrovia linked security with how well equipped the troops were:

When the Irish roll out the tanks that is enough. The communities see the level of troops arriving and they see how well equipped they are. The more equipment they bring, the more respect there is for security.

In this way perceptions of the Irish and Swedish peacekeepers hinged not on muscularity or humanitarian masculinities, but on an understanding of an elevated, admired and skilled masculinity numerous referred to in regard to the symbolism of their equipment. During an interview with a mixed gender group in Bong County in Liberia, the following interchange took place:

Interviewer: If there was a security incident, who would you most like to see help?

Local male: I will be very candid with you, if there was a security problem, almost everyone would be looking up to the Irish and the Swedish rapid response unit. We know they are there to quell the violence and their role is to ensure that a particular area is made secure.

Unlike the Nigerians and Bangladeshis who were often conflated with their physical demeanour, few participants discussed the physical characteristics of these European soldiers. However, it was not only their efficiency and professionalism that was noted. As one Liberian female working for a religious organization in Monrovia commented, the 'Good Samaritan' ethic of the Irish contingents made them a reliable source of financial charity and logistical support. On a number of occasions Catholic organizations were helped by Irish peacekeepers to transport food and equipment to hospitals and orphanages. Similarly, Swedish

peacekeepers were known for supporting charitable events and often donated monies to different communities in need.

Discussion

As noted above, our aim in this work was to gain an insight into the ways that participants constructed male peacekeepers as men of a certain kind, when considered through the lens of their security practices. Here, we were looking for evidence of the extent to which the new man imagery of the blue-beret had percolated from broader representational practices into ways of perceiving and imagining peacekeepers. In so doing we developed three ideal types: (1) the traditional warrior, (2) the humanitarian and (3) a synthesis of both, labelled the 'humanitarian warrior'. Though the research used theoretical sampling in order to maximise thematic breadth and depth, the extent to which masculinity and nationality shaped responses was striking right across the sample. Here, the language of national military identity represented an indispensable prerequisite of perception, providing key axes of peacekeeper identity. Whilst the intersection of nationality with peacekeeper masculinity has long been noted, the focus has tended to concern how peacekeepers relate to their own identities rather than how they are perceived by host populations and others. For example, Cynthia Enloe (1993: 33-35) probes peacekeepers 'sense of masculine license' in this passage:

We know amazingly little about what happens to a male soldier's sense of masculine license when he dons the blue helmet or armband of the UN peacekeeper... *the crucial question may be whether soldiering for a state calls forth different notions of masculinity than soldiering for a non state international agency does.* What exactly happens to a Canadian or Fijian male soldiers presumptions about violence, femininity, about enemies or about his own sexuality when is placed in the position of maintaining peace between two warring armies? (emphasis added).

The few studies investigating peacekeeper masculinity and nationality have yet to highlight the emergence of a 'non-state' or 'UN-generic' identity, a finding that is further validated here. For example, Ben-Ari and Elron's (2001) anthropological study of peacekeeping missions points to the possible tensions between national armed forces identity and the multi-national composition of UN peacekeeping. A key finding to emerge from their ethnography undermines the thesis that multinational forces serve to *loosen* ties with the nation state. Rather, their argument is that 'the symbolic importance of the multi-national aspects of peacekeeping is crucial to the way they carry out their roles' (Ben-Ari and Elron, 2001: 277). Military nationality configures how peacekeeper's everyday social practices are seen, but more than that, how their nationality is hierarchised and organised into a series of security 'styles'. Accounts thus demonstrate that interventions can be viewed as the polar opposite of the cosmopolitan 'melting-pot' model of peacekeeping that has emerged recently in some of the peacekeeping literature (e.g., Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 2005). Peacekeepers were seen as located at some distance from the new man in ways that contest the notion that donning the blue helmet erases national, ethnic, gender, military or professional identities, giving rise to the universal humanitarian warrior. Our research underscores the inseparability of peacekeeper masculinity and nationality in regard to a modest empirical component constituted by those 'to be secured'. As Petersen and True argue: 'gender infuses all our identities so that race, age, class, ethnicity, ability and nationality are also gender specific identities' (1998: 16). Here, the strength of the relationship between nationalism, militarism and masculinity has been noted to have far-reaching resonance amongst a range of individual and state actors (Enloe, 1990; Shaw, 1991; Dawson, 1994; Nagel, 1999). What counts in perceptions of security practice is not so much the iconic blue beret, but the national insignia that embodies a community of imagined national character (Cohen 1985; Ben-Ari, 1991).

How might we further account for the particular framings generated in the current work, where memories of the Nigerian ECOMOG troops had such an important influence on the ways in which south Asian UN peacekeepers, and less so those from both Sweden and Ireland, were articulated?

Situating Peacekeeper Masculinities in Liberia

As we saw above, the people of Liberia suffered civil war for 14 years marked by the most abhorrent human rights abuses including the extensive use of gender-based violence. Nigerian (and other African) elements of the ECOMOG peacekeeping force, as well as irregular members of the various warring factions, were guilty of egregious atrocities (Pitts, 1999: 61). However, the general sense with which Nigerian troops were credited in helping to bring the conflict to a close remains tenacious in ways that are reflected in their canonization as fighters and warriors. The legacy of these exemplary combat personnel is far-reaching and expressed itself through the ways in which a hierarchy of peacekeeping military security was played-out in participant accounts. Unlike the current UNMIL force, during the civil war Nigerian troops had been directly observed conducting combat operations. In this sense, troops of the south Asian contingents represented something of an unknown quantity in respect to their warrior potential.

Less obviously, it is possible that wider narratives of masculinity and national identity were also co-opted into reflections on peacekeepers and security. Here, the concept of Pax Nigeriana may have shaped the responses of some in our study. Pax Nigeriana is:

Reflected in the utterances of Nigerian soldiers, politicians...these Nigerians share a common belief in their country's manifest destiny as the Giant of Africa with special responsibilities to act as a regional big brother...The big-brother syndrome implies a sense of responsibility and a feeling of protectiveness towards weaker inexperienced siblings and smacks of a paternalism. (Adebajo, 2002: 44)

Of interest here is the reference to paternalism, and indeed, a number of accounts from Liberian participants in the current study did frame the security work of Nigerians with a degree of reverence signalled by terms such as 'fear' and 'respect'. Metaphors around presence and embodiment also permeated accounts in ways that spoke to the hegemonic warrior in contrast to south Asian troops whose martial skills tended to be read-off from physical size. The construction of Nigerian troops as 'big men' who 'shoot first and ask questions later' was somewhat incongruous with our normative category of the caring, and compassionate humanitarian.

Troops of the south Asian contingents, whilst considered according to the importance attached by participants of human versus military security, were nevertheless cast as largely subordinate to their (military) hegemonic Nigerian peers. If anything, they were closer to the new man end of the spectrum with participants drawing on a synthesis of observed activities and a sense of imagined masculinity. In regard to the exemplary humanitarian work they undertook, it has been argued that not only does this lie at the kernel of their peacekeeping ethos, but more importantly that their explicit aim in the performance of security work is to build alliances. Here, the use of force is considered to be subordinate to the prime goal of seeking and fostering community support, and in this way their activities are noted to resonate with the approaches adopted by peacekeepers from other contingents, including India (Krishnamsamy, 2001). This more passive style of peacekeeping was demonstrated most obviously by Indian peacekeepers in the case of Somalia (UNOSOM II) where violence against peacekeepers was widespread. Indeed, whilst it would be inappropriate to conflate

Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers with their Indian counterparts on account of their numerous cultural and other differences, nevertheless, considerable overlap between their styles is evident in respect of the ways that local populations are regarded, and vice versa. For example, the Commander of the Bangladeshi battalion with whom one of the authors carried out a brief period of participant observation echoed sentiments captured in the following commentary: ‘Peace and security in peacekeeping operations can...be achieved through mutual understanding, cultural exchanges and increased military-civilian interactions’ (Krishnamsamy, 2001: 39).

Yet, the Commander’s claim may be somewhat rhetorical and was clearly in tension with other participant narratives, a good proportion of which highlighted the intersection of Muslim and masculine identity in ways that made for ‘biased’ security responses.¹⁶ Given the extent to which Bangladeshi peacekeepers in our study were noted to be actively involved in reconstruction work, the notion of a ‘development army’ seems relevant, again in ways that mirror the humanitarian emphasis placed on peacekeeping by Indian troops (Bullion, 2001). In a broader sense, the everyday security practices of Bangladeshi peacekeeper masculinity can be directly traced to the geopolitical level as suggested by Krishnamsamy (2001:37) who states that:

Bangladesh views its participation in UN peacekeeping as an act of goodwill. Dhaka’s overwhelming willingness to contribute is in keeping with its broad foreign policy objective, which is to cooperate with the international community for the promotion of international peace and security, justice and freedom.

Further, Bangladeshi involvement in UN operations should be about: ‘Eliciting cooperation, the possession of interactive skills found in the appropriate attitude and discipline of the soldiers...peacekeeper-community relations in the field are key’ (Krishnamsamy, 2001:41).

The former Secretary General, Kofi Annan had argued that peacekeeping operations must be able to communicate with the population: ‘Explaining why they are in the country, what they expect from the people and their leaders, and what people might expect from the peacekeepers’ (Bullion, 2001:42). Clearly, then, these broad political objectives find expression in the style of security performance picked up and articulated by participants in this study. These were conveyed within the context of the ECOMOG legacy in ways that reflect and refract the production of particular military masculinities, cross-cut by essentialised and national(ised) framings.

Big Tanks and a Cool Approach: The Swedes and the Irish

Peacekeepers of the Swedish and Irish QRF contingents were perceived through a particular hegemonic military masculinity that turned on perceptions of professionalism and a degree of moral superiority. The belief that Irish and Swedish troops embodied a well-developed military security seemed to rest not only on reputation but also on the ways they were perceived to occupy public spaces. In this way, professional performances reflected a technological and material proficiency, seen as reflecting a masculinised mastery of military

¹⁶ We do not include that element of the data in the current article. However, it is interesting to note that the perceived bias of ‘Muslim peacekeepers’ towards ‘Muslim tribes’ was articulated in reference to an ‘irrationality’ of peacekeeper security practice. Clearly masculinity is being invoked in this assertion that turns on highlighting an inappropriate and unprofessional ‘religious’ bias where peacekeeper masculinity is assumed to be linked to an impartial rationality.

hardware.¹⁷ The deeper roots to this perception may be found in structural conditions in regard to their status as troops of QRF, as well as in ideologies in circulation at the geopolitical as well as ‘ground level’ about what kinds of men they were presumed to be, and in turn, the forms of peacekeeper masculinities they imported into their security practices. For example, it is argued that:

In the Swedish context, neutrality and *folkhemmet*¹⁸ are the central dimensions of nationalism...the strong ties between the policy of neutrality and Swedish national identity may explain why in the debate on Sweden’s future security arrangement the idea of Sweden as a neutral power in world affairs still occupies an important position. (Kronsell and Svedberg, 2001: 155)

Further, it could be assumed that Swedish peacekeepers, originating from a socialist welfare state with a long track record of gender equality (Nyman, 1999), would be cast as the quintessential new men. However, alongside the Irish contingents, these ‘northern’ peacekeepers were seen to be more closely aligned with somewhat more conventional ideas about masculinity, including stereotypes of white Europeans as efficient, professional and fair. Indeed, their image among locals was overwhelmingly positive, in contrast to the more mixed views held about Nigerian and Bangladeshi contingents.

Conclusion

Whilst it is hardly novel to suggest that masculinity is intersected by other axes of identity, nevertheless our findings flesh out wider anecdotal evidence in which nationality represents the key essentialising move of what male peacekeepers ‘are like’ as men when framed through their security practices.¹⁹ In this way, participants considered different styles of peacekeeping as natural expressions of the nationalities of which their performers were a part. Here, narrative accounts unfolded through the lens of imagined gender and national identities, and often involved portrayals of particular contingents informed by prevailing and historical stereotypes. Interestingly, these ways of seeing male peacekeepers tended to resonate with broader geopolitical intentions in regard, respectively to ‘Pax Nigeriana’, ‘ambassadorial Bangladeshis’ and ‘fair’ Swedes, with the Irish perhaps being seen in the same way as their northern European counterparts by association.

Given that Liberia has only recently emerged from a protracted civil war and could be said to be enduring a negative peace, it is unsurprising that the appetite for new man peacekeeper masculinities is marginal. Many of our participants valued more conventional aspects of traditional military masculinity, and relied on stereotypical notions of particular ethnic, national and religious groups in forming their opinion about who was best suited to protect them and who made them feel more or less secure. This research also suggests that whilst international intervention can enhance the success of peacekeeping, it may bring with it a number of complexities around its multi-dimensional enactment as the blue-beret is supplanted by national identity in the minds of the audience.

¹⁷ Participant perceptions here can be read on a number of levels. One possible reading characterised by considerable historical continuity concerns the ways that: ‘weapons have always played an important role in war’ (Hables Gray, 1997:195) such that military kit and soldiers can be conflated into one entity by their audiences. This theme of the interchangeability between soldier and equipment is pursued further in our book (see above).

¹⁸ The concept of *folkhemmet* is often used to refer to the ‘Swedish middle way’ in reference to a political system that attempted to steer a considered course between capitalism and communism. Its resonance with ‘fairness’ and ‘equitability’ is clear and may have seeped into the ways that members of the sample made sense of Swedish peacekeepers security practices.

¹⁹ See for example the work of the journalist Polman (1997) who discusses at length how different peacekeeping contingents are invariably perceived through the lens of their imagined national identities.

The findings presented here, particularly when coupled with the numerous and growing reports of peacekeepers' involvement in sexual exploitation and abuse of 'beneficiaries', are in tension with the dominant imagery of peacekeepers cuddling babies and handing sweets to children. In these terms, the potency of the new man representation may lie in the ideologically driven attempt to produce the acceptable face of military or, as some have argued, imperial intervention (Zisk Martin, 2004). Here, the creative capacity of gendered discourses to provide 'softened masculinity' may seek, in unintended ways, to render acceptable interventions that may be driven as much by national vested interest as by the responsibility to protect. While we acknowledge that security is ultimately about matters of life and death, we suggest that in other ways security may not exist independently of those who experience it, in and through how they discuss those tasked to make them safe. In this way, our work may also speak to the security studies literature that had tended to overlook the sociological dimensions of security, though with some exceptions (see Dillon, 1996 and McSweeney, 1999). In sum, then, we have attempted to provide a modest contribution to thinking about security in a particular African peacekeeping mission. Further work might develop these approaches in ways that take as their starting point the tenacity of national or ethnic identity among those who work under the broad umbrella of the UN. This is particularly important when thinking about how international and cosmopolitan a UN peacekeeping force can be, given the hold that stereotypes can have on people's everyday observations within a mission. Can, and should, the UN erase the differences in gender, national and professional backgrounds of its peacekeepers in an attempt to fashion an ideal, 'universal' peacekeeper masculinity?

Finally, in early 2007, an all-female contingent of military-trained police officers from India arrived in Liberia, ready to take up their duties as female peacekeepers [why 'female peacekeepers' rather than just 'peacekeepers?']. Following from UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the UN has been trying to increase the number of female peacekeepers in PSOs, but this has been difficult for a number of reasons, including the low numbers of female personnel in the majority of the militaries of troop-contributing countries.²⁰ Nevertheless, the deployment of the all-female contingent raises a number of questions about the ways in which male peacekeepers conventionally behave, and are perceived to behave, by those living and working in such missions. Will the introduction of military women transform these negative impacts? The panacea to the insecurities generated by a number of male peacekeepers may not lie in new man style security practices after all, but rather, a peacekeeping force that is considerably more 'feminized' and less militarized than that currently deployed in the post-conflict regions of the world.

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