



**Conduct and Discipline in UN Peacekeeping Operations:
Culture, Political Economy and Gender**

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Overview

Systematic patterns of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) have emerged around UN peacekeeping missions over the course of many years.¹ Reports of abuse by

¹ The term sexual exploitation and abuse has emerged as the term of choice by the UN for referring to a range of illegal and illicit behavior, from forced sex to sex between adults in situations that would be considered consensual were the parties not be of such unequal power. The shorthand (SEA, pronounced S, E, A) is widely used, but both the long and the short hand term have the problem that they fail to communicate anything like the reality and severity of much of what goes by that name or acronym, such as an adult male peacekeeper sodomizing an 11 year old girl, already orphaned and impoverished by war; coercing sex by offering money or food to hungry teenage girls for oral sex; paying boys

peacekeepers in Cambodia and the Balkans in the 1990s were followed by news of similar problems in West African missions in 2001 and 2002. The Secretary General subsequently issued a 2003 Bulletin outlining a zero-tolerance policy, but the abuse continued. In 2004, peacekeeper misconduct became widely known through mainstream media reports that UN personnel in MONUC, the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, had been engaging in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of local women and children. The SEA included, most egregiously, peacekeepers' exchange of UN food supplies or money for sex with young girls and sometimes boys. SEA has been a particular problem in mission areas where extreme poverty and conflict or post-conflict trauma and social dislocation drive local people to sell their bodies, but it has occurred in more developed contexts as well, such as Cyprus and Kosovo. The UN response to these problems has been to establish, in 2005, a Conduct and Discipline Unit with offices in New York and mission areas, charged with addressing the problem in a variety of ways. SEA continues to occur since then, with serious incidents revealed in Sudan, Liberia, Haiti, Cote d'Ivoire, and again in the Congo.

With the cooperation of the Conduct and Discipline Units in New York and in the three mission areas, a team of anthropologists conducted the research reported on here. The team examined the cultural and political economic roots of the problem, focusing on the relationship between ideas and attitudes about culture, gender, sexuality, and peacekeeping as those influence the nature and extent of SEA. This research included fieldwork at a global gathering of CDU mission operatives in Brindisi, Italy, as well as at UN missions in Haiti, Lebanon, and Kosovo. The mission sites were chosen in order to compare missions with a history of conduct problems and missions without, and to compare settings where severe economic dislocation provides a context for the mission and potential for SEA and where it does not. This report presents the findings of that research. It offers a framework for understanding the problem, which is proposed to replace frameworks currently in broad if often tacit use in the UN, and presents a set of recommendations for the Conduct and Discipline Unit.

UN responses to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers

The 2003 Secretary-General's Bulletin, "Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse" (ST/SGB/2003/13), articulated a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations by peacekeepers. In 2005, the Secretary-General tasked Prince Zeid al-Hussein of Jordan with investigating the problem and recommending solutions. The resulting report, now known as the Zeid Report and titled "A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations" (2005), made recommendations in the areas of renewed standards of conduct, new investigative procedures, and new forms of organizational responsibility and accountability for perpetrators. In conjunction with this report, the UN established a Conduct and Discipline Team (now Conduct and Discipline Unit) in New York in November 2005, and it has been organizing training, monitoring, and enforcement of the UN Code of Conduct for peacekeepers and the Bulletin. Fourteen

to act as pimps; verbal sexual abuse, or having a sexual relationship with a young woman who hopes thereby to escape her situation but is abandoned when the peacekeeper leaves.

Conduct and Discipline teams have been established as of 2009 covering 19 UN peacekeeping locations.

These teams engage in a variety of activities, including communicating UN policy on conduct to UN personnel on site, attempting to make the local community aware of the UN Code of Conduct, and advertising a complaint line for citizens. They take complaints about peacekeeper behavior and liaison with other UN offices that investigate complaints. They communicate to all parties that SEA constitutes “Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” They communicate the zero tolerance policy vis-à-vis both prostitution and sex with minors and the “strong discouragement” of sex with beneficiaries of UN assistance, a term that can be construed to mean almost anyone in any UN Mission area.

In addition to mission induction training and data collection on misconduct, the UN has been developing victim assistance programs, attempting to improve morale and welfare for peacekeepers, negotiating amendments to the legal agreements (Memorandums of Understanding) with troop-contributing countries and contracts with peacekeepers to ensure accountability (which now fall far short of the Zeid Report’s call for on-site court-martials for those accused), and attempting to develop a database of allegations against peacekeepers that will allow permanent exclusion of those who perpetrate or permit SEA. In addition, some mission commanders have instituted more stringent measures such as curfews, lists of establishments off-limits to UN personnel, requirements that troops wear uniforms off-duty, and telephone hotlines for reporting abuse.

Enforcement remains a problem, with many UN personnel we spoke with saying they have observed or heard that SEA occurs much more often than it is identified and punished. This culture of impunity, or belief in a culture of impunity, was most pronounced in Kosovo, less so in Haiti, and least in Lebanon.

The problem of SEA appears to be pervasive, according as well to a recent study using focus group methodology in Ivory Coast, Haiti, and Southern Sudan (Csaky 2008). Over half of the participants interviewed in this 2008 study recalled incidents of sexual abuse or coerced sex, and 23 percent of those respondents could identify at least ten such incidents (Csaky 2008). In 2008, there were 83 formal allegations of misconduct against Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) personnel (of which 4 were in Haiti, 1 in Lebanon, and none in Kosovo), and 80 investigations by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (50 of which were for rape of a minor). Of those, 66 were substantiated and forwarded to the relevant state for action. Of the military personnel involved in substantiated cases, 58 were repatriated and barred from future peacekeeping work. The only concrete prosecutions reported back were of two military personnel sentenced to an average of 35 days in prison.

The number of allegations was significantly smaller than in 2006, when there were 357 formal allegations of misconduct against DPKO (of which 48 were in the mission in Haiti, 2 in Kosovo, and none in Lebanon). There were 82 investigations by the Office of

Internal Oversight Services (5 for sex with minors, 24 for exploitative sexual relationships, 43 for prostitution, and 3 for rape or sexual assault). Of these 82, the OIOS decided that 16 were substantiated. Of 13 military personnel who were repatriated on disciplinary grounds in 2006, the DPKO received feedback from two governments as to the actions that they took against those military personnel. These actions included “three demotions in rank, four custodial sentences and five dismissals from the armed services.” Given the scale of the problem, this is scant enforcement in either year.

History, methods, and scope of this study

This study was begun in 2006 as an attempt to understand and advocate for greater awareness of cultural issues in peacekeeping. In consultation with the Integrated Training Service of the DPKO and the Conduct and Discipline Team, the research team focused in on how cultural issues intersect with attempts to solve the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse. With the help of what is now the Conduct and Discipline Unit (CDU), one of the researchers participated in a Team training of those who educate on issues of SEA in the mission areas. It was attended by 21 CDU trainers from missions around the world. The researcher observed the training and conducted formal and informal interviews with most of the participants. This provided a global overview of the UN response, and the teams’ own understandings of and experiences with the problems of misconduct and discipline.

The researchers then visited the missions in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Lebanon (UNIFIL), and Kosovo (UNMIK). There they conducted interviews with approximately 75 (Haiti), 36 (Kosovo), and 56 (Lebanon) individuals, most of them military, police, and civilian peacekeeping personnel. Several interviews were conducted with members of local NGOs, particularly women’s groups concerned with peacekeepers’ behavior. In addition, the team attended multiple training sessions for incoming mission members on cultural awareness and SEA. Post-fieldwork phone interviews were conducted with a number of experts on gender and SEA outside the UN system, and NGOs concerned with the problem of SEA.

Almost all of these interviews were digitally voice recorded, translated where necessary, and transcribed verbatim. Content analysis of these texts was conducted, focusing on understanding the explicit and tacit reasoning the speakers engaged in around the issues of gender, sexuality, understandings of the local population, and attitudes toward SEA and their UN jobs. The value of this methodology, in comparison with survey data, is that it allows for close examination of the *ways* in which people think about a problem such as SEA. While survey data can be collected from larger numbers of individuals, such survey data cannot reveal the complexities of the attitudes held by people involved in the problem. Moreover, it is more likely that extended qualitative interviews will discover aspects of a population’s thinking that are unanticipated or unknown by researchers before the survey takes place.

The goal of the research was to collect information on how the problem of SEA is understood by members of the UN in mission, to understand how the zero-tolerance policy is understood by peacekeepers, and how variability in the rates of SEA across

settings is understood. While the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse is at the center of the problem of peacekeeper misconduct (63 percent of all allegations against peacekeepers involve SEA; Guehenno 2006), drunk and other dangerous driving, corruption, and theft are also common in some missions. This project follows CDU interest in focusing on SEA rather than these other forms of misconduct, although incidence of all types tends to co-occur (Dahrendorf 2006).

The three missions chosen for study varied on important dimensions of interest. Typical of missions in areas of less intense poverty, the Lebanon mission was expected, like earlier missions in that country, to be less associated with conduct problems and was chosen to provide a contrast with the situation in Haiti, where the problem has been significant. The mission in Kosovo has been associated with problems of SEA in the past, and it provided an important contrast to the MINUSTAH and UNIFIL missions in that the Kosovo mission is in a region where simple and solely economic (poverty) or cultural (Islam) arguments for rates of SEA could not be easily deployed. More complex analyses of the roots of the problem of SEA can be generated as a result.

Developing a research-based framework for understanding misconduct in relation to questions of culture and political economy

Misconduct has been found in military, police, and civilian components of UN missions, and it has been identified in both higher- and lower-ranking UN mission members. Rates and types of misconduct appear to vary by particular mission, mission type, national contingent, and other factors. Some misconduct has been studied systematically; contrary to common belief, for example, per capita rates of SEA are higher among civilian peacekeepers than among military peacekeepers (Dahrendorf 2006). Understanding all such forms of variation is a key and standard social scientific route to understanding the processes that underlie and produced particular behaviors.

Despite the scientific value of this approach, significant obstacles exist to employing this methodology in relation to misconduct. Foremost among them is the common reluctance, sometimes approaching taboo status, in the UN against speaking of differences between national contingents and between the local populations of various missions. While UN personnel and other observers speak informally about these differences, commonly seen as “cultural” ones, there is significant reluctance to address them in formal or official contexts.

There are two major reasons for this reluctance. First, the centrality of notions of sovereignty in UN institutional culture creates fear of offending particular member states by comparing their behavior with others, particularly, in this case, by suggesting differing degrees of criminality (whether SEA or prostitution) or competence among contingents. A second and related factor is racism. While race talk may be relatively rare, talk of culture can often be a proxy for talk of race (Stolcke 1995). A reluctance to speak of culture, in other words, occurs where there is some awareness that this may be heard as racism targeting either the population where a UN mission is operating, or directed against particular contingents within the mission. Insight into this taboo requires more research, and could help make CDU training and policy formulation more effective.

Given contemporary, less reified or rigid frameworks for understanding “culture” to be discussed below, it is possible to discuss multiple forms of difference in context of history, politics and contingency, and avoid the problem of conflating notions of culture with popular ideas about race.

Cultural beliefs, nonetheless, gather force and shape what is done on UN missions. Beliefs, particularly about race, sexuality, and gender, form the conditions under which CDUs operate and particular contingent patterns and cross-contingent patterns of SEA emerge, as will be discussed below.

Some of what gets discussed as cultural difference, moreover, can be additionally or alternatively discussed as a behavioral result of “incentive structures” that are primarily political economic in origin. These incentive structures include such things as the economic rewards and risks of peacekeeping work, and other factors to be mentioned below.

Cultural beliefs and attitudes about culture, sex, and gender

CDU workers often encounter significant resistance to their work and training. This includes especially disagreement that sex with beneficiaries is problematic. For example, many will not agree that sex with adult members of the society in which the mission is located is problematic, and/or disagree about what constitutes prostitution (some seeing “gifts” given to impoverished women with whom they have a relationship as acceptable). Many also believe that the problem is not so much a UN problem as a local one, arguing that women in mission areas, and in Haiti particularly, “throw themselves” at peacekeepers. One CDU member mentioned that he believes that local mothers are angry with the CDU for ruining their opportunities to have their daughters make money through prostitution.

There are, in fact, many different cultural standards around sexuality and gender represented in UN mission contingents and their individual members. The legality of prostitution, the age of consent and the age of marriageability all vary around the world. CDU training emphasizes that these standards must be dropped in favor of UN universal standards, and that a UN peacekeeper identity must supersede other identities in relating to mission populations. Openly acknowledging that these identities can be in contradiction with each other seems a useful insight to add to training.

The relationship between peacekeeping personnel and the local population is, as Heiberg notes, “a decisive element in determining the operation’s success or failure” (1991: 147-48), which the problems of misconduct certainly illustrate. Lack of cultural knowledge about the society in which a mission is established occurs widely (Chopra and Hohe 2004, Myint-U and Sellwood 1999, Sion 2008). This has several special consequences related to SEA. These include failure to collect, understand, and use information from local populations about gender, sexuality, class/poverty, and the use of force. Inattention to questions of local cultural processes also leads to lack of regular, systematic attention to reports from, or reports potentially available from, local populations about the behavior of peacekeepers. Such reports would not only indicate where abuse is occurring, but

would also provide information about local attitudes toward the UN mission more generally, attitudes which can be quite negative, often on the basis of attitudes displayed or thought to be displayed by peacekeepers in their interactions with local people.

Two of the three missions we examined had no regular or extensive contact with women's groups in country, for example. Both general cultural knowledge as well as specific knowledge of local women's perspectives and information would have allowed for much more rapid responsiveness on the part of mission personnel to the problems of conduct and discipline as they occur or as they seem likely to occur based on peacekeeper attitudes and behaviors being observed in the community.

CDU members face the problem that cultures of masculine privilege — which suggest that men ought to be able to dominate women and have what they want — are strong and pervasive within both UN contingents (Higate and Henry 2004, Higate 2007, Martin 2005) and societies where missions are being conducted. Several analysts have focused on the problem of use of regular armies, with their especially heightened senses of male entitlement, to staff peacekeeping missions. SEA is exacerbated when the desired ethos of respect toward women and codes of conduct desired by the UN confronts a warrior ethos of militarized masculinity (Whitworth 2004, Segal and Meeker 1985). Moreover, CDU staff themselves do not always use an analysis of the SEA situation that puts gender dynamics at the center of the problem, rather than indiscipline, generically (or even racially) understood. They may sometimes use notions of masculine obligations to protect the women in their mission area as a rationale for their work in general. Nonetheless, this rationale is often implicit, as issues of gender are routinely treated as background context more than operational guidelines.

There is a widespread belief among peacekeepers in the idea of an unchangeable “(male) human nature” and a hydraulic/disciplinary model of male sexuality. As one high-ranking UN officer said, “Now, you can train your troops, and instruct your troops, and you can warn your troops, and threaten them that if they're caught, they're going home, and that's a huge financial punishment, but it's human nature, you're always going to have fun with your...the important thing is to minimize it, and to ensure that it's not endemic in the society, or that it's not part and parcel of the organization of the force.” He is arguing that one can make sure contingents have phone or internet contact with home that reminds them of their wives, recreational facilities, and so on, but SEA is the result of something that men do naturally, because their bodies tell them to. This takes for granted that men have to have it, so leadership should simply be finding ways to contain and limit it, using a hydraulic model to understand what exercise has to do with the likelihood of SEA. Shorter tours, no-go areas, and curfews then become the preferred device to prevent SEA.

This not only fundamentally misunderstands the nature of human sexuality, male or female, but also presents rape and exploitative sex as a function of a simple sexual desire and drive, not, as most contemporary theorists of rape tell us, a function of power, domination, and gender inequality (Sanday 1981, WHO 2002).

These cultures of masculine privilege and naturalized biology are all the more difficult to change when they are not recognized as such. UN members widely see themselves as “beyond” or “outside” culture, that is, simply a rational modern and global organization with no cultural distinctiveness. In relation to questions of SEA, those we interviewed invariably talked about the mission area if they talked at all about culture, seeing the local culture as having gender and sexuality attitudes with which the UN then simply had to deal. Despite the existence of an Office for Gender Affairs, and the efforts of principled and determined individuals within the organization to educate mission members, it has been hard to shift deep-rooted views that “professionalism” is a universal gold standard—and that the ongoing racial and gender inequalities within the UN (whereby white men continue to occupy a majority of senior positions) represent the workings of meritocracy.

Race and intercultural relations

It has been observed more than once that the UN can be a culturally deaf institution. When you add to that tens of thousands of peacekeepers who are in their 20’s and on a UN mission or out of their country for the first time, there is ample opportunity for cultural misunderstanding. But the problem of race makes this problem especially pernicious and intractable; that is, it is not just lack of cultural knowledge that creates the context for abuse, but powerful racial frames that orient people to other contingents, to New York headquarters, and to the local community. To take one example encountered as we drove through Port-au-Prince with members of the Nepali contingent, a peacekeeper looked at an apparently barren hillside and said, “These are very lazy people. They do not farm. They do nothing.” A Nepali officer later that same day told us that high rates of illness and poverty among the Haitian population is due to their ignorance about health. Another example is a story widely circulating among both Haitians and UN personnel that the Jordanian contingent steals goats from Haitians and uses them for sex or food.

Racial attitudes intersect with notions about SEA and why it occurs. A number of the European peacekeepers we spoke with said that many of the non-European contingents are “unprofessional,” “undisciplined,” and “incompetent,” and went on to explain low rates of SEA in Kosovo and Lebanon by the fact that European contingents dominate there, while Latin Americans and Africans dominate in Haiti. As just noted, many peacekeepers believe that male sexuality demands relief. This belief is amplified when the men in question are from the Southern Hemisphere, illustrating that a long-standing colonial notion that such men are especially oversexed still circulates.

Specific beliefs like this about SEA and race can sometimes be self-fulfilling. More SEA may be either tolerated across contingents or unfairly noted and prosecuted across contingents as a result. Even more important, however, racial assumptions can make SEA more likely when people in the mission area are dehumanized in this way. Rape is often more common in such contexts (Lakoff 1990).

We were told by several CDU leaders that the problem of SEA is made worse by the fact that, at least for some members, there exists a “UN culture” that suggests mission participation should be “fun,” including allowing sexual pleasure in the field. This is

more the case in positions which are classified as “non-family,” including Haiti and Kosovo. A hidden racialism in this worldview defines sex with vulnerable women and girls, including those with whom one cannot easily communicate, as “fun.”

A cultural issue is also found in the concept of “command climate,” which many see as the most significant factor in rates of SEA (Dahrendorf 2006, Nair 2005). Reports from the Congo and elsewhere, for example, showed that commanders sometimes participate in SEA, cover up for friends and colleagues, and ignore the fact that such acts are occurring or that whistleblowers are being harassed (Rasmussen 2005). Understanding this as a culture of impunity and understanding the common beliefs about SEA should be helpful in designing measures to combat it. It is also important to note that the small-group loyalty common to military organizations is also a significant factor in erecting a wall of silence around misconduct, something made even worse when sub-cultural differences and divisions emerge within national militaries, leading to attempts to cover-up within contingents as well as between them (Winslow 1998).

Nonetheless, SEA is exacerbated not only by these kinds of cultural ideas about gender, race, and sexuality, but also by the political economic incentive structures and disincentives that exist for peacekeepers. These include such things as the pay structures and career trajectories of peacekeepers, and the relative wealth or poverty of the peacekeepers in comparison with local women and other potential victims of peacekeepers abuse.

Factors behind variability in incidence of sexual exploitation and abuse

Differing rates of misconduct by mission and by national contingent are relevant to diagnosis and treatment of the problem. A more complex framework is needed for understanding why such differences occur. Observation and interviews in the field suggest the following factors are significant, some of them disguised or misrecognized through use of the shorthand of “cultural difference.” These contributing factors include:

Local conditions:

- The degree of vulnerability of local girls and women, the result of poverty and economic dislocation that provide fewer alternatives to sexual exchange for women, fear of losing material assistance, and the mixture of “stigma, fear, ignorance and powerlessness” (Csaky 2008) that makes for low levels of reporting of abuse when it does occur
- The degree to which local actors have knowledge of mission norms of conduct and feel their complaints will be taken seriously
- Local gender and kin relations (social networks that may or may not protect women from peacekeeper exploitation), some of which may be protective but were eroded in the context of war
- Language issues, or the degree to which the local population can communicate with members of the mission
- Level of violence, which may prevent as much casual interaction between community members and UN peacekeepers, who are kept on more of an alert, military status

Mission actions and behaviors:

- UN command or supervisory climate that contributes to hostility to victims or indifference to their problems, particularly ideas about male privilege and sexual needs and racist and other dismissive attitudes toward the local population
- Attitudes toward sexuality and gender among military and civilian mission members, in particular the belief that “boys will be boys,” and the best one can hope for is that external restraint (military discipline, no-go areas, etc.) will prevent some SEA
- Attitudes toward local population, including racist ideas
- Hostile attitudes toward discipline (especially who can enforce it) among military and civilian mission members
- The type of UN mission, for example, whether it is a newer or older mission, or a family mission, with problems associated more with the older, non-family missions
- Relative lack of pre-deployment training, particularly where troop-contributing countries have sent nonprofessional or previously retired soldiers or police officers into UN duty and where they have sent units assembled piecemeal for the mission rather than already established units
- Relatively less investment in the idea of the UN and its peacekeeping mission
- Institutional expectations about the structure and sources of pay (e.g., where local supplementation of pay is common and expected within the higher and/or lower ranks of some national militaries and might support the notion that units can “get what they want” on the side), and beliefs about the intangible rewards of being a peacekeeper
- When most pay is withheld from peacekeepers while in the field, as it is in some contingents, they report less opportunity to engage in misconduct
- When peacekeepers see themselves as engaged in temporary peacekeeping work rather than military career professionals, although those who consider themselves permanent peacekeepers may see themselves as entitled to have sex with locals or to operate with impunity
- The identity or “personality” of the particular units (e.g., Special Forces v. logistics units) sent to the mission, particularly where the unit is considered to have a “more masculine” reputation
- The length of a peacekeeper’s mission tour, with the potentially self-fulfilling belief that longer tours make SEA more likely because of a hydraulic model used to understand male sexuality
- Units with a history of mistreatment of local populations in prior military or police work
- The class, ethnic, gender, and marital demographics of a nation’s peacekeepers can make a difference as, for example, when increases in the proportion of women in police contingents might be expected to decrease SEA
- Absence of accessible mechanisms for civilian reporting of abuse (Csaky 2008) or of regular work with local women’s NGOs

Other factors that should be considered as potentially having an effect on rates of SEA are average length of service prior to mission, operational tempo prior to the mission, relative pay structures and available resources within contingents and within the mission. While there is much discussion of the contribution of UN workers’ living conditions,

including especially lack of recreational facilities or rest and relaxation opportunities among contingents whose leadership does not allocate UN morale and welfare monies to that purpose, it is not clear whether this is connected to rates of SEA.

This list of issues is obviously too long to have allowed close examination of any one of them, but each suggests something important to consider when planning for change. It is also important to embed these factors in a cultural and political economic explanatory framework rather than see them as simple institutional features that can be simply retooled through educational efforts or institutional rule making alone.

Overview of local peacekeepers and populations in Haiti, Lebanon, and Kosovo

SEA in Haiti and UN response. Two members of the research team made a nine-day research trip to the UN mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH. The mission has had significant problems of SEA by peacekeepers, as reported by Martin (2005), and as evidenced by the repatriation of 117 members of the Sri Lankan contingent in late 2007. There we conducted 75 interviews with a wide range of mission and some community members, including the force, contingent, and police commanders, soldiers, police, and UN civilian employees from 20 different countries, as well as Haitians knowledgeable of the problem of peacekeeper misconduct. In addition, the team attended multiple training sessions for incoming mission members on cultural awareness and SEA. We also interviewed, post-fieldwork, several women's groups from Port-au-Prince, including the organization that reported on the SEA occurring in the Sri Lankan contingent.

Sexual activity among peacekeepers in Haiti appears widespread, some of it with local women and children. An August 2007 survey of 1166 uniformed military and police peacekeepers indicated that 7 percent reported having had sex in mission, while 29 percent reported having sex on leave, usually in the Dominican Republic (Lothe and Gurung 2007: 5). Several things suggest that the rate is in fact much higher: the first is the report authors' conclusion that the face-to-face, self-report survey method used leads to underreporting of the reported rate. In addition, the fact that 90 percent of those surveyed indicated an interest in receiving HIV/AIDS testing in mission, despite virtually all having reported having such a test at some point earlier in their life, suggests that the rate of sexual activity may in fact be higher.

Despite this significant incidence of sexual activity, some or all of which would constitute SEA, few complaints, we were told by the CDU, had been filed by the local population. This was despite the fact that significant effort had been made to incentivize reporting, by printing and distributing a calendar of Haitian holidays with CDU contact information on it, for example (although the telephone contact on the calendar called for a technology not available in most Haitian homes). In November 2007, however, the Sri Lankan contingent was sent home after substantiated public allegations by local women's organizations that members of the contingent were regularly abusing local women and children. Substantiated allegations of coerced, purchased sex, some of it with children, were made by OIOS.

Our interviews revealed that peacekeepers (including both soldiers and police) believe that sexual activity between UN personnel and local girls and women is rampant. They report it is easy to have sex with local women. They focus on being approached rather than approaching local women, and many report women coming up to them on operations and at leisure. They report that prostitution is common in nightspots in Petionville next to Port-au-Prince, and at beaches outside the capital.

There is widespread acceptance of the idea that sex with local women does not violate the UN Code of Conduct if it happens outside the mission area. As a result, many report that peacekeepers go to the Dominican Republic during compensatory time off to have sex, paid and unpaid. Many peacekeepers at lower and higher ranks use a “safety valve” theory to explain the relationship between peacekeeper sexuality in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic.

There is diversity in cultural attitudes toward prostitution among the national contingents. One soldier in the Nepali contingent, for example, noted that they have had no problems with SEA because they anticipate severe punishment if they do, with social humiliation in front of their families at home as the strongest disincentive. He also said he was told and believes that frequenting prostitutes will “damage society” by encouraging the growth of sex work.

Without exception, contingent commanders all seemed concerned and knowledgeable about the issue of SEA. No one seemed dismissive of the problem, and each gave the researchers a significant amount of their time to discuss the problem. All but one commander (of the Nigerian Formed Police Unit) seemed to speak frankly. In that particular case, policewomen in the unit appeared to be placed in a very subservient role within the contingent, though the commander expressed suspicion that his unit was chosen for the research because of biased assumptions about the Nigerians themselves. Despite the general emphasis on following the UN Code of Conduct, some mission officials insisted, against what seems like very visible and widespread evidence, that the problem of SEA is minor in Haiti.

During the interviews among the contingents, no one reported problems in his own unit. Some reported that they knew the problem to occur in other contingents.

One group of female peacekeepers reported their belief that accusations of SEA are primarily false: “The locals sometimes found that when they raise an alarm, they are able to get the upper hand. So they tried to raise an alarm of SEA. But after further investigation they realize that it wasn’t true. So sometimes, when you become a little bit free or lenient to somebody, he takes advantage. When they realize that when there is a problem they have the upper hand of winning. By so doing, they try to get you into a problem.” While this belief might become motivation to avoid local women and men, it misunderstands both the incidence and causes of SEA.

Interviews and training materials also showed that cultural awareness about the Haitian population among rank and file mission members remains rudimentary at best and

counterproductive to the mission at worst. One training session we attended on cultural awareness of Haiti gave this account of the religious practices of Haitians: “They are 80 percent Catholic, but roughly half the population practices voodoo. It is black magic. They believe in this stuff. If there is a dead body in the street, they think they will be affected and die.” In regard to the Haitian festival of Carnival, the instructor said, “Anything is possible during Carnival. The highest percentage of births is nine months after Carnival.” Showing a slide of a black woman in a skimpy Carnival costume, he said, “They have the freedom to do whatever they want.” This was the only image and discussion of women and sexuality during the lesson.

Finally, the rampant SEA occurring in at least one mission area in Haiti was reported to the UN by a women’s organization. They documented a dozen cases of abuse of children between the ages of 9 and 13, and were aware of many more who would not come forward. They argued that the peacekeepers should have been tried in Haiti for their crimes, and the victims provided with psychological and social services. They also asked for and were not given information on what the UN response had been. As one Haitian lawyer said, however, several women’s groups do not want to have a regular relationship with MINUSTAH “because they are against the UN’s occupation of Haiti because militaries translate into the subjugation of women and violence against them. Guns always bring rape.” These perspectives suggest that the only solution to the SEA problem is for the UN to leave altogether.

SEA in Lebanon and UN response. Two of the research team members made a seven-day field trip to UNIFIL in Lebanon, which has been in operation in the country since 1978, and began to grow substantially in the wake of Israel’s massive bombardment of the country in 2006. The mission involves facilitating the return of the Lebanese Army to the southern part of the country. Unlike most other DPKO missions, this one is not primarily staffed by peacekeepers from the region in which the mission is located. Pressure from Israel is one explanation for why UNIFIL has primarily European contingents. At UNIFIL, we interviewed 50 peacekeepers at Naquora headquarters and at the posts of a variety of contingents located around southern Lebanon.

Despite the war, the area primarily includes a non-dislocated population with an agrarian base, intact social order, and Islamic religiosity, which many people pointed to as the explanation for the lack of SEA among peacekeepers in the country. However, peacekeeper conduct is treated as solely an issue in the mission area between the Litani River and the Israeli border. If the security situation allows, peacekeepers can go on leave to the city of Tyre or Beirut. Most know that Russian and other prostitutes are available in Beirut. However, even the CDU sees peacekeepers in other areas of Lebanon, Cyprus or elsewhere as outside their area of concern.

A number of the peacekeepers we spoke with attributed the lack of SEA problems in Lebanon not only or even primarily to “local culture,” but to the fact that the many of the peacekeepers posted there are European. While they generally attributed this to the comparative competence of those peacekeepers, they also note, in other contexts, that tours of duty for most of the European contingents are shorter than average, and, in

keeping with common views about male sexuality noted above, they argue that the troops are more likely to be able to “make it” through two or four months without committing SEA.

One high-ranking officer said, however, that there is a large disparity in incomes between UN troops and locals, and “it would be naïve to say that [SEA] is not happening here. Of course, it has to happen wherever you have that disparity of income.” That UN peacekeepers take up relationships with local women is more widely admitted when people speak, and very approvingly, of the large number of marriages over the years between UN peacekeepers and Lebanese women.

Lebanon is a family mission, with an estimated 80 percent of the internationals requesting the mission in part for this reason and then living on the civilian economy. Low rates of SEA are often attributed to the fact that it is a family mission. Related to this, one officer there argued that SEA can be the result of “group mentality”: “you take a group of 100 soldiers and send them away from home where their normal norms and mores exist and they follow them, and they get this pack mentality. They tend to do things when they are away that they would never do at home.” He argued that “local culture” still makes a difference: “If you send a group of soldiers from one first-world country to another, they will act in a similar way that they used to at home, but if they go to a place where the standards are much lower, and there’s no one who will hold them to account.”

Most importantly, however, a number of the people we interviewed saw Lebanon, as does CDU headquarters, as a mission at low-risk for SEA problems because the population is not poor. Focusing on class rather than gender means that sex with local women, should it be possible, would not necessarily be considered to violate the Code of Conduct. Said one high-ranking civilian: “Do you think you can classify them as beneficiaries of assistance in the same way as people in the Congo or Liberia? You can’t. And the same thing applies here. The poverty and vulnerability of the population is not the same. They are not starving, and they are not refugees.”

Given the mission’s longevity, a number of people we interviewed had worked for many years in country. This made it all the more surprising how few knew more than the most basic facts about Lebanon. Despite limited contact with locals, they also claim the local response to the UN is a positive or neutral one. Nonetheless, several people saw locals as potentially dangerous, particularly if one acted inappropriately with women, and claimed that many traffic crashes between UN vehicles and local cars are intentional, the result of Lebanese attempts to get cash from the UN. This illustrates a phenomenon common to UN missions, in which peacekeepers operate in a UN bubble and advocate for separation, leading to cultural ignorance, in order, ironically, to avoid cultural misunderstandings (Sion 2008). As one high ranking peacekeeper said of relations with local communities: “Most Lebanese have grown up with UNIFIL. It’s kind of just part of the furniture now.”

While many saw the long-term and numerous Lebanese UN staff as conduits for information about Lebanese attitudes and cultural patterns, this seemed not to actually result in much detailed knowledge. In addition, there appeared to be little

communication between the CDU or other elements of the mission and women's groups in the country. There were no publicly disseminated reporting mechanisms for local complaints from the community at large, something which may be the result of the notion that SEA is rare and/or that either staff or what is considered a robust local communication system would apprise the mission of problems should they occur.

The cultural awareness training that many peacekeepers had been exposed to focused on the most basic level of cultural knowledge, which is the knowledge of rules or etiquette, such as "do not talk to their women," or "their Islamic religion requires premarital chastity." The view of surrounding Lebanese standards of sexual behavior is colored by the peacekeepers' own cultural standards, including the notion, as one interviewee put it, that they are "less accepting of free behavior" in their standards. This portrays Lebanese standards as both singular (when those standards are in fact multiple) and less than ideal (i.e., unfree) and portrays SEA as a form of straightforward sexuality rather than abuse. One administrator reflected a common view of women's dress as partially responsible for SEA when he put the relationship between Islam and low rates of SEA as follows: "The Islamic culture in the South prevents SEA issues, especially since the women dress more modestly."

While many at UNIFIL articulate the view that training is important and necessary to stem SEA, there is a diversity of views on how much of an effect it has. Said one officer with 23 years of experience: "the standard of the instruction usually misses the type of audience. If it is someone who has no connection with me, telling me something else I'm not allowed to do, it just washes over you." Moreover, he said, lecturing against SEA is not very effective when there are no repercussions, which he noted, "there usually are not."

SEA in Kosovo and UN response. One member of the team made a six-day field trip to UNMIK in Kosovo, a shrinking mission with approximately 4500 peacekeepers.² He interviewed 37 people, including 20 international police officers from a range of contingents, six local women's NGO professionals, and a number of representatives from different offices within UNMIK concerned with conduct and discipline issues, especially with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse.

The UN mission has been in Kosovo since 1999, where it has operated as an interim administration: there has been a substantial civilian UN population, and also a large number of Kosovars working for the UN in various roles. There has also been a large international police contingent, with over 50 countries represented over the course of the mission. The main peacekeeping force, KFOR, is not under the command of the UN mission; as of February 2008, KFOR had around 15,900 troops from 24 NATO and 10 non-NATO nations.

² As of December 2007, their numbers included 39 military observers, 1996 international police, 468 international civilian employees, 1953 civilian employees, and 137 UN volunteers; Source: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm>. Accessed March 2008.

UN operations in Kosovo have been heavily influenced by the continuing formal sovereignty of Serbia, as well as by the instability and economic uncertainty across the region. In particular, the UN mission operates in a context of widespread unemployment, where smuggling of weapons, cigarettes, drugs and people has been a major source of revenue, and is orchestrated by criminal structures. This “informal economy” undermines ideals like accountability and transparency, and, it has been argued, has also been accompanied by a “re-traditionalization” of local society, especially with regard to gender relations. However, it has ties to a culture of resistance to state oppression from 1989 onwards, which fostered some of the civil society activism evident in urban centers.

There have been serious, high-profile SEA cases involving UN personnel, including in 2001 the repatriation of two international police officers who were involved in the movement of women for the purposes of prostitution (United Nations News Centre 2001). Anecdotal evidence collected during the 2007 visit confirmed a sense of a “culture of impunity,” in which codes of conducts had not been enforced in earlier years of the mission. A long-time NGO worker in the region, for example, said, “I watched the CIVPOL go over to the hookers there – and [thought] hold it – aren’t you the guys who are supposed to be catching the guys who are running this place?” Scholars and journalists have reported the wide incidence of trafficking and prostitution in Kosovo, and the region more generally (Mendenhall 2003; Mendelson 2005). International complicity in the trade has been on the official record since 2002, when two whistleblowers won suits against the US company, Dyncorp, that previously supplied US police personnel for missions (Capps 2002). Existing training modules seek to educate personnel, including slides that state “we are part of the problem.” They make the argument on ethical as well as practical, security grounds, and also suggest that some people’s “fudging” of the code of conduct, by seeking sex in nearby countries (Bulgaria, for example) on the grounds that they are outside the mission area, does not acknowledge that the criminal and economic flows involved also impact Kosovo, and that it makes little difference to the women concerned if they are abused by peacekeepers in one country versus another (Valenius 2007: 46).

Officially, it appears, SEA in Kosovo has been acknowledged. In April 2005, officials published a “no-go” list of nightclubs and other locations suspected or proven to be involved in trafficking women, for civilian and military personnel, as part of a broader campaign (Deen 2005). In November 2005, a UNHCR official was sentenced to three years in jail for underage sex: in this case, immunity was waived and Kosovar judges were involved in the sentencing.

However, such apparently robust steps have not eradicated the problem. Their effects have been undermined by steps which blur lines of accountability further, and which do little to alter gendered power dynamics. Examples of the factors which make the robust enforcement of UN-mandated standards difficult include the gender politics of the mission, the unequal impacts of “Kosovo-ization,” and a long-term culture of permissiveness, to be considered here briefly in turn.

Despite early efforts by Lesley Abdela in conjunction with Kosova women's NGOs, and the passage of UN Resolution 1325, UNMIK (and KFOR) remain heavily masculinized. The persistence of the non-family status for the mission reinforces this, as does the omission of women from positions of responsibility. For example, of 15 CIVPOL contingent commanders met, only one was a woman.

Human Rights Watch has documented how systems of accountability have, for the most part, protected UNMIK and other international personnel from local accountability. One particular example has been the reduction in the reach of the ombudsperson position, as it was indigenized: whereas the international ombudsperson received Kosovar grievances against UNMIK, the new position of the national ombudsperson does not, thereby eliminating one channel by which local individuals, families or organizations might call international personnel to account. One institution which retained responsiveness to Kosovar concerns has been the UNMIK Police CAST (Counseling and Support team), which explicitly maintains an open-door for Kosovar employees (including, for example, interpreters, who are often the targets of inappropriate conduct).

Casual references from UN personnel, too, indicate that whatever high-level, symbolic actions were taken in 2005, a culture of permissiveness persists. This is not isolated to SEA, and many suggest it is linked to the failure of those in leadership positions, historically, to act in exemplary fashion. Among the examples given, besides that of international police personnel's familiarity with bars run by local criminal organizations, given above, are the following:

One high-ranking officer in UNMIK police reported that different police contingents have divergent understandings of the police role. The interviewee continued, "I include some of the most developed countries in this. Some, because they are away from home, behave in the most disgraceful fashion, suddenly feel they are free of their marriage vows, go off on a sexual bender. The locals know about this. We lose our credibility."

One police contingent commander said, of his knowledge of his police personnel's every move: "I know what type of drink they have, what girlfriends they have, each and every one." This was met with laughter around the table during a group meeting. The sense was of shared knowledge that this was routinely the case.

That language of "girlfriends" was repeated elsewhere, indicating an ongoing debate over the acceptability of consensual sexual relationships between locals and internationals. Another interviewee reported Kosovar Albanians actively pursued peacekeepers: "They all went for the Americans when they came. There are hundreds of them who married Americans, for a variety of reasons. I saw it being a problem. They were only hiring good-looking secretaries, translators. That's just the way it was here. Who's got the best-looking one. Well, and let's have the party, so we get to go meet them on a social atmosphere And these were police, most of them I'm talking about."

While these cases of SEA involved personnel from “Western, developed” countries, the investigations and prosecutions thus far in Kosovo have been directed at non-Western personnel.

Personnel posted to Kosovo find that some of the power asymmetries they are used to are inverted. The “beneficiaries” of UN presence are, as former Yugoslav citizens, often English-speaking, media-savvy, European-oriented. Though a majority of Kosovar Albanians are Muslims, this is hardly a “Muslim” country. Women’s NGOs point to misunderstandings generated by training which emphasizes the idea of a traditional, Islamic cultural context for the mission. When personnel arrive and see mini-skirted, stylish, English-speaking young women, it tends to discredit all of their cultural training, as they tend to extrapolate from the apparently open, cosmopolitan behavior they observe to other aspects of Kosovar society, gender and sexuality.³

Static ideas about culture – especially, the idea that Albanian society is clan-dominated and patriarchal -- serve as easy explanations for trafficking and crime. Some UN personnel argue that it is somehow hardwired into Albanian culture for women to be treated as objects or second-class citizens. These ideas about Albanian society also support arguments that it is the new Albanian elite—rather than, as journalists have suggested, international personnel-- who are the prime consumers of the sex trade.

Finally, and very importantly, the ignorance and non-acceptance of input from women’s NGO sector – a vibrant network of articulate and passionate activists – feeds into such misconceptions by internationals. These misconceptions, as well as lack of collaboration with those NGOs on directly combating SEA, are major contributors to the persistence of the problem.

Recommendations

There currently exists significant institutional support for combating the problem of SEA across senior leadership in these three UN missions. There continues to be significant reluctance to really face how frequent the problem remains both in and outside the mission area, or to develop close and frequent communication and ties with the local community that might lead to more aggressive pursuit of perpetrators of SEA and better prevention strategies. Moreover, there is significant perceived reluctance to report or conduct investigations of violations of the UN Code of Conduct.

There is as yet no systematic attention to the problem of cultural beliefs about SEA that obstruct its elimination and prosecution. There are non-trivial cultural differences across national contingents in attitudes toward prostitution and related ideas about male and

³ Social habits of the country, as a result, then get read through the wrong lens. For example, several people pointed to the insistence of local personnel on coffee breaks as a case of “culture-clash” where internationals see laziness, instead of recognizing the enduring significance of what in Serbian are called *veze* and in Albanian *lidhje*—personal connections—in normal life, and acknowledging that these ties are fostered and expanded through the creative and productive use of “down-time” of this sort.

female sexuality. There are also highly relevant and varying career and other incentive structures for soldiers, police, and civilians for avoiding SEA. Reasoning about and attitudes towards SEA among UN personnel show certain common patterns that are counterproductive to the goals of eliminating the problem. These include attribution of problems of SEA to particular national contingents, with these putative patterns explained either by culture (or race as culture) or by levels of professionalism. They also include attributions of the problem to a naturalized male biology that can only be managed through such measures as confining soldiers to barracks or increasing the number of leaves peacekeepers receive. In addition, there is significant tolerance of outsourcing of sexual misconduct to our countries or non-mission areas where peacekeepers go on leave, such as the Dominican Republic for MINUSTAH, Cyprus for UNIFIL, and Bulgaria for UNMIK.

Finally, the UN mission sites remain highly masculine, up to and including the Conduct and Discipline units in some cases. The low levels of consultation with local women's NGOs lower the likelihood of fundamental reform.

The project has five main recommendations.

First, the problem of SEA needs to be addressed by directly confronting the questions of race, gender, and relative power that help fuel it. The CDU needs to work to put a paradigm into use for thinking about the sources of peacekeeper conduct that includes but goes beyond simple notions of culture. The paradigm avoids common pitfalls that separate culture from political economy; that treat cultures as homogenous, unchanging, and equivalent to the nation-states rather than historically emergent and internally diverse; and that equate cultural explanation with ethical excuse, or that allow "culture" to serve as a proxy for "race." In almost all of the interviews conducted, understandings of the causes of SEA failed to mention gender inequality. The CDU should make much clearer than is now the case that SEA is about gender and power, rather than sexuality, religion, and poverty per se. Such ideas would then be directly addressed in training.

Second, consideration should be given to developing high quality in-mission induction training materials on local society and culture. Training would be required and its content much more closely monitored. Existing training materials appear to add fuel to the racist attitudes that can contribute to higher rates of exploitation of local women. More generally, better cultural awareness training materials will explicitly address problems of racism and dehumanization among peacekeepers. Awareness of the problem of racism within the UN would allow the problem of SEA to be identified in whatever contingent it occurs and it would work to minimize one of the factors contributing to high rates of SEA. It may be necessary to prevent independent development of SEA, sexual harassment, and cultural awareness training materials.

Third, various forms of communication should be widely and regularly used to communicate UN standards, propagate the belief that citizens have a right and duty to lodge complaints against UN personnel, and solicit information and ideas from the community about peacekeeper behavior. Such an approach communicates respect and a

sense of partnership (Rubinstein, Keller and Scherger 2008) crucial to solving the problem in a climate often rife with racism, fear and distrust. Acknowledging that conflict and post-conflict contexts have often left women with less self-confidence and with the need to push for other, more material priorities will also help prevent simple criticism of local women for non-reporting of abuse. Taking local women's organizations at least as seriously as international women's NGOs when they report abuse is also crucial (Funmi Olanisakin, personal communication).

Fourth, UN missions need to take responsibility for the off-mission as well as on-mission actions of their peacekeepers, and police R & R sites on- and off-mission, where possible and require judicial proceedings where infractions occur.

Fifth, as has often and long been stated in evaluations of the problem of SEA in peacekeeping missions, enforcement remains lax; the UN response to allegations and evidence of abuse must be immediate and thorough, including repatriation and prosecution in the home countries for SEA.

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