

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

The two small-scale exploratory case studies presented here point to the continuation of activities involving peacekeepers and local women and girls that challenge both the letter and the spirit of the UN Code of Conduct and UN Resolution 1325. While it would be inappropriate to generalise these findings more widely, empirical data from other peace support operations (PSOs) points to the continuation of similar activities.

The monograph opened with a brief discussion of the social and economic contexts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone respectively. It was suggested that ongoing incidents of massacres and conflicts in the Ituri region of the DRC marked this environment as being somewhat different from that in Sierra Leone, where there existed a greater degree of security and stability against the background of recent elections. A further contextual difference between the UN missions in the DRC (MONUC) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was the atmosphere surrounding reflection on, and practice of, gendered relations. In the case of Sierra Leone, it was clear that gendered relations—in both the ways they were discussed and played-out—differed from activities in UNAMSIL, as the legacy of the UNHCR/SCFUK report had undoubtedly served to raise awareness around sexual exploitation and gendered relations. However, a number of participants suggested that the effect of this new climate had sent sexually exploitative activities ‘underground’ and caused them to become considerably more ‘secretive’. Further, it was suggested that peacekeepers had ‘learned the language’ of equality and diversity in respect of gendered issues (the so-called ‘liberal humanist discourse’), but that there existed a tension between what was understood to be ethically acceptable and what was actually practiced by a number of peacekeepers. In MONUC, the peacekeeper’s use of prostitutes was less covert, and during one phase of fieldwork in a sector site, was in the open as illustrated by the high profile of uniformed members of one battalion’s contingent personnel in leisure sites argued to be places for meeting prostitutes.

While passing reference was made to the so-called ‘peacekeeping economy’, illustrated, for example, in the establishment of bars and brothels, there

remains a paucity of understanding and information related to this dynamic. Thus, strategies intended to tackle instances of sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) committed by peacekeepers should, in a political-economic sense, function at the levels of both supply and demand. One avenue to be explored further through research could be crystallised in the following question: 'What conditions (political/social/cultural/economic) give rise to the flourishing (or otherwise) of bars and brothels? Once established, bars and brothels serve to support and facilitate abuse and in so doing, frequently rely on the tacit tolerance of military establishments. If policies against exploitation and criminality are to be strengthened, including the trafficking of women, tackling the problem will require robust intervention aimed, in-part, at the *laissez faire* entrepreneurialism that ultimately treats women and girls as units of economic exchange.

Peacekeepers appear to the local population to be powerful and privileged, especially to vulnerable groups including women and children. Currently, a number of them may abuse their positions by bartering money, food or services for sex. To tackle such violations, mechanisms must be established to challenge exploitation and abuse when it arises. The absence of any kind of systemic, enforceable instrument to impose accountability serves to skew many aspects of peacekeeper's relations with local people in both PSOs, and is likely to be a common theme in other post-conflict settings. Members of civil society remain particularly concerned at the impunity with which some peacekeepers act towards local women and girls.

In MONUC, there was a dedicated Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) with direct access to the SRSC's office. The OGA is mandated to both mainstream a gender perspective in all decisions taken on policy and programming initiatives as well as work with the Congolese population and society to bring the reality of the conflict, and its gendered dimensions, to the attention of decision-makers and Transitional Government. In UNAMSIL, a gender focal point sits in the Human Rights section, and necessarily has to juggle a range of other responsibilities. Ideally, the terms of reference for this post would be to act as a robust point of support for mainstreaming and other gender awareness strategies. To reiterate a concern that has been made repeatedly, it is vital that any strategy designed to address the range of gendered issues in PSOs has to be well-resourced, staffed with senior personnel and given a high profile at every stage of the mission's activities. It should also work closely with local women's groups in order to comprehend the priorities of the local population. Only then might gender training and gender awareness initiatives be treated with the gravity they deserve. However, until a systemic approach is taken to incorporate gender issues, the

UN will continue to react to allegations, rather than take a proactive gender awareness-raising approach. Other challenges reflect wider issues that can be traced back to the culturally nuanced interpretations of the concept of gender, and the aims and objectives of such awareness strategies. Here, there exists a greater need for research that can highlight patterns of understanding of gender related issues turning on, for example, national (military) cultures/religious beliefs that shape engagement with the term gender.

The pattern of recruitment for PSOs must also significantly change. The gender balance within peacekeeping personnel is currently inadequate: women make up only 4 per cent of the total civilian police personnel in PSOs, and figures are equally low for the military.¹ Victims, usually female, have repeatedly stated that the sight of a man in uniform may trigger memories of a past violation, or suggest that they would refuse to report cases of SEA to any member of the male sex. Under such circumstances, the UN must appeal to troop contributing countries to encourage women's participation in PSOs, and identify challenges towards increased deployment of female personnel in order to enable the UN to adapt strategies to counter-balance such challenges.

The UN Codes of Conduct, while appearing uncompromising in their use of language, do nevertheless, contain 'grey areas' that may be used to challenge the extent to which peacekeepers frame their activities with local women as 'exploitative'. Ultimately, the notion of a *bona fide* relationship will always be characterised by a degree of value judgement. The abuse of minors, however, is an issue of real concern and the lack of transparency around the process of allegation through to punishment remains a hindrance to progress in this area. Here, the UN, while needing to demonstrate clear leadership through punitive action, is in a state of semi-inertia as it has to confront the complex political and diplomatic challenges pervading its relationships with troop-contributing countries. It is too early to get a sense of the effectiveness or otherwise of UNAMSIL strategies (for example the UPCC, including the 'telephone hotline') on the extent to which it has curtailed SEAs. These incremental changes are welcome and are to be encouraged in other PSOs. Such strategies, however, require planning at the earliest stages of the mission, and sustained throughout the entire duration of the mission. However, it is important that independent assessment of such initiatives is made, otherwise a degree of wariness will remain about the extent to which the UN takes such strategies seriously. This can, in part, be addressed through the sensitisation of all decision-makers, particularly at the strategic level, to the importance of gender mainstreaming, the need to host an in-mission capacity to investigate allegations and apply disciplinary measures, if so required. To be successful, con-

tinuous training, reporting and follow-up mechanisms will be required. It is time to pay more than lip service to the 'zero-tolerance' policy, as not only do acts of abuse and exploitation violate human rights, but seriously undermine the credibility of the very mission itself.

The report presented here contributes to a growing empirical evidence base concerning the activities of a minority of peacekeepers towards local women and children. These activities should not distract from the positive aspects of the work of the UN; during the course of the research, I encountered many committed, dedicated and enthusiastic personnel whose interventions contributed towards the reconstruction of societies and populations broken by war. However, given the shifting reputations of organizations including the UN who have recently come under the critical spotlight within the context of the Iraq war and the events leading to its invasion by allied forces, faith and trust in institutions such as this has appeared increasingly fragile.

The activities detailed in the report are symptoms of a deeper malaise turning on power and privilege reflected through the lens of a transcultural militarised masculinity promoting certain forms of aggressive heterosexuality. They are supported by what the social theorist Bob Connell has called 'complicit masculinities'. As he states: "masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense."²

The continued failure of the UN to take decisive action against perpetrators can be interpreted as tacit acceptance that cases of SEA are an inherent component of every PSO. Complicity of this sort is supported and reinforced by the range of military masculine subcultures clustering around a deep and widely voiced belief that men have a biologically driven need for sex that, at best, can barely be held in check by rules, regulations, attempts at behaviour modification (training) and awareness raising. Thus, it is increasingly essential that all peacekeepers are made aware of their roles and responsibilities as a UN representative, as well as their position of perceived authority in society. This position should never be used to bribe, coerce, or pay for sex.

The main focus of this monograph has been on the exploitative nature of gendered relations existing between a minority of peacekeepers and local women and girls in two PSOs. The abusive activities under scrutiny have tended to perpetuate a 'perpetrator/victim' dichotomy that has been valuable in analysing the exploitative dynamic between the two parties. However, while this framework has been used to map activities and develop deeper understanding, it is

important to recognise and acknowledge that women are more than victims, and men in these contexts have the potential to be more than perpetrators.

It is vital that attempts to reformulate the oppressive gender order—apparent in the ongoing instances of exploitation as discussed above—necessarily mobilise the energies and interests of both men and women. Cockburn and Hubic's study of women's organizations in the post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is indicative of women's wider resilience and agency, even in the face of sustained gender based violence.³ For example, they show how these women were able to co-ordinate activities to create economic independence, a valuable status in freeing them from their dependence on men and the potential corollary: perpetuating an oppressive gender asymmetry. Cockburn and Hubic also highlight the ways in which particular women were able to take important action against violence inflicted upon them during the conflict, and to provide crucial legal advice on issues arising from the terrible conditions created during the war. Finally, they write of the women's increased involvement in the male bastion of politics, together with their significant role in reconciliation work. Overall, this analysis serves to elevate women from their frequent portrayal as victims, a status that may frequently be used to oppress them. Women are not always vulnerable. They are essential components in both war and peace and their positive role should be integrated in all decision-making, policy planning and programming. Women need to be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. While challenging, it remains that much work has already been done to address the issue and once best practices and lessons learned are better integrated throughout all levels of a PSO the very nature of PSOs themselves may change. It is hoped that this modest study may contribute towards this process.

Notes

1. Statement of Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno. Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, Open Meeting on the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security, 29 October 2003.
2. R W Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press. 1995, p 79.
3. C Cockburn and D Zarkov (eds), Women's organizations in the rebuilding of Bosnia-Herzegovina, *The Postwar Moment. Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*, Lawrence and Wishart. London, 2002, pp 68–84.